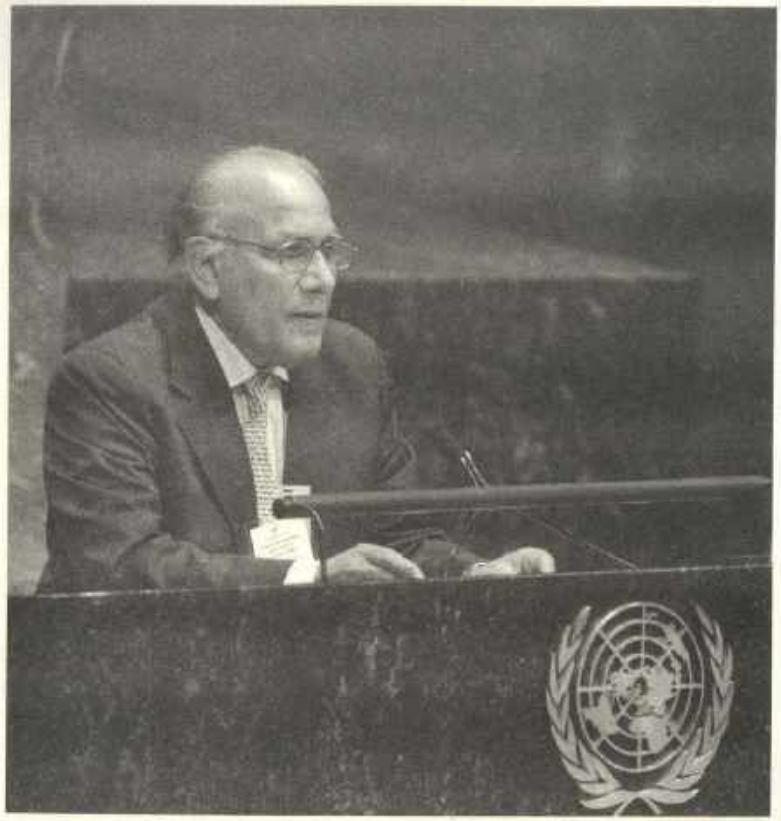
Man in the Hat



The story of Shoaib Sultan Khan and the rural poor of South Asia

Noel Cossins

962.02014
Biography SK
Rasul Pood



Addressing 17th Annual Session of Sustainable Development
at UN General Assembly (2009)



First Dialogue - Sherqilla 1982

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Dedication

A Thai peasant proverb; once in general use, 'Back to the sun; face to the earth' is one of those wonderfully short pithy sayings that embody a general truth – for much of their lives poor farmers in South Asia bend over a plough or a mattock, ploughing, planting, weeding or harvesting their fields, their backs to the sun, faces to the earth.

This book is dedicated to the farm families of South Asia, to the millions of rural poor whose lives have been touched by one man, Shoaib Sultan Khan, and to the millions more who still wait, whose lives have not changed, have not improved, who still live in abject poverty.

Contents

Preface xi

1. **Four boys and a panther** 1

- Beginnings
- The reluctant scholar
- Badminton by moonlight
- Shangri-la

2. **The Heaven Born** 49

- The Golden Rule
- The dancer
- Odysseus's Son
- Cavagnari's ghost
- A First Class Trench
- Afridi Khan's list
- The DC's Daughters

3. **Time over; Time out** 172

- Yes, We Will Hang You
- Time out
- The Garden of Eden

4. **The Man in the Hat** 280

- Dardistan
- The Prince
- Impossible Dream
- The Prince's Jeweller
- Pleasantly Insane

- The rooms at the Inn
- A Man Driven
- Beyond belief
- Terra Incognita

5. **Shoaib Sahib** 506

- Dreaming of Camelot
- A diamond in the slipper
- The Doomsday Clock
- Legends of the poor

6. **Epilogue** 695

- The Story Teller's Story

Those who made this book possible:

- Islamabad/Peshawar/Lahore/Karachi
- Northern Areas (Gilgit, Hunza: Yasin, Shandur) and Chitral (November 2007)
- Andhra Pradesh
- London/Monaco/Bangkok

Books; Reports; Notes and other reference sources:

- Pakistan
- India
- General

PREFACE

The book presents a beautifully written account of the life story of Shoaib Sultan Khan, the man whose noble efforts made a difference to the lives of millions of poor in Pakistan and many other countries. It traces the journey of a man who for many decades, has served to lift people out of poverty and forge a way for development at the grassroots. His belief in the power of the poor was the key foundation of most of the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) he founded. His belief that poor have the willingness to come out of poverty but lack *the capacity* to do so made him promote the idea of community organisations of the poor. He envisioned an organization not only for the poor but more importantly of the poor. He believed that the destiny of the poor lay in their own hands and they had the power to make the difference in their own lives. Thus the key to development, visualized by Shoaib Sultan Khan was community mobilization—if the villagers were able to organize themselves *with the support of* an organization then they would be able to lift themselves out of poverty. He proved that these organizations play an important role in empowering the poor to find their own ways of development. All these things about his vision and approach for community development has been brought out very lucidly in this book in a very arresting style.

Shoaib Khan pioneered the concept through his landmark Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Pakistan by promoting sincere investment in building the community organizations and capacity building of the poor. His focus on the inclusion of the every poor member in all collective initiatives by the underprivileged rural communities had a remarkable impact on the society. The successes of AKRSP in the areas of land development, livelihood generation and skill development through community organisations were appreciated by the development agencies across the world. His concept of community organisations were brought to the forefront of rural development intervention models adopted by many multilateral agencies.

With the support of UNDP, he introduced the concept of poverty reduction through community organizations through South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) in India and other South Asian countries. The pilot initiative of SAPAP led to a full-fledged programme based on the principle of development through community organization under the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) in Andhra Pradesh with the support of World Bank.

The project has seen the journey of over ten million organised households from despair to hope, from diffidence to confidence, from subjugation to empowerment in last decade. The spirit of community empowerment has continued to thrive in India since then. At the behest of Mr Rahul Gandhi (parliamentarian from Amethi) he made a visit to the Rajiv Gandhi Mahila Vikas Pariycjana (RGMVP) villages in Uttar Pradesh and helped the project to reformulate its vision. RGMVP founded on the same set of core values and beliefs and thus has much to benefit from Shoaib Khan's vision and efforts. RGMVP today strongly espouses the poor's strong desire and innate ability to come out of poverty. It has proven that social mobilization can help poor people overcome psychological, social, economic and political obstacles even in the most hierarchical social structural settings.his commitment to the cause of community mobilization is praiseworthy. He earned the *Ramon Magsaysay Award* and Hilal-i-Imtiaz of Pakistan for his contribution to the *poorest community. It is* remarkable that a person who began his rural development journey *from* Gilgit in Pakistan with the founding of the AKRSP more than three decades back and forged partnerships with a million people in one of the most inhospitable terrain in the world still unflaggingly carries forth his vision and dedication to work for the poor with the same enthusiasm. Today Shoaib Khan serves on the boards of numerous rural support programmes.

This book makes a sincere tribute to highlight the viewpoints of a legendary person who asserted his ideas by the power of his belief in the poor and the strength of his demonstration of grassroots development. Shoaib Khan toiled for the social and economic upliftment of the poorest of the poor and inspired the minds of many development practitioners to stick up to path of community mobilization to achieve the poverty free society. Community mobilisations are appreciated across the geography as a tool for empowerment. The question arises as to how and why the community members accepted the mobilization processes an empowering and enriching experience. The answer has been provided quite aptly in this book. The book not only introduces the community efforts of Shoaib Khan but also takes us through an exciting journey of his early years. It has been written with great affection for Shoaib Khan.

It has been a great honour for me to be part of this long overdue book. This life story of Shoaib Khan is an invaluable read for all the followers, for development practitioners, for those whose lives have been transformed by community mobilization initiatives, and finally for the world to be inspired and grateful for his efforts.

New Delhi
April 17, 2012

Jairam Ramesh
Minister of Rural Development
Government of India

I was glad to learn that a new book is being written about my friend Shoaib Sultan Khan and the work that he has been doing for many years for the people of Pakistan, and beyond the Asia. His achievements and ideas deserve to be widely known.

It so happened that my diplomatic career took me twice to Pakistan, for a total of 9 years. Life was never dull. Among all the problems, ranging from floods and drugs, corruption and religious extremism to nuclear proliferation, numbers of individuals stood out as beacons of probity and inspiration. One of these has been Shoaib. Not all people of such outstanding caliber have been able to leave, as he has, a legacy of permanent value among poorer sections of the community.

I think that Shoaib would be the first to recognize the debt that he owes to his mentor Akhter Hameed Khan, a man I first got to know when he was working with cooperatives in what was then East Pakistan and who ended his life's work, following similar principles, among the poor urban communities of Karachi. The policy he promoted, which seems obvious but was revolutionary in the beginning, was to help poorer communities to help themselves. First they were encouraged to come together to discuss their problems and to choose their leaders. Then they would agree on their own priorities for development. Several times I observed Shoaib talking to villagers in remote and dramatic mountain locations where they appealed for a bridge, or perhaps a new irrigation channel to be dug. They would be offered help and technical advice on the basis that they would contribute funds or labour themselves, so that they had a vested interest in keeping the project well maintained. There might be loans they would eventually repay. This was much more effective than aid projects dreamt up by so-called experts in donor capitals and doled with little consultation nor local knowledge. I believe that much of such aid is wasted.

Shoaib Sultan Khan was the man, with appropriate education, background and experience who came at the right time to put these basic ideas into practice on a substantial scale. He trained assistants who became devoted to him. He established systems, with sound finance. He spoke without fear or favour to local headmen, to administrators and to politicians. He gained the confidence of all concerned.

I noted how in Chitral, Hunza and Gilgit he was trusted by the people as a friend, without in any way patronizing them. In northern and rural areas of Pakistan, his plans were backed by international donors, of which I am glad to say that Britain was one, and endorsed by His Highness the Aga Khan who lent his name to what became the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, the AKRSP.

Much of Shoaib's remarkable success in extending AKRSP principles and practices to other parts of Pakistan and then to India, Bangladesh and beyond, come after I had retired. But I have kept in touch with him and his delightful

family, mentioned in the book. We appeared together on a platform in Asia House in London earlier this year. Age has not withered Shoaib, nor restrained his efforts to help more communities. It has been a privilege to have known him.

Sir Nicholas Barrington KCMG, CVO,
British Ambassador & High Commissioner
in Islamabad (1987-94)

I often wondered when Shoaib Sultan Khan would share his life experiences with all of us. He has been the most consistent development activist in Pakistan. No doubt, his inspiration came from the legendary Akhtar Hamid Khan, but his commitment to the field and for the marginalized came always from his own motivation. Working amongst the most disadvantaged is always challenging especially in a country where millions of people live under the poverty line, in remote areas and where the State lends meager support but ample more hindrances to private enterprises at empowering communities. Shoaib Sultan Khan recognized these challenges including the ethnic, sectarian and religious rivalries that exist in our societies. He built on the strengths rather than be deterred by the existing weaknesses in Pakistani society. He was able to convert sectarian rivalries into a healthy diversity worthy of respect and mustered the energy, that Pakistanis have in abundance, to build trust and economic base in society. Human capital remained a key driving force to Shoaib's advancement and sustainability of his various projects.

Shoaib's work lacked the ugly grandiose of modern day NGO initiatives. His projects had solid financial support but remained modest in their approach and style. These were the outcome of decades of hard labour and clear vision. The rewards have been amazing. To see so many beautiful lives bloom into a valuable assets for society is an amazing transformation. No wonder Shoaib looks so satisfied and calm. This book will now add value to all those who read the amazing achievements of development activists like Shoaib Sultan Khan.

Asma Jahangir
Advocate Supreme Court, Pakistan

1
Four Boys and a Panther

India: Lakhimpur Kheri circa 1940s: a tiger shoot—forty elephants, drummers, an eminent guest, Sir Iqbal Ahmad, Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court, to take the shot. He is not known for his marksmanship.

Four small boys beginning to be bored: the *shikari* (hunter) shrugs, 'your grandfather, the commissioner, has spoken. If you come you will have to keep out of the way'.

An idea: let's take a bullock cart and go hunting in the jungle ourselves. The commissioner smiles indulgently, hunts out two battered side-hammer shotguns, a handful of cartridges, 'in case you see a *sambur* (deer)'. He smiles and strolls away. In his old-fashioned, very correct, very gentlemanly way he loves the four young scallywags, especially the youngest one, his dead daughter's son.

Four boys, brothers and cousins all, brimming with blithe life, the careless happiness of the young; four boys in India, a sprawling country of maharajahs and gentleman commissioners, an India where tigers roamed and a luckless panther sunned itself in a jungle clearing.

Sun-warped, the wooden wheels of the bullock cart creak as it lumbers along the jungle track. A boy suddenly squeaks, 'tiger, keep down'. It is Sohail. The foolish oxen amble on. Peep over the board; see something large and reddish sprawled in a sunlit clearing where the track widens. Scrabble to load, cock the guns, wait while Sohail whispers 'one, two, three'. Two guns belch fire, four barrels, deafening. The two gunners, the two older boys, pick themselves off the floor of the cart. But it was you on watch, the youngest, who saw a great dark red shape leap into the air as if stung by a thousand bees. You will never forget it.

What to do next? No *shikari* to answer that question. Edge softly out of the cart, drop onto the ground. Sohail eases off a shoe, pitches it at the great shape

sprawled by the clearing's edge. Nothing. Guns cocked you all creep forward, the two gunners ready to fire, all of you ready to run on the instant. No need. The panther is very, very dead.

A great hurrah and hullabaloo meets you back at the camp and the skin of the panther joins that of a great tiger, all eleven foot two inches of it, brought down by Sir Iqbal so it is said, although the *shikari* smiles and shrugs.

Who shot the tiger does not matter now, nor does it matter that the panther the *shikari* was sure he would find for his hunting party in the jungle clearing had vanished. Puzzled at the time, now the *shikari* knew. But that was hunting for you and anyway the sahibs had their tiger and their chota pegs, and the boys had far more than they deserved.

What happened to the tiger skin? No one can recall. As for the luckless panther, one day on its way from one boy to another its skin was left by accident in a railway carriage. It was never seen again. Nor will India of that era be seen again, an era of princely privilege and power, India of the Raj Sarkar.

And the boys? What became of them?

Each one has his own story, each one made his own way through years fraught with change and challenge; but one stood out, the youngest, the favourite, and this is his story, the story of the old commissioner's grandson.

Beginnings

Do beginnings matter?

I think they do, although for most of us, we take a bit here and a bit there from our beginnings and then we bumble along through life. But there are some of us, and Shoaib was one of these, some of us who are indelibly imprinted by their beginnings, some of us who seek to faithfully replicate the lessons of their childhood. Shoaib Sultan Khan or SSK as he is known to those who love and admire him, yes Shoaib was one of those who strove as hard as he could to replicate the lessons of his childhood, lessons taught simply and by example. In this his teacher, his mentor and role model was his beloved maternal grandfather, Sultan Ahmed Beg, Commissioner in Imperial India.

On that first morning, the first of many we were to spend with Shoaib talking through his life, after we had taken breakfast and he had seen to his morning correspondence, we moved to the comfortable sitting room that spans the front of the house on Aga Khan Road, a room where we would follow, step by step, one remarkable man's journey through an extraordinary life. Tea was served, or was it coffee, and then Shoaib sat back and was silent for a time until old, long buried memories began to surge; and then he smiled and began to talk.

In 1931 or thereabouts—no one is quite sure of Shoaib's birth date—a boy was born in what was then the United Provinces in northern India to a sad and lonely young woman. The boy's mother, Husna Jahan, was the daughter of Sultan Ahmed Beg, a well respected officer of the elite Indian Civil Service, a true gentleman in every sense of the word, and one who believed firmly in honourable behaviour and service to the people. Sultan Ahmed Beg served in the provincial civil service in what is now known as Uttar Pradesh where he eventually rose to become a Commissioner, a very high status position and one that from a very early age, Shoaib firmly resolved to follow.

One of the happy hordes of children who lived in Ahmed Beg's sprawling household, Shoaib was singled out for special attention. Was he spoilt? *I was*, he laughs, *yes I was, but I survived.* An aunt of one of the many of the household, tells how when Shoaib was a small boy he used to sit in his grandfather's chair and shout, 'look everybody, I am the grandfather and you are all my assistants and have to do what I say'. Years later in Pakistan, when Shoaib did indeed become Commissioner of Karachi, that same aunt would exclaim, 'Well, there you are, his dream has come true, he has made it to his grandfather's chair'.

But this is jumping ahead too far and too fast, so we will return to the young Shoaib on that day in that sitting room in Islamabad, Shoaib the living legend, the gentle young-old man sitting opposite me in a comfortable chair as he took us back to the past to the story of a boy in India, a small boy who lived in a large, happy, rambunctious extended family. And this is how he began.

Oh yes, he said, *I had an enormously privileged childhood and a marvellous role model in my grandfather. Although I was determined to follow his example and serve the people, in many ways I lived like a young prince and the grandeur of the princely states when the British Governor visited was just like a fairy tale. I suppose the only sadness of my early life was that I hardly remember my mother except that she always seemed to be very sad and lost in her thoughts.*

Shoaib shakes his head, says he has always imagined she was beautiful but sad, so very sad. And Husna had reason to be sad. Her husband and first cousin, Shoaib's father, had fallen in love with another woman whom he had taken as his second wife.

Of course I was too young to understand the reasons for her sadness but one of the few things I do remember was a mini-gramophone which played records one third the size of normal records. Funnily enough, nobody else seems to remember this. I am told she died in childbirth when I was three years old and there are some stories that I jumped over her when she was lying down and

that caused her subsequent death. I do not know the truth of this but I do remember one day seeing her carried away from the house on a bed and that I followed the crowd until someone led me away, away from Husna, a pale but beautiful shadow in his memory.

Shoaib slowly shook his head, and said almost in surprise, *yes, that is all I really remember except that my mother's younger sister once told me that I brought tears to everyone's eyes when that evening I wanted to go and bring Mother home. I used to call her* Baji, *which means elder sister, and I suppose I had never looked on her as a mother. But then, she did not behave towards me as a mother. In that huge household she was as distant or as close as anyone else.* And a large household it certainly was, a household whose absolute ruler was Sultan Ahmed Beg's formidable sister, a lady known as Begum Bubu.

Captain Sohail is a wonderful old man with twinkling eyes and a most beautiful smile. A ship's captain and accustomed to command, Sohail spoke of his grandfather as having a peculiar nature in that he wanted to keep all the family with him—countless sisters, daughters, and aunts of every sort all with their husbands and children, a huge, noisy and rambunctious family. Sultan Ahmed Beg was the happy patriarch and Begum Bubu the stern but loving matriarch. *I think she must have loved us* laughed Shoaib, *she was tall and very elegant. Her real name was Abida. Bubu is an affectionate term of respect. Her hair was snowy white and if she had ever been married it is something I do not know to this day. Anyway, she had no husband when she ruled my grandfather's household and she was quite fierce,* Shoaib laughed again, memories in full flow.

For rule the household Begum Bubu did—in household matters her word was final. At any one time, the household could consist of thirty or forty adults and children. There were also servants and retainers. Shoaib has no idea how many except that most had served one or other of the family for generations, had grown up within the same home village and in their own way they were family. *Yes, we had a marvellous life,* said Shoaib, *and we got away with a lot except for one thing, something that was drummed into us from an early age; we could ask politely, but we could not order—servants had to be treated with respect. And servant or not, it was age that determined who had to greet whom first. I once failed in this and was very firmly admonished and told to mind my manners. We always had to address the older servants as 'Mother' or 'Father' and we certainly had to watch what we did and said, having to hop to it when an older respected servant, man or woman, told us to do something.*

And then the faithful Ishaq brought in our morning soup and as we drank Shoaib began to speak again, this time of his father, a man called Mohammad Nasim Khan, a man who was born in the prosperous village of Pharia in Azamgarh district. Originally Pathan, the family had been established there for

many generations and over time had produced several well known and highly revered Muslim scholars. Shoaib's paternal grandfather, a wealthy land owner, was married to Sultan Ahmed Beg's sister and when lives were at risk during a serious and potentially bloody land dispute in Azamgarh, Sultan Ahmed Beg took his sister's young son Nasim into his care.

And so it came to pass that the boy Nasim grew up, and as so often was the custom, was married by arrangement to Sultan Ahmed Beg's daughter, the hapless Husna. That Nasim later took another wife is of relevance to this story only because Begum Bubu and her brother blamed Mohammad in part for Husna's death. Feelings ran high, he was ostracized for many years and his name was never allowed to be mentioned in the household. Shoaib only began to grasp the reason for his mother's sadness and his father's banishment some six years after his mother's death when his still disgraced father told Shoaib some of the details. There was a reason why he did this. Nasim asked Shoaib to intercede on his behalf with Begum Bubu, and to ask her to forgive him.

Shoaib, of course did so, but it was too big a job for too small a boy, something Shoaib found out the hard way. *Well,* he laughed, *it certainly landed me in a lot of hot water. I clearly remember how angry Begum Bubu became, and of being scolded severely and being told in no uncertain terms that the matter was none of my business and of being sent off with a huge flea in my ear. I never brought up the subject again.*

It was to be many more years before Nasim was allowed back into the fold.

So Shoaib knew little of his father while he grew up. Instead, Nasim remained a distant figure throughout his early childhood. Later he was to find that his father had graduated from Allahabad University. Graduates were rare in those days, and with the help of family influence, it was relatively easy for Shoaib's father to secure a job as clerk to the city of Moradabad. A position of some prestige, Nasim held this one job for his entire life. A dull but secure life perhaps, but sons like to think well of their fathers and Shoaib is no exception. *Yes* he had said with some satisfaction, *a few years ago I was surprised to find that my father's starting salary as an executive of the Moradabad municipal corporation was exactly the same as my initial salary when I joined the Civil Service of Pakistan. He was a comparatively rich man for those days.*

The story of India is the story of families and the complex web of contact and contract this entails and so it was in this case. In one of those strangely synchronistic episodes that Shoaib says have marked his life, Shadmani, the woman his father fell in love with and then took as his second wife, Shadmani 'adopted' a child, the baby daughter of a cousin who had married a young man from Dera Ismail Khan, a town half-way across the continent in the North West

Frontier Province. A lawyer and an extraordinary eccentric, the young man established his practice in Peshawar, but as was the custom of the era, his wife made the long journey across to Moradabad to have her baby in her mother's house. Why is this small incident important? It is because the baby was Musarrat, who, as a woman will become Shoaib's wife and one of the cornerstones of his life. *Yes,* whispered this tiny but commanding woman on a mist laden London winter's evening in the drawing room of Heather Walk, a world away from the dust of Dera Ismail Khan, the clinging heat of Moradabad, *I was first adopted by my grandmother's sister. My mother and grandmother had a big family in Uttar Pradesh and my grandfather had built many houses for them outside Moradabad. This family wanted me to stay there rather than return with my mother to Peshawar. So I was left with my wet nurse at eight months of age, as in those days in such families, the mother did not feed the child. The great-aunt who 'adopted' me had two older daughters and one son, and one of the daughters, the one who became Shoaib's stepmother, wanted me in the house because she did not have any daughters of her own. And so there I lived.* Fact is sometimes stranger than fiction, and this action, of Musarrat's mother leaving her baby girl behind in Moradabad, was to have an enormous and totally unforeseen impact on the young Shoaib's life. And, as if it might explain her own temporary abandonment, explain Shoaib a little better, Musarrat sighed and said, *and you know, he did not have a mother, just think of that, no mother, and he did not live with his father or stepmother as a child, never.*

About all that Shoaib can remember of his father from his early years is of a middling grand house with trees full of oranges, but never as grand as his grandfather's many residences. Childhood memories, we all have them, coloured by our own small size, changed and discoloured by time's erosive passage. Whatever it once might have been, Afshan, Shoaib's artist daughter, speaks of Moradabad as a cramped, congested, grubby city of narrow streets and rickshaw traffic, of a dust-streaked house of fading grandeur, of how monkeys chattered in the branches of the huge guava tree that still shaded her grandfather's dressing room. A tree of memories—after his all-night poker sessions, Shoaib's father would wander up to change his clothes, throw open the shutters, and, if his mood was right would toss a guava at the monkeys and laugh when the monkeys tossed it back again. Gone now, long gone, but not Shadmani and not the shopkeepers either. They easily recognized a much older Musarrat who had accompanied Afshan, calling to her, 'Madam, go home and we will send the saris and jewellery to Shadmani's house to choose from as you please', as long ago and far away she once had.

There is little more we know about Shoaib's father except for his success as a poker player and of his setting up an account for the young Shoaib out of his poker winnings to help with his son's education. He was also a man who made

no religious distinctions in whom he befriended, who loved cigars and who had a mischievous streak, munching *paan* in secret conspiracy with his granddaughters when he once visited Peshawar when Shoaib was deputy commissioner. A good man, content to live his entire life in the same small Indian city, eclipsed by his wife's grandfather, in his own quiet way Nasim cared for his son, and in time, became quietly proud of him.

Enveloped in the warmth and many minor dramas of a great extended family the boy Shoaib recalls being very happy with life, *oh yes* Shoaib said with absolute emphasis, *all my needs were met and I was loved by everyone.* Sohail has a slightly different perhaps older brother's perspective, agreeing that Shoaib was certainly an intelligent boy, but that he was pampered by their grandfather, and this, combined with a streak of stubbornness in his early years, meant that to Sohail and his two cousins, the precocious young Shoaib annoyingly always seemed to manage to have things just as he wanted. But apart from a normal stab or two of jealousy, Sohail remembers that all four boys got along together very well. They also, quite frequently, got into trouble.

There is a story that one night Shoaib and two other boys stole out, purloining one of the ubiquitous bullock carts that seem to always play a part in boyhood stories of this era. They carried with them shotguns, including Shoaib's battered but precious 20 bore, and a spotlight which was then an illegal way to hunt. It was dark and spooky and of course the boys told stories of ghosts and night creatures, managing in the process to scare each other witless. Then, to their horror, when they turned on the spotlight they were surrounded by what seemed to be dozens of ghostly, floating, luminous eyes. In total fright they opened fire and then fled, furiously flogging the bullocks until they were clear of the forest. They were safe in their beds next morning when an angry grandfather stamped in, *wonderful hunting you brave boys,* he growled, *you have managed to shoot all six cows and now I have to pay for them.* There must have been an indulgent smile behind the anger because their grandfather paid up and no more was said about the incident.

Hunting has remained a life-long love of Shoaib because as Sohail smilingly said, relaxed in an armchair in our hotel room, high above Karachi, *when we went on tour with our grandfather for we four boys it was fantastic. Most days we would just go out each evening looking for something for the pot. But you should remember that despite his position, our grandfather was always polite, always very kind and extremely fair, and he never ever showed off, and really all of us had a very simple life, unless we were with one of the princes or maharajahs of course.*

Simple and sensibly frugal life might have been within the household but nevertheless there were tiger shoots as we already know, sometimes from the

backs of elephant; there were partridge shoots with beaters where, as Sohail laughingly said, *you shot from elephants that were trained to pick up the partridges with their trunks* and how tricky it was to shoot from the moving back of an elephant, *and yes, Shoaib was a good shot, in fact, better than all of us then except for our much younger cousin Mahmood who grew up to be an Olympic shooter.*

There was also a family farm in the *Terrai* right beside the land of the legendary killer of man-eaters, Jim Corbett. Here Shoaib smiled, body straightening, life's loads vanishing, a carefree boy again, *Oh yes, it was a wonderful time. The British had caused a stone wall to be built for twenty miles along the edge of the forest to protect the new farmers whose task it was to rehabilitate the land.* (Shoaib's great uncle had bought quite a lot of the land) *and much of my childhood was spent roaming about with my old 20 bore shotgun that my cousin had bought, at a cheap price because the tip of the barrel had split, and we had to saw it off but it still served me well.* Where the wall was broken, animals would sometimes jump over to eat the crops on the other side. It was at these places that Shoaib, and sometimes some of the others if they were back from school, would wait in ambush. One day though the boys crept up on a break to find to their great dismay a tiger sitting there. *You know that chap was really smart and had the same idea we had so we left him to it and all beat a hasty retreat. We might have been foolishly courageous at times, as all boys are, but not with a tiger that smart and anyway, even I knew that my old 20 bore was no match for such a one.*

Shoaib grinned again; said it was not the last time he was to decide that discretion was the better part of valour; that there is no shame in a sensible retreat. *One day, I remember trying to get a jungle fowl when an animal screamed and I knew right away it had been attacked or injured. The sound was retreating and I ran after it in excitement until I suddenly thought, you idiot, that old smart tiger, or maybe panther, had made a kill and it will be more than cross if I disturb it. So again I beat a hasty retreat.*

Time well spent, a phrase imprinted in Shoaib's mind from an early age. He flashes a smile, says, *this was the golden period in my life.* In those days Shoaib explained, the Raj demanded that District Officers live 'on tour' under canvas for at least three months during the cool season to ensure an officer got to know his district well and to take government to the people. *You went to the people, and you sat down with them and you listened carefully and heard what they had to say.*

On tour, officers like Shoaib's grandfather would hold court during the afternoons under the shade of a tree dispensing simple justice and resolving disputes on the spot and then perhaps, after tea, might walk out in the cool of the evening to see if there was something they could shoot for the pot. It was

camping in the grand style with log fires at night and sitting at a camp table with linen, silver cutlery, and fine china. Shoaib smiled again as he so often would during the weeks we spent together, *yes, it was all very stylish,* and of course projected a very definite image of benign power to the people, *and although we would go in the summer to hill stations like Mussourie, for me the best days were those winter days on tour when we would live under canvas. It was organized and yet free. We just roamed about and I loved to sit and watch my grandfather at work.*

In Lakhimpur there were forest rest houses and Shoaib recalls getting up early in the morning because they would have thrown grain along the edge of the forest the night before and more often than not the jungle fowl would be there and he and his grandfather would just shoot them from the veranda. Later, the birds would be served as soup for mid-morning tiffin. At Hamirpur also, the Collector's house had previously been the palace of the Maratha governor. *It was a huge big thing,* Shoaib chuckled shaking his head, still in awe of the size of it all, *with a square mile of compound full of wildlife. My grandfather's predecessor had shot a leopard in the compound and my uncle shot a hyena. You could hear the partridge and see the peacocks dancing from the veranda of the house. The grounds led down to the Jamuna River which in those days was full of dolphin and where you would often see crocodiles basking on the sandbars.* Had he been scolded by a watchful servant, warned by Begum Bubu because a fear of crocodiles sank deeply into this highly impressionable and imaginative child's mind? A trifle shamefacedly, Shoaib says he never learned to swim for fear of being eaten by a crocodile.

Lakhimpur was another posting Shoaib recalls with nostalgia. *It was a district that included several small states or principalities and the collector was treated like a viceroy and had all the pomp and splendour of the states at his disposal. If you went out on a hunt, all the maharajahs vied to provide elephants and splendid equipment. Yes. From my birth until matriculation, I had that kind of life.* Shoaib smiled, memories rising to the surface like bubbles in a glass of finest champagne, *Ah yes, you know, the tiger shoots were something else. I saw my first tiger from the back of an elephant and it was so beautiful. I was just dumb with amazement and was the only one who saw it. I was so taken by its beauty and by the way it just strolled by that I simply could not tell anyone, I could not have shouted out to those with guns for anything. And you know, that great tiger, it could not have cared two hoots whether this elephant was standing there or not.*

Yes, it was a wonderful life, really a never-again sort of life, Shoaib said shaking his head, *I loved being on tour, loved camping with all the entourage, loved setting off in the cool of early morning with the bullock carts carrying all*

the camp and all the servants walking cheerfully along. We rarely what you might call 'roughed it' and at night there were almost always baths and good food. Later, in Hamirpur or Lakhimpur there would be forty or fifty elephants to carry everything. My God, can you imagine it all today, fifty elephants!

And of course, I couldn't.

Occasionally there were hiccoughs in Shoaib's young life, intermissions from the ordered splendour of his grandfather's household. One such happened when Shoaib's grandfather was posted from Shahjehanpur to Dehra Doon. There was a delay in readying suitable accommodation for the large household and so the five-year-old Shoaib was packed off to the ancestral village, Muslim Patti, accompanied of course by his nurse Buboo and perhaps a couple of others from the household to watch over him. No hardship for a little boy, it was more of a great adventure. *Yes*, said Shoaib, *we came by boat on the river Tauns as there was then no road between Azamgarh and Muslim Patti village. The six months I spent there were perhaps the only time I lived a purely rustic life.*

Shoaib recalls relishing the freedom of the fields and of being able to remain outdoors for hours, of the fascination of watching the making of unrefined sugar or *gur*, of sucking deliciously sweet sugar cane, something which, with a sheepish smile, he admits he still loves to do. There was also the fun and responsibility of rounding up the animals in the evening, especially the bulls which no doubt made a small and sometimes fearful boy feel very proud of himself.

And Shoaib freely admits his childhood fears, not only of crocodiles but also of ghosts. It was in Muslim Patti where Shoaib was to start his education with lessons in the local mosque where a rotund but rather kindly religious teacher taught him the Urdu alphabet on a wooden slate.

There was also a girl who became his special tormentor, playing on Shoaib's imaginative fear of the unknown and of ghosts in particular, a fear first stimulated by a cinema version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* screened as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of George V in 1936. Still vivid in his memory, Shoaib recalls fleeing the cinema in total horror when the ghosts appeared in long white shimmering sheets. Then he smiled, *you know I never quite lived down a reputation of being a bit of a wimp.* But it was not all bad in Muslim Patti because his tormentor *was one of the liveliest, most vivacious and clever girls I had ever come across. Do you know*, he said, smiling fondly as boys do when thinking of a pretty girl, *she even made up a teasing rhyme that she would chant whenever she caught sight of me.* What manner of indignities even small boys will happily tolerate if it means the attention of a girl.

Muslim Patti might have been a rural idyll but it was also a place where rude custom took precedence over comfort. Shoaib sighed, *yes, it was a kind of rustic*

paradise, but it was also a place where my little world came crashing down when one afternoon, without warning, I was seized and subjected to the Muslim religious ceremony of circumcision. Like all other boys, I had to suffer through many miserable weeks of inconvenience and pain. After this rude awakening, rural living lost its appeal and Shoaib was more than ready to put Muslim Patti behind him and rejoin his beloved grandfather. *I left eagerly for grandfather's new posting, because in those days Dehra Doon was known as a paradise.*

Time smoothes old hurts and seventy years later, in an emotion charged trip to Uttar Pradesh and a day spent visiting Muslim Patti, Shoaib was to write of the village and the way he was received so warmly, *everyone introduced to me was a Mirza or a Beg. It sounded so sweet. It seemed no one else lived in Muslim Patti.*

On this same visit, Shoaib was also taken on to Pharia, the village of his paternal forebears, where he sat on chairs under a tree outside the house where his grandparents had lived all those years ago and where his father had been born. Shoaib was humbled to find that there were still twenty-six *bighas* of land owned by the family. The land had been held in trust by the villagers for ninety or more years. You could almost feel the tears in his eyes as he wrote, *the people urged me to come and take charge of the property.*

Ever one for grand and sudden gestures from the heart, Shoaib writes *I was overwhelmed by the sincerity and affection shown by Shafiq Sahib, (who had looked after the house and land for many of those years), and assured him that something which he has looked after and taken care of for nearly a century belongs to him and to no one else.* And with this, Shoaib's last and long forgotten ties to Azamgarh, to rural Muslim Patti, and the ancestral village of Pharia were severed.

Shoaib cannot ever remember his grandfather actually talking about service and integrity. Instead, he taught these by example, *it was just the way he lived* Shoaib once thoughtfully remarked, *and the only thing he used to say was that you should try at all times to do good to people but never expect anything in return; that you should be grateful if they did speak well of you but you should never expect this or feel angry if it did not happen. He would say it is your duty to be good to others.*

This was a seriously heavy load to give any child, but it is one that Shoaib seems to have willingly shouldered. Service and not compromising his integrity are two immovable principles, two cornerstones of his life. The two have won Shoaib the unsought admiration of so many, but they have also cost him dearly. But there was never any question of compromise in his grandfather's life and there has been no question in his own. The details are long lost, but it is with pride that Shoaib to

this day recalls his grandfather's principled stand against a commissioner, a man called Nethersole, whose idle boast was that he was 'Leathersole' to his enemies. In the days of the Raj it was no easy thing to stand up to a British-born commissioner, but unmoved by Leathersole's bluster, and supported by some powerful friends, the old man quietly stood his ground. Nethersole was forced into an ungracious retreat; Shoaib watched and remembered.

For Shoaib's older brother Sohail, it was no surprise that it was Shoaib who was to follow with single-minded tenacity in his grandfather's footsteps. As Sohail said, with that beautiful family smile lighting up his face, *he had an advantage over the rest of us because he lived with our grandfather much longer than any of us did and he was our grandfather's favourite. I was older and less interested in all the paper work and judgements, and was sent off to school far sooner than Shoaib, so he had the advantage of absorbing far more of my grandfather's acumen and ideals than I did.* Despite Shoaib being a favourite, Sohail believes that their grandfather was concerned for all of them and that Shoaib was favoured because he was the smartest. *I always thought he was smarter than me and although our grandfather imbued the ideals of service in all of us, he did not want us to do anything we were not inclined to favour. Without exception he left to each one of us the final choice of what we would do in our lives.*

Shoaib says he never had any doubts at all about his final choice, his total commitment to follow in Sultan Ahmed Beg's footsteps. Such was the influence of the old man that even today, whenever Shoaib writes about his grandfather it is as if the old man was still there watching over his every move: *To me he was an all-pervading personality who, from the day of my birth, had taken me in his charge and protection. I had seen and savoured affluence and luxury (but also) a life committed to integrity, upholding of principles, magnanimity and hospitality. I had observed day in and day out the art of administration and management. I had participated in out-door life at its best and had learnt to live under canvas for prolonged periods. This was my life. His career was my dream.*

In the India of Shoaib's youth his grandfather's unchanging mantra was this: before anything else, a collector's first responsibility was to the people and whether at headquarters or on tour, work came first. All cases had to be adjudicated and all visitors met before anything else was indulged in. Now most boys would also become quickly bored if faced with reading the daily Situation Reports or the Collector's Who's Who in the district, and then the details of the resulting judgements but not Shoaib. Later, at the Civil Service Academy in Pakistan, some of the bright young blades of the time describe Shoaib as quiet and serious. And perhaps he was but Shoaib did not see it that way. For Shoaib, learning how to be a first class administrator was more than a duty—it was a

dream come true. *I would marvel at my grandfather's ease in churning out judgement after judgement immediately after hearing cases and in my later life I tried hard to emulate those qualities.*

A more than proficient horseman and of course a serious hunter, Shoaib also happily listed cars and driving as a mania. Four times he cheerfully embarked on the long and sometimes dusty trip by road from England to Pakistan, and whenever he could he acquired a special car including a much-loved Mercedes sadly sold to fund the mercurial Afshan's fees at an expensive art college in London. Family always came first, even if it meant selling a car he had long sought to own. His mania for cars, Shoaib says, started at an early age; in an era when cars were rarer than tigers, Shoaib's grandfather had owned several. *My early memories include many trips in an old green convertible motor car that often had to be pushed. I also well remember this car being replaced by a magnificent new chocolate coloured Ford convertible that was driven through the enormous front gates of our compound by a cousin of my grandfather. My envy of his driving expertise was to land me in trouble several times in the future.*

Shoaib laughs, he is happy, boyish, admits to many boyhood misadventures associated with cars, all of which his grandfather would, of course, forgive, tells a story about *a certain maharajah who arrived to call upon my grandfather.* So marvellous was the maharajah's great motorcar that Shoaib could not resist climbing in and turning the key in the ignition. The car must have been in gear because the engine coughed into life. *There was a great hullabaloo,* he laughed, *as I did not know how to stop the vehicle I simply drove on with the hue and cry following until the petrol ran out.* Luckily, the car was not damaged and the maharajah regarded it all as a fine joke although his entourage may have had a slightly different view.

There was also a time in 1945, just after the Second World War, when jeeps were 'two a penny' and several suddenly appeared at the deputy commissioner's house at Lakhimpur. The keys had been left in the ignition of one and so a precociously confident thirteen-year-old Shoaib jumped in and drove off. Shoaib smiled that mischievously boyish smile again—it was still a great joke—*well, my father was one of the visitors and it was he who had left the keys in the jeep. He was very worried you know, not so much about my well being from his point of view, or so he said, but what he would say to my grandfather if I came to grief.*

Shoaib wipes a hand across his face, the cars are banished. He will be serious again; speak of his grandfather, of tolerance and charity. Sultan Ahmed Beg came from a family whose origins can be traced to Azamgarh, an important seat of Islamic learning. The college had been founded by an illustrious ancestor, Allama Shibli Nomani, but despite this background, perhaps even

because of it, Shoaib describes his grandfather as being always very relaxed and religiously tolerant, believing that religion should be a very personal affair.

A very charitable man, although he did not always fast himself, his grandfather would however take pains to make sure those who fasted were fed well at night. Among those who attended seriously to religious matters was Begum Bubu. Shoaib smiled and nodded, *Yes, it was a time of great tolerance. For some reason the womenfolk of the household were much more religious and were very punctual in offering prayers but nobody ever asked me to offer prayers. That matter was left to me to decide.*

As an officer and district magistrate, Shoaib's grandfather had to be seen to be impartial, having to officiate at each and every of the year's calendar of festivals, religious or otherwise. Shoaib remembers all the children of the household happily participating in almost every religious festival and occasion. Even the slightest hint of Muslim-Hindu friction eluded Shoaib's notice as a child; his grandfather had many Hindu friends and colleagues as did Shoaib's father many of whose poker partners were Hindu. *They would all sit and play poker and smoke the whole night through. They were friends. It was like that in those days. My grandfather had always taught that it was up to everyone to decide for themselves what they would and would not do and my father believed this too.*

Steeped in an ethic of religious tolerance, Shoaib says simply that he never thought much about the various later movements and agitation for the partition of India on religious lines. *I believed that we were all part of this great country, a part of the British Empire, and I was proud to be Indian. My grandfather's friends were from all walks of life and all religions, and later, at Lucknow University, my roommate at the hostel was a Hindu and neither of us thought anything of it.* Religious tolerance and understanding, as taught by Sultan Ahmed Beg, has been a watchword for Shoaib and his family throughout their lives; from the gently religious old sea captain Sohail, to the socially rebellious and sometimes intemperate Musarrat and her extraordinary daughters, bigotry finds no place or favour.

And if the picture I seem to have painted so far of spoiled and pampered boys living a life of ease and plenty; if this was true, how ever did the marvellous 'man of the people' that Shoaib was to become; the benignly tolerant and self-depreciating Sohail, emerge from this early version? It was the old sea Captain Sohail who gave me the answer:

Oh yes, it might sound as if we lived like rajahs, but we were never ever trained to be princes. Yes, we lived in big houses like palaces, and we hunted and met maharajahs and important people, but we were all trained to respect others no matter their position in life, we were trained to be men of the people.

The reluctant scholar

Dehra Doon was famous for its two schools, Doon school and Colonel Brown's school. The boys were growing fast and a decision on their formal schooling needed to be made. There was little disagreement about the older three. They had already started their schooling at other postings, but the argument rumbled through an entire afternoon about when and where to educate the last and youngest, and of course the favourite.

There were those, and Shoaib's maternal uncle was the spokesman for this group, who thought that Shoaib had been spoiled and indulged for quite long enough. It was time he said, that the boy learnt about the real world, was subjected to a bit of discipline. Some thought otherwise. Shoaib's grandfather in particular was reluctant to lose his favourite grandson, but bowing to the combined wisdom and pressure of the family council, he finally agreed. The boys would all go to the same school. Regardless of age, the American Presbyterian Mission School would accept all four.

It was 1938 and Shoaib would have been seven or so. He chuckles and admits to throwing a real tantrum, digging in his heels and simply refusing to go, refusing to budge when the servants tried to ready him for school, weeping himself to desperation. He also admits, with a wicked smile on his face, that the other three, his elder brother Sohail and his two cousins, had all gone obediently and happily and without argument, but not Shoaib. No way was he leaving the freedom of his grandfather's house for the uncertainties and strict discipline of a school in India in the late 1930s.

His performance must have been very effective, his tear-streaked face more than enough to soften the resolve of the family patriarch because to his uncle's disgust, and the annoyance of his brother and cousins, Shoaib's grandfather decided he was too young and that school could be postponed for another year. But the year passed like lightning and further resistance was futile, his grandfather had given his word, and so the reluctant scholar was finally packed off to school.

For Shoaib, that first school was to be a truly horrible experience. No longer a little rajah in a doting household, he found himself in a world where rude justice was meted out by cane wielding masters. Corporal punishment was the order of the day.

Shoaib later wrote that in the early years, his days were sheer torture and that he used to long for holidays or rainy days when school was cancelled. Maths was a particular ordeal. One master became so irritated with Shoaib's

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miserable performance at arithmetic that the headmaster was summoned. Shoaib says he still remembers standing before this formidable man in front of the whole class. Literally shivering in his shoes and thinking he was to be severely beaten or expelled, or even both, Shoaib says he was totally taken aback when having been chirpily informed by another student that Shoaib's grandfather was Mr. Sultan Ahmed Beg, the City Magistrate and Political Agent in charge of Afghan refugees, the headmaster gave the master a black look and strode from the room without another word. And there, to Shoaib's relief, the matter ended. The maths master never troubled him again. The writ of a City Magistrate was not something a mere headmaster would ever dare to challenge. Shoaib laughs, thanks his lucky stars that his grandfather was not informed, says *otherwise next time I irritated the maths master it might have been a different story.*

As the years passed, Shoaib and the other members of the infamous four were to have what Sohail described as a patchy education. Dictated by his grandfather's various postings, Shoaib attended no less than six secondary and high schools. The constant disruption did not seem to dampen his performance, and contrary to his early troubles at the American Presbyterian School, a quietly proud Shoaib still clearly remembers eventually obtaining his high school certificate in the first division. *I still remember getting a distinction in arithmetic, I don't know how, and that my number in this first of many external exams, was 32,533, so God knows how many students were sitting that exam. I still wonder what my old mathematics master would have said about this. I am sure he would never have believed it.*

Beginnings and endings, and one was about to happen. Sultan Ahmed Beg was on the verge of retirement, future postings were in question and his pension, although generous, was a long way short of full senior civil service salary with all its entitlements. A family conference was convened where it was decided that it would be best for Shoaib and his brother Sohail to move elsewhere for their matriculation. *So*, said Sohail smiling his beautiful smile, *of all the many places where the family had lived, the real home was Azamghar and that was where I went.*

Shoaib had other ideas.

Although Azamghar College was well renowned and had been established by one of the family's more illustrious forebears, Shoaib did not want to join his brother there. Maybe it was just mild sibling rivalry, or maybe he was curious about his father who had long wanted Shoaib to spend time with him. Whatever the reason, when his grandfather gave Shoaib the option of finishing school at Moradabad Intermediate College, Shoaib leapt at the chance. It was, however, not a totally joyous reunion.

Was Shoaib disappointed? Yes, it seems he was because he describes coming to Moradabad like a stranger, of being a guest in his father's house for the entire two years of schooling, of never achieving the closeness he may have hoped for and of treading very carefully in the presence of his stepmother. *I cannot recall why it was so, but during all that time we maintained a very formal relationship. My stepmother, of course, went out of her way to make me feel at home and my other brothers and sisters were absolutely angelic and charming.* But, as Shoaib admits, there was a tremendous contrast between the grandeur and excitement of his earlier life and the fairly boring urban existence of a moderately prosperous city clerk, *Yes, the yearning and nostalgia for the past never left me for a moment.* To acerbate matters, Shoaib made no secret of his dream to follow in his grandfather's footsteps. A secure, mundane job as a city clerk just did not feature on his wish list. Most young men have yet to learn to fully conceal their feelings and emotions, and in this, Shoaib was no exception. This must have been very clear to his father who, to his credit, nevertheless continued to maintain a perhaps slightly stiff but very civil relationship with his stranger-son. Shoaib was always welcomed as a son.

An aspirant for the elite civil service, Shoaib's academic choices naturally favoured the classics and shunned the sciences, thus creating a blind spot in the future when an understanding of technical matters would have been useful. However, so well had he performed at maths that he could have chosen this as a major at any time during his formative years. Shoaib's choice was a gentleman's option; history, geography, and languages, Hindi, English, Urdu, and classical Persian. Shoaib waved aside my murmurs of admiration at his eclectic choice *of course my Persian is the classical version so that few modern Iranians would understand what I am saying. I studied three or four of the more famous poet-philosophers whose sayings are still quoted. I quote them myself,* as he does the English romantics, an amazing mix.

Shoaib's decision to finish his schooling at Moradabad was to be far more momentous than just an excellent matriculation result. It was a decision that would change and influence his life as few other decisions ever would.

Badminton by moonlight

Moradabad, Northern India, 1947

Most highborn Muslim girls in the India of the times lived under the strict rules of *purdah*, a system that permitted no visual or physical contact with any man other than the very few males of her immediate family. Within a house, once a girl reached puberty, she lived behind screens and curtains, and never went unveiled into the outside world. To violate these rules could be extremely

damaging, possibly dangerous even if you lived within a moderate and relatively tolerant household.

But what if you are headstrong and have a mind of your own, music in your soul, are a dancer, a classical Indian dancer, and beautiful to boot? What if you are a budding social rebel, if you have lived a pampered and secluded life, and what if your grandmother and her sister are strong women too? What if you are wildly romantic but also immensely practical and you have met and fallen madly in love with a boy but are being discreetly courted by older wealthy men you don't want or love? What if your name is Musarrat? Well, with the support of your grandmother, you have your willful way; that is what you do. You find an accomplice who will carry your secret notes; you just happen to arrive at the family's new badminton court as the young man is leaving and you quickly flash a smile as he lingers while you languidly stretch for a shot; and then, when he is hooked and utterly besotted, you really live dangerously, arranging intensely exciting but all too brief secret meetings in the dead of night. And yes, you are both young and beautiful, and it is all so incredibly romantic.

And yes, you want each other, no matter that he, Shoaib, is a penniless student and you are being courted by a rich nawab who, indirectly through his sister of course, promises to shower you with gold, precious jewels and beautiful saris. And although you quite like the idea of beautiful jewellery and wearing deliciously expensive saris, you very definitely do not want to spend your precious youth shut away in some older man's *zenana* bored out of your mind. And anyway, you want a young man whose mind is still open, a mind ready for your ideas and stories, a mind ready to be inspired.

The dark days of Partition also loomed; traumatic, colossal, an enormous task, hastily drawn lines, the division of India, and you are seventeen and very vulnerable. And although the worst of the troubles bypass sleepy Moradabad, the family fears for you; they think maybe if you were married, and married soon, you would be safer. Luckily your grandmother, the grand old lady, is on your side, supporting your rejection of the Nawab and the others, and just as adamantly supporting your choice of the new arrival, this interesting boy, the equally young but entirely love-struck Shoaib.

Musarrat's maternal great-grandfather was a very rich man.

A construction tycoon, he was said to literally own half of Moradabad. The family's houses stretched for half-a-mile within the city, and outside, in the more exclusive civil lines, there was a row of five large bungalows, one for each of his five daughters. Musarrat had grown up in one.

Roohi, the eldest of Shoaib and Musarrat's daughters, says Musarrat never stopped being a daughter of India, smiles, *her heart was really always there* she says. In Moradabad? Oh yes, says Roohi, in later years Musarrat would sometimes snap when angry that she would rather go and live and die in the middle of a *mohalla* in Moradabad than stay where she was. *Hah*, Roohi laughs, nose wrinkling, as dramatic as her mother *would she? I don't think so. There is nothing there now but cows and dung and rubbish.* Musarrat does not deny this, readily admits Moradabad had an unsavoury side even when she was young. The station was a major junction and at night was crammed with impoverished would-be travellers and the homeless. Musarrat shakes her head, wrinkles her nose just as Roohi had done, says the smell was just awful and you could not walk anywhere and not step on someone, and children used to run about stark naked or just in a dirty shirt. *So poor, all so very poor*, she whispers.

Despite her family's affluence, Musarrat describes living very simply, saying thoughtfully *perhaps because of this I never really felt at home in Pakistan. Rich people there had too many things. We had no carpets even though we were rich but always plenty of food, just no artificial things, and no tables and we all sat and ate on the floor. Our servants were also all part of the family and ate the same food. Later, I would often get very cross with our children if they tried to order our servants about.* Musarrat is scornful of the way people seem to live in today's world, as Roohi says, *hah, in my grandfather's house, once it was decorated it was decorated. No need to spend more like these modern times, always changing, always spending more.* In the India of her childhood, Musarrat continues, just a little proudly, *we did not waste money replacing furniture or anything like that unless it was broken. Why would we want to replace something if it was good?*

Musarrat talks of her childhood as being perhaps lonely at times but also very happy. It was to be a far freer life than her sisters were able to live even though her Peshawar-based father and mother were extremely liberal. In Moradabad, the *purdah* system was not very strict although quite selective with social interaction being mainly within the family. Musarrat was allowed to dabble in Hindu culture and learning and loved the colour and life of all the festivals. In common with many of the wealthy Muslim middle class in India, Hindu friends were also entirely accepted by Musarrat's family. She describes her grandmother as a very good and religious woman who, unlike her sister, Musarrat's great-aunt, had always been a housewife although she was nonetheless a powerful force. She made sure Musarrat's understanding of Islam was thorough, but she was also tolerant, allowing the independent minded young girl to think about other religions and to attend religious festivals of all kinds. Even though her own upbringing had been strict and religiously orthodox, Musarrat recalls her grandmother teaching that religion is a personal affair, and that everyone has to decide for themselves.

Musarrat's great-aunt was an entirely different character and was to have a profound influence on her young and impressionable niece. Strong minded and highly political, she had divorced her husband and fought him in the courts for twenty years over the division of the estate and an allowance, socially daring and very rare in those days. A member of the Muslim League, the young Musarrat accompanied her to meetings and rallies and met many of the political giants of the era, including Mohammed Ali Jinnah. She also remembers Ms Fatima Jinnah who wore a white sari, and that her hair was very black, and that she badly wanted Ms Jinnah's autograph.

With a wicked twinkle in her eyes and the ever-present mischievous smile, Musarrat, chuckling naughtily said, *you know, at that time there were so many political people, even Mr. Nehru, and it was all so exciting. Hah, his sister wanted to marry a Muslim boy so the boy was given some money and sent to England for education. It was like that then.*

England was the centre of the world. Musarrat recalls always having an English governess in the house and that furniture, books, clothes, all were imported from England. The plosive 'hah' again, *the British influenced the big families to send the boys to school but not the girls, they were not interested in educating the girls.* Did this really bother Musarrat. She laughed, said not really, admits to being totally uninterested in formal schooling. She says firmly emphasizing every word that she never wanted to go to school although she made sure her daughters were well educated. She knew that education frees a woman. She smiles, *Yes, I told them if you can have a job then you are free.*

Sent to a girl's college, ever the rebel, Musarrat would attend assembly and then steal away, roaming the college as the mood took her, sometimes with her two school friends. She admits to quite liking geography, map making and history but found mathematics dull and impenetrable, boring, but dancing and singing, well, these were another matter, they were to become a consuming passion. Her eyes sparkled, *there was a dance master and a singing master and I loved both dancing and singing. If it was not my class I would just show up anyway and sit and watch. I could have spent all my time there.* Time enough indeed; Musarrat became a skilled exponent of Indian classical dance and her performances were said to be exquisite. She possessed a rare talent; those who knew her then said she could have gone to the top, become one of India's elite performers, and later when married to Shoaib she would have a *tabla* master come to her house as often as possible and practice every day. There would come a day, however, when Musarrat had to choose between her husband's career and her love of dancing. The decision once so clear, now not, to focus on Shoaib's career, still troubles him. Not Musarrat, although she admits to wondering sometimes just what might have been; but then she claps her hands, shrugs and laughs, *but it wasn't to be.*

A woman of extremes, rebellious scholar but also an avid reader; Musarrat raided the bookshelves of a favourite uncle, devouring many of the classics including the works of Shakespeare. Never allowed to be idle Musarrat recalls, *in Moradabad we were always busy. My grandmother employed a clever seamstress from Rampur and we used to make clothes and have doll marriages. If I was not doing anything my grandmother would mix rice and dal and say, well then, there is the dish, separate them; we were never allowed to be idle.* Musarrat never forgot the skills of dressmaking, and later in life was known for being very clothes conscious. Few realized that many of the beautiful and elaborate clothes she and her daughters wore were home-made rather than purchased from an expensive salon. *Simply out of the question* she laughed. In the early days, having to live on Shoaib's salary, the family was always short of money said Musarrat laughing, hand to her mouth, a dancer's movement, telling of the time in East Pakistan when, having sold some gold bangles to buy a dinner service she had nothing left for cushions and curtains, *so I made them myself. Everyone wanted to know where I had bought them as they were so beautiful. I never told them they were my old saris.*

Munawar, the beautifully composed wife of the worldly Humayan Khan whom we will meet later, describes Musarrat as being at heart an actress, always gay, a party girl who dressed extravagantly, flowers in her hair, jewellery flashing and with beautifully crafted low-slung silver belts. *They would sometimes spend the night with us when Humayan was ambassador to India. She was just so lively, her clothes so extravagantly tasteful, a bindi, a flower in her hair and silver anklets, so lovely and so lively* said Munawar softly.

Musarrat was known for her strange moods and her volatile temper from an early age. She was once thwarted by a favourite uncle, editor of the *Indian Times*, who was a natty and immaculate dresser and extremely fussy about his clothes, most of which had been purchased in the best shops of London. Musarrat became his spoiled mascot and he took her everywhere. This was stopped for the sake of propriety by his mother, Musarrat's great-aunt, when the girl was approaching puberty. Musarrat smouldered at this perceived injustice, apparently becoming incandescent when she was not taken to a film by the uncle and his friends. Seizing a pair of scissors and stamping into his dressing room, she is said to have shredded all his precious ties, shirts and suits, smearing mismatching boot polish on his shoes and leaving his wardrobe in utter ruin. On being confronted with the damage, he is said to have paled and then stormed out without a word. He was not to speak to a chastened Musarrat for six months.

Maternal or paternal, Musarrat's was a family of eccentrics.

Musarrat's father was certainly one. A constant thorn in the side of a succession of governments in Pakistan, a passionate critic and social idealist, debate and

argument regularly raged over dinner at the family home and late into the night. *Hah,* Musarrat had exclaimed *they would argue for arguments sake. My father would take the opposite side just to disagree. He had the most argumentative mind I have ever known. The whole house was one continual argument.*

Of her mother, Musarrat said that she was very gentle and mainly managed the house and rarely said a bad thing or told a bad story about anyone. Someone in that household not political? Musarrat laughed, threw up her hands, *of course she was political, everyone in that house was political,* and because of her father's continual, erudite, and highly vocal opposition, his witty barbs that so often stung the government of the day, the family were later whispered to be communist. *But we were not,* insists Musarrat, *we just wanted justice, and for Pakistan to walk the right path.* It was that kind of family. There were also furious domestic rows. After one such, her parents refused to speak to each other for several years.

There were others, equally eccentric, such as an aunt who dressed in men's clothes, smoked cigars, but nevertheless held down a job with the government. None in the family thought anything of it. Why would they, Musarrat had asked? Of the four daughters born to Musarrat and Shoaib, the hard working eminently sensible Roohi was the bossy one, a description she laughingly agreed with. But even Roohi had to summon up her courage before she was able to ask the cigar-smoking aunt if she was a lesbian? At this, her aunt laughed heartily and said, *of course not, but darling, you are the bravest of them all, it has taken sixty years for someone to ask me. It is perhaps a strange thing to admit,* says Roohi, *but my mother's family were all rebels and misfits, so many strong men and women, totally dynamic and totally out of place.*

Musarrat's quietly astonishing sister Rahat, frail and brittle in her eighties, still sits in the office of the Spinzer Press in Peshawar, a business she founded to make the living her husband, yet another eccentric, brilliant political cartoonist, poet, and lost soul, could not. She wistfully recalls the family visiting Moradabad every three years or so to see her mother's relatives. Each time they would stay a few months. *It was easier there* she said.

Shoaib thinks he may have first met Musarrat when he was thirteen or fourteen when he visited Moradabad with other members of his grandfather's household. His father had by then been accepted back into the family although Begum Bubu was never fully reconciled. *I think we may have all gone to the pictures. But there were many of us, it was just for a few days, and I was more interested in getting back to hunting than going out in a party with pretty girls.*

However, it was a very different story when the young Shoaib returned to Moradabad in 1947 as a serious sixteen year old. One look at the very beautiful and impetuous Musarrat and he was lost.

But he was not the first suitor for this eminently desirable girl. There was the Nawab of course, and apparently also a well-placed civil servant whose proposal Musarrat's grandmother haughtily refused, apparently saying, she is a daughter to me and I would not give you even a rag doll! Quite why the fellow was so roundly rebuffed we will never know.

Young he may have been but Shoaib had much in his favour too. Musarrat's grandmother had always been emphatic that she would never countenance a drinking man for her granddaughter. Although easy going and tolerant of the habits of others, Shoaib never drank alcohol of any sort, and never smoked, so he easily jumped that hurdle. And of course, he came from a very good family.

Did she fall in love just like that?

Musarrat had smiled mischievously, *Yes, I had heard about him and I knew straight away that he liked me. He was a cousin but very distant, so that was alright because we never married first cousins in our family.* Yet fearing that there would be family fights, the kind of fights and domestic bickering her own family was famous for, Musarrat remembers that her first reaction had been no, *and then I changed my mind* she said, laughing shyly.

There is a window in the mist of sixty year old memories, a window through which we might see how this unlikely pairing came to pass, the quietly serious boy with his benign patriarchal version of the world and this rebellious, fiery tempered temptress of a girl. The window is this. When Shoaib arrived in Moradabad to live in his father's household in 1947, his stepmother Shadmani was ailing. She needed help in the house, someone who would care for her children. Musarrat loved the children and they loved her, so back she came to the house where she had lived as a child, back to help Shadmani. Shoaib makes no bones about his feelings; he was smitten from the start.

And yes, the story of the badminton court and the incredibly romantic midnight trysts are all true, with Shoaib's adventurous younger sister acting as a go-between. Shoaib shakes his head at her daring, *it was really so brave of Musarrat. She had far more to lose than me, but she had made up her mind about the sort of man she was going to marry, and luckily it was me, I fitted the bill,* said Shoaib laughing as he did so often through those days of talk, *once Musarrat makes up her mind that is it.* It was and as we will find, always will be.

Musarrat also liked to write, and when Shoaib told his younger sister that she wrote very good stories, some of which were published, he believes his praise was quickly relayed, caught Musarrat's attention, put him in her good books. Musarrat was vastly amused, *yes, I was always a good writer and later I even wrote a book, so yes, let him think it was what he said about my writing, let him think this,* and she hugged the whole idea tightly, a happy thought.

And if Musarrat had already made up her mind, Shoaib still believed he was up against it, that there were many suitors, some far richer or better connected than he was. *You know, there was even a prince* Shoaib says still a little awe-struck that he had really beaten out a prince, well, a *nawab* anyway, but as we know, Musarrat's grandmother had sent them all packing. Good, bad or otherwise, perhaps she just acted as her favourite granddaughter wanted.

Young, impulsive, and very much in love, they decided to marry. Shoaib said that they both thought that such was the state of social turmoil at the time, that if they did not marry then and there they never would. The idea that they would go their different ways and never marry was simply unthinkable. This, they believed, was their one and only chance. It was not only Musarrat who was under pressure. Shoaib was fairly sure that it would not be long before he would be quietly pushed into marrying his mother's sister's daughter. A thoughtful Shoaib confided, *of course I had nothing against the girl but I was determined not to repeat what had happened to my mother. I was only going to marry someone for love and for no other reason.*

In Shoaib's mythic rooms in Gilgit's Chinar Inn there is a misty black and white wedding photograph of a handsome young man standing beside a beautiful young girl. Her jewellery is discrete but obviously expensive and includes of course, Husna's pearl and ruby necklace. The young man wears a well cut English suit; the girl a beautifully extravagant sari. Even though people in photographs of that era tended to adopt a serious unsmiling attitude, these two beautiful young people looked anxious. And they had good reason.

And so it came to pass that in 1950, at the age of nineteen, and in the first year of his university studies, Shoaib wrote one of the most important letters of his life. The letter was addressed to his grandfather and asked for his approval. A favourite aunt agreed to deliver the missive at an opportune moment. When the reply came, Shoaib said *my heart sank;* the answer to his favourite grandson came like a bombshell. For once in his life his grandfather icily refused to lend his approval. Only once before in his life had his grandfather lost his temper with Shoaib. This had happened in Shahjehanpur when Shoaib was young and for no known reason, used to cry at night. The event so impressed itself on the child that more than seventy years later, Shoaib remembers it clearly, *everyone was helplessly trying to silence me when suddenly one night I heard my grandfather shouting for me to be quiet. That was the last time anyone heard me crying at night.*

There was a solid wall of family opposition. Fearing that Shoaib would be distracted from his studies, the entire family fell in behind his grandfather. The old man wrote a searing letter back commanding Shoaib to go to the grave of his mother in Shahjehanpur and ask her whether he should marry or study. Shoaib

believed he could do both. Sohail clearly recalls Shoaib saying that nobody should worry; "I will become a member of the civil service someday."

With the stubborn single-minded determination of young lovers they decided that nothing would stop them. Plans for the wedding went ahead and the family fretted.

Accepting the inevitable, permission was tersely given, but no one from his grandfather's family came to the wedding. For the first time in his life, Shoaib had been abandoned by the one man he loved and admired above all others. It must have been truly awful; weddings are a hugely important family occasion. That they went ahead says a lot for the determination of both Shoaib and Musarrat, of their willingness to defy social convention or perceived injustice, of their willingness to pay the price, this time in the pursuit of happiness. A couple of days later, Shoaib's elder brother Sohail defied his grandfather and visited the newly married couple, an act of fraternal support that Shoaib would never forget. *Sohail is like that you know, such a kind and lovely person.*

Musarrat, however, insists the wedding was small because she told her grandmother not to waste money but to put it aside for an allowance after the marriage. They would certainly need the money and Musarrat did indeed receive a handy allowance while an impecunious Shoaib was studying. Musarrat smiled and said, *I think there were only one hundred or so people at the wedding.* Few indeed for two families as large, wealthy, and important as theirs.

Not everyone in Musarrat's family was overjoyed about the impending marriage either, but they took it all much more philosophically—except Shoaib's stepmother, Shadmani. She is said to have venomously opposed the marriage and when she failed, tried to undermine the continuance of Shoaib's student allowance, and generally made life unpleasant. Shoaib and Musarrat were glad to leave. However, like so many family feuds and tiffs, in time it all faded. In later life, Shadmani and Shoaib's father were always welcome in Musarrat's home, and ignorant of the turmoil of the past, her daughters came to love them.

Old beyond her years, Musarrat understood how much Shoaib's grandfather and father feared the marriage would wreck Shoaib's chances at university. Determined to prove them wrong, two years later, after their first child Roohi was born, Musarrat, emphatic as ever, said, *oh yes, I took Shoaib aside one day, and I told him to stay on in India and study. I would go and live with my father in Peshawar. I told him, look, if you get good grades in university I will let you come, but if you get bad grades you will not come. To have me you need a gold medal.* Just how serious was the young Musarrat, what might have come to pass if a gold medal was not attained we will never know and she would not say. She was certainly wilful, and she knew her own mind but we will never know because as she said

laughing merrily, *you know he got one, he got a gold medal in English Literature and then he came.* And then, suddenly, it was enough. She bid us goodnight, commanded us to come again, and slowly climbed the stairs to her bedroom and to the memories that lived in its crowded shadows. Shoaib has a slightly different version, saying that it was he who persuaded Musarrat to go to Peshawar to be with her mother, *by then we had conceived our second daughter Afshan and I thought she should go and have her baby there.* There is a postscript to this story. When Shoaib eventually arrived in Pakistan he found *there were history MA's by the dozen, but only a few in English Literature. There was no dearth of offers of lectureships in English.* The gold medal really counted.

The former ambassador, the eloquently worldly Humayan Khan, cousin to Musarrat, believes she always had great ambitions for Shoaib, was able to flout convention, stoke the youthful love affair in ways the more conventionally staid young Shoaib just could not have done, and had fought tooth and nail for his rights at a time when displaced Indians were not always well regarded in the new state of Pakistan. The gold medal in English Literature was to have another very positive effect for Shoaib. Time probably helped also, but it was the medal that was to finally win over Shoaib's grandfather, as perhaps Musarrat guessed it would, that and to Shoaib's surprise, that most idealistic and uncompromising of romantics, the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Shoaib still vividly recalls discussing English Literature with his grandfather one day and remarking that everyone seemed to admire Shakespeare. His grandfather had agreed, saying that Shakespeare well deserved the praise that had been heaped upon him but that as far as poetry was concerned, Shelley reigned supreme. The outwardly stern and steady old bureaucrat a secret lover of the one of the greats of the English romantics? Shoaib says he was stunned; the whole thing was a revelation. Face animated, Shoaib's memory went into overdrive, *from that time onwards I never again judged a book by its cover and I made it a point to read everything that Shelley had written. I found I loved it, so much so that I named our youngest daughter Shelley, and you know I still remember it all.* And then he was away with verse, lost in the past.

While the secretly tempestuous courtship had been moving towards its inevitable end, Shoaib had managed to pass his higher secondary examination with grades good enough to ensure his admission to a university of his choice. Allahabad, his grandfather's university and his father's choice, was a possibility, but not Aligarh, an institution Shoaib's grandfather had parted company with, wrongly blamed for an incident involving of all unlikely things, a package of mangos. Shoaib, however, had set his heart on Lucknow University. Just across the river via the 'monkey bridge' and designed by the famous Cunningham, the

university was located in a city famous for its gardens, and as the centre of Indian Muslim civilisation. It was very English and very exclusive, the Oxbridge of India. It would suit Shoaib down to the ground.

Although Shoaib had always determined to follow his grandfather and take English for his Master's degree, influenced by a brilliant history master, he had dithered, thinking he might choose history instead. For the first of many times, however, Musarrat was to alter Shoaib's chosen path. Her own utterly exasperating and argumentative father had taken a doctorate in history at London University. Using her father as a prime example, she not only insisted that historians inevitably became too argumentative, but that one historian in the family was more than enough. Shoaib shrugged and gave in, taking English Literature as his major subject. It was to be a fortunate choice as we already know, and the beginning of a life-long love.

The final decision needed his grandfather's blessing who, from his summer residence at Nainital, happily concurred with Shoaib's choice, questioning only the expense. Now retired, the old man had already distributed the commuted portion of his pension and the balance was just sufficient for his own needs. However, Shoaib already had a thousand rupees in a post office account, a large amount in those days, half of which had been given by his father from his poker winnings, and the balance by his grandfather from his pension.

With this account as a back-up the family decided Shoaib's father would pay the rest, and of course he did.

Although his requirements had been estimated to be about fifty rupees a month, Shoaib insists with pride that he rarely asked for more than fifteen. Whatever the amount, his father always complied without a murmur. In the years to come, Shoaib was asked often by his grandfather if he needed extra funds but the answer was always no. Shoaib and Musarrat's needs were modest. In fact, much of the post office account was given away by Shoaib at one time or another to relatives.

One such was the uncle whom Shoaib describes as utterly flamboyant, a constant lover, and always very dapper. He would apparently breeze in wearing one of his grandfather's suits, saying 'alright, young Shoaib, I need a little loan'. *Despite his best intentions I would never see the money again* said Shoaib laughing.

During the first year after their marriage, when Shoaib lived by himself in a university residence, Musarrat would send money from her own allowance which Shoaib says was far more generous than his. The arrangement worked well until one of the smarter postmen twigged that there was often cash in the envelopes from Moradabad and the money started to disappear. To the postman's chagrin, the arrangement was smartly stopped.

After Roohi's birth, however, the family was able to live together again, taking up a vacant room in Lucknow, in the home of Reyaz Ahmed Khan, a relative. There was also a job for Shoaib running a printing press when Reyaz left for Delhi, work that he managed to fit in with his studies. The extra money was useful but Shoaib insists, *by no means essential; together we had enough.* However, it was not a time for complacency. Shoaib was barely twenty years old, he was still a student, and he was a father. Extra funds were always useful.

Fatherhood had an upside for Shoaib. Although Musarrat had wandered through to matriculation level and he admired her imaginative short stories, Shoaib had quickly come to realise that she was not at all fond of studies. Instead, she loved music and art and dancing, and of course writing and talking all of which the more serious Shoaib regarded as fun but frivolous. He must have wondered what he would do, how he could live with her and have time to study, but nature provided a solution. As Shoaib said, smiling and just a little bit embarrassed, *then of course, and to my delight, a year after marrying we had a baby, Roohi, and that certainly took up her time, although even before the baby she made no demands except to ride my bicycle.*

Yes, Musarrat agreed, *in the beginning we had no money at all and I took pleasure in being a housewife.* She of course also took pleasure in mastering Shoaib's bicycle, the first signs perhaps that this was to be an unusual partnership to say the least. Anything else? *Well*, said Musarrat, at *first he did not care about his clothes but I changed all that.* Whatever he once was, the Shoaib of today dresses conservatively and well in a style he was to make famous years later in the mountains of northern Pakistan.

A trip down memory lane.

In 2008, Shoaib took advantage of a visit to India for the Rajiv Ghandi Charitable Trust and embarked on what he called 'a trip down memory lane'. Lucknow was an important address on memory lane and so there he went.

Shoaib admits the newly built parts of Lucknow are spectacular and *European in every way* and filled him with anticipation to see his old alma mater. The comparison was shocking. As Shoaib was to write despairingly, *the once great university had subsided to a state of bare decay.* Gone or in a sorry state were the open verandas, the Tagore library and the once beautiful fountain ponds. The common rooms that were once a place of armchairs, newspapers, and noisy with talk and games were now bare, unwelcoming, whitewashed shells, and much of the once thriving English Department had been given over to the study of Sanskrit, a shock for the anglophile Shoaib but not perhaps for the seriously academic. After all, the scholarly comparison of Sanskrit with

European languages at the end of the eighteenth century was the starting point of scientific language study.

Time ravaged also was the Old Coffee House where Shoaib's professors had held court, buying coffee for any student who made a brilliant point, although in consolation, the New Coffee House was full of people and served a reasonable cappuccino. Back into town next to scour Hazrat Gunj for the society photographers C. Mull & Co who had taken wedding photographs or the jewellers Satramdas Dhallamal who crafted Husna's precious pearl and ruby set worn by Musarrat at her wedding. But the hunt was in vain. Gone also was the printing press and the cottage where Shoaib and Musarrat had lived as guests: memory lane had vanished.

A sadly sobered Shoaib was to pen this note in his diary, *I said goodbye to Lucknow with a heavy heart.* Time can be cruel. Lucknow had once been a place of great happiness.

Before we bid goodbye to the India of Shoaib's boyhood there is one more story to relate, one more insight into the remarkable Musarrat and the way she was to affect Shoaib's life.

Brides in India tend to be like gorgeous silent dolls, but Musarrat, although gorgeous, was never silent. She broke the rules; she would not accept that a woman's role was to be quietly acquiescent. From the start she would make her presence felt, make sure that she was heard, make sure she was respected, *you could say that even then I was a liberated woman. At my marriage I asked my husband to stand by me at* Namaz *[ritual prayer recited by Muslims] and said I wanted three things from him, otherwise we would go separate ways right now. Hah*, said Musarrat laughing at how bold she had been, *he thought I was a mad girl but he agreed so I told him, first you must pray and then we must promise never to hit each other. If you hit me, I will kill you.*

Would she have really done that? Just walked away?

The hour was late, the night noises of London muted, but not Musarrat. She gave an almost naughty little smile; *I think he believed I would although I knew he was a good person.* Silence for a minute or two, gathering memories, apologizing that her English was not very good, *you know, he was such a young boy when I married him, and he has changed a lot. He is more tolerant, much less conservative and fixed in his views, but he has always remained a good person, always a good person. You know, a diamond remains a diamond no matter what happens and however long it exists.*

And then came perhaps most far-seeing and significant of all the promises this precocious teenager insisted Shoaib must make, *yes, I told him he must never be arrogant and must help the poor, he had to help the poor.*

That Shoaib accepted all these injunctions with equanimity not only says a lot about Musarrat and her socially advanced views. Musarrat whose name means happiness, but also that hidden within that quietly gentle but determined twenty year old boy, ardent hunter and seeker of the truth, were the makings of the quite extraordinary humanist he would become.

This perhaps is what Musarrat really saw.

Shangri-la

Long ago and far away the Vale of Swat was a dreamy mountain principality known for its scenic beauty. It was a mystic land of peace, a magic land lost in the cool mists of the Hindu Kush, a place young English civil service officers tossing restlessly at night in the solid oppressive heat of the endless Indian plains would dream about and long for.

It was Shangri-la.

December 2007: Shangri-la has vanished. The Pakistan newspaper *The News* announces the tragic death of the son of Aurangzeb, the former Wali of Swat, killed by a roadside 'improvised explosive device'. He had been en route to Mingora in an attempt to negotiate an end to the fighting and violence. Although family and friends were shocked and stunned by the senseless savagery, the incident passed largely unnoticed, dwarfed by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi.

April 1953: Swat still lived on in the dreamtime of the past when the young and penniless Shoaib arrived in Pakistan with his gold medal and his Masters in English Literature, a land ruled by a benign and socially enlightened prince, the Wali of Swat.

Lucknow had been absorbing for Shoaib, and rewarding, for after graduation there had been the offer of a lectureship. He hardly noticed, there was a far more important matter to consider. If the young Shoaib was to fulfil his dream and gain entrance to the civil service, the vital question was whether he should pursue his dream in India or the new state of Pakistan.

Shoaib decided that his best chance lay with Pakistan.

To the family's regret, the patriarch Sultan Ahmed Beg gently refused to leave the country he had served for a lifetime. The old man had held a senior

post as collector at the time of Partition and as representative of the government he was in effect the voice of India. Offered the position of *Dewan* (minister) in a number of Indian States, as well as the plum post of Chairman of Pakistan's new Federal Public Service Commission, the old man gracefully declined them all. Some younger family members were astonished, others irritated. Influence was always helpful.

Shoaib is inclined to believe his grandfather sympathized with Mr. Jinnah's position but perhaps not enough to feel he had to leave his home. Perhaps the grand old man felt he had done enough; maybe he was truly tired, already ailing and ready to rest. So back he went to Azamgarh and Katra, content to offer occasional counsel to the family and to fill his days rebuilding his beloved Salim Manzil. Already mollified by Shoaib's gold medal performance at Lucknow University, Sultan Ahmed Beg was completely won over when he finally met the vivacious and irresistible Musarrat. To Shoaib's obvious joy, *my grandfather received my wife Musarrat with open arms when I took her to him before leaving for Pakistan, and wished us great happiness.* All was forgiven. Today Shoaib tends to downplay his momentous decision as obvious and inevitable but it was not quite as obvious as it may seem.

Musarrat had opposed Partition thinking that Muslims in the India she knew would have been safe and well, would have had freedom if less influence, and she did not look forward to a more restricted personal life. *When I was young* she suddenly said one night at Heather Walk, *I suffered in Pakistan whenever we visited. I was brought up in India in a very different way. Even the clothing was different. In summer in India everything was pure cotton, but at my grandparents house in Dera Ismail Khan they wore brocade, even in summer. It was just one of many silly things, like ivory, I never wanted ivory and I never ever felt quite at home, not then and not later.*

So really, she did not want to leave India, *Yes, at first I did not want Shoaib to leave India and join this service* (the Civil Service of Pakistan). *I did not believe in the honesty of government. I wanted Shoaib to do some other work. Professor, or something like that. You know he was offered a job as a professor at Lucknow* (Shoaib says it was a lectureship but the point is irrelevant to Musarrat) *and I wanted to live there, but the pay was low and our family in Pakistan thought we should come.*

However, practical as always, Musarrat realised that when Shoaib's grandfather died, his influence with the Indian government would die with him whereas her own family had recognized rank and power, even notoriety, in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. The first two could prove to be crucially useful although the notoriety might be a problem. As Musarrat well remembers, *my father was a lawyer, very political, a very strange man who*

made many enemies. He did little for us, and always just said that we have to stand on our own two feet. When I arrived in Peshawar he was earning a lot of money as a lawyer, but he never helped us, not at all.

In the new India, the competition may have been greater and there was varying anti-Muslim sentiment in some quarters, but at the time, there was also discrimination in Pakistan. The often highly educated and very capable new arrivals were resented by some within the Punjab-based establishment as outside opportunists who sought to snap up the best jobs. With most of his own family still in India or new arrivals themselves, to his surprise and dismay, Shoaib ran headlong into the thick of it. Suddenly he was an outsider.

So the move to Pakistan was Shoaib's decision. He shrugged and then grinned a little sheepishly, said *yes, it was. Musarrat had never lived anywhere but India and she probably would have preferred to stay but her mother was there and I thought she might like to be near her for the birth of our second child* (Afshan, that incredible bundle of future trouble). Musarrat smiled when I told her this, said, *Shoaib did not know my family very well at all then.*

Decision taken, on April 19th 1953, as soon as his final examinations were done, Shoaib flew from Delhi to Lahore.

Excited but also apprehensive, he sat in the compartment of the train to Peshawar and took stock of his situation. Except for having to occasionally move to safer areas in Moradabad to avoid the occasional riot during Partition, the family seems to have been largely spared the horrors endured by others. And, yes, he had an excellent degree in English Literature and yes again, there was Musarrat's influential Frontier family who might be able to help. Apart from that, all he had in the world to ensure his future was a pass, because passports had not yet been introduced in Pakistan, the small amount remaining in the post office account, and a quiet determination to somehow find a way into the elite ranks of the Civil Service of Pakistan. But first he had to find a way to live. As he later wrote, *of course I wanted to enter the civil service but I knew it would take time as there were examinations to pass and conditions to be met. If we were to live and not be a drain on our relatives, I needed employment, and I needed it right away.*

Shoaib believes in synchronicity, that just when you are most desperate, just when events seem to conspire to defeat you, the pathways of fate somehow converge to provide opportunities. The trick is to be able to see them. You also have to be brave enough to seize the moment even though you are unsure where it might lead.

So while Shoaib was casting around for an interim job, it so happened that one of Musarrat's relatives at the newly established university in Peshawar

discovered there was a post available as lecturer in English at the Jahanzeb College in Swat. Shoaib was in the running for several positions including one at the prestigious Lawrence College in Ghora Ghali but Swat had a number of advantages. The salary was higher than the other possibilities and the package included an attractive bungalow. Throw in a benign climate and few distractions so Shoaib would be able to study after hours and Swat seemed tailor-made for the young family. Interviewed and accepted by the principal who was summering in nearby Abbotabad, Shoaib also needed to pass muster with the State's ruler, the Wali of Swat.

Shoaib remembers the journey to Swat as combining comic opera adventure with a valuable learning experience. It all began with a late night foray, the result of a promise to take Musarrat and her sister to a screening of the epic film, 'Gone with the Wind'. *The film was a must see for all the ladies of the town* laughed Shoaib *but dragged on and on and on.* Next morning he overslept, missed the early morning bus to Mingora, and had to fall back on the midday one. This was a mistake. Shoaib laughed again, *in those days, government buses had to stop at the border and then you had to find a private bus to go on and late in the afternoon when I arrived at the border all the private buses had stopped for the day.* With no spare cash to pay for accommodation and none available anyway, an uncomfortable night by the roadside seemed inevitable. Instead, Shoaib was able to write *I experienced my first taste of true Pashtun hospitality. The quietly dignified white-bearded elder who had shared my bench seat from Peshawar turned out to be the principal of the local high school. Seeing my plight, without hesitation he invited me to stay in the school's guest room. Next morning he arranged a tonga to pick me up at five.*

Warmed by his first encounter with country people of the Frontier, his spirits rose further in the sparkling morning as, transferred to a second tonga, they trotted along a river-side road edged with rose bushes in glorious bloom. He arrived in Mingora at nine.

Exhilarated, but slightly disheveled and in shirtsleeves, Shoaib presented himself to the principal who had arrived earlier. Shoaib laughs as he so often did during the long days of talking, laughs at the memory of the principal being quite shocked. *He thought I would be in a suit, not some rather travel-weary trousers and shirtsleeves. The Wali's court was quite formal and was held at his palace at Saidu Sharif with all his courtiers in attendance. But what I had was what I stood up in and so we went and it was fine.*

Shoaib recalls the Wali as being an absolute but nevertheless enlightened ruler who raised funds by collecting one eighth (*an octroi*) of the value of all incoming and outgoing trade goods plus one tenth of all crops. *But the money was not wasted or used frivolously,* and for Shoaib this was important, *for as*

well as the degree college, there was a network of beautiful schools, all free, and as staff were paid handsomely he got very good people. He was a very down-to-earth person and very good to me. There was also absolute peace.

Scenically gorgeous with roses and hollyhocks in the garden of a comfortable bungalow, a benign summer and log fires in the sometimes snowy winters, Swat was a paradise, a dream come true. Musarrat sighed, one of the few times she did, and then she smiled, such a sad-happy smile, *I always wanted to live in a small house in the mountains. You can live anywhere if you love each other but in Swat people lived totally peacefully. You could go anywhere at night. The Wali was a very good person. If someone committed a murder the Wali would ask the family, 'well, what do you want, money or this man's life', and that settled it. Even though the people were mainly Pashtun and sometimes quite religious, there were never any problems in Swat. For two years we were very happy there and I loved it all.* There were picnics in summer and frequent visits from family members who were happy to get away from the heat of Peshawar. Shoaib remembers taking tutorial groups on walks up through the most beautiful forests you can imagine, all the way to Kalam. There were no roads and the peace of the place was magical. Shoaib also loved teaching although he says he had to work hard at it. *No, not at all* he said, *I was not brilliant, not a natural teacher but in those days in the Frontier, students were very respectful of their teachers, yes, it was all very good.*

How often do husbands misread their wives?

Shoaib says he always felt Swat might have been a little dull for Musarrat, a little too quiet, a little boring even for a someone who grew up near the lively, crowded bazaars of Moradabad. *There was not much society and I think she wanted more, something different, some place a bit livelier. She could visit the Wali, of course, when he was there, and his son Aurangzeb had married the daughter of President Ayub Khan and they became good friends, but otherwise it was very quiet.* And then, as if to qualify what he had just said, Shoaib added, *but anyway, I think she was happy wherever we were.* Musarrat says no, not anywhere, not always, but Swat? *Oh,* she had whispered, *I could have stayed there forever.*

As well as teaching, Shoaib also had to study quite hard. There were more than eight thousand contenders for about eighty places at the Civil Service Academy, only twenty of which were in the elite administrative wing. The going would be tough, extremely competitive. Shoaib knew he had to do well in the entrance exams.

The exams had three components. Candidates could select topics for the two written papers which were worth varying amounts for example, English Literature was worth two hundred while European History carried only one

hundred. The maximum score was six hundred of which three hundred was allocated to a viva voce or oral exam. Scoring well in the written papers, Shoaib's viva voce performance was marked down. To this day he has no idea what happened. Did he have a mental block that day or were the examiners determined to make it hard for new arrivals?

Shoaib's main chance now depended on getting in on the North West Frontier Province's special quota, but to his dismay he found himself fifth in the queue. Only the first two would be admitted. However, luck was with him again. Five of the twenty places at the Academy were allocated on merit. The first two on the Frontier list had outstanding results and were admitted in this way. One of these was Musarrat's cousin Humayan Khan who had the advantage of having just 'come down' from Cambridge. This stroke of luck narrowed the competition to three, all of whom were supposed to prove they were domiciled in the Frontier. There was no question for one of the three who had been born to a long standing Frontier family and who spoke fluent Pashto. As Shoaib said, 'he was a true son of the Frontier soil'. That left Shoaib and one other candidate, both new arrivals. Then a 'bolt from the blue', a telegram arrived noting stuffily that the selection board was unable to regard him as being properly domiciled in Pakistan. Someone had decided his Domicile Certificate was insufficient evidence. Where was his house? Where was his land? How could anyone tell where he lived? *My heart sank,* Shoaib said.

Musarrat was furious. *No land, what do they mean, no land. We have inherited so much land from my grandfather in Dera Ismail Khan we already have too much. Shoaib does not need any more.* With that she packed her bags and stormed angrily down to Peshawar where, as she had expected, her father shrugged and said, 'do not ask me, if you want help, help yourself' and then went back to composing his next pamphlet attacking the government of the day. Her sisters and brothers-in-law were not so offhand. They helped her take the train to Karachi. Musarrat had a baby on her hip, another held her hand and she was twenty-two years old.

Musarrat found the Wali in a hotel in Karachi with his young wife; he was immediately sympathetic saying, 'how can they say your husband has no land; that is ridiculous'. So he wrote a personal introduction to the Establishment Secretary. Musarrat took the note and hurried off to the government offices; in those days, Karachi was the capital. Although the secretary's wife was apparently of Indian origin, he was from Punjab and held strong views about refugees. He refused to speak to Musarrat.

She was on her own.

Anyone less determined would have despaired but not Musarrat. Perhaps her father had known her all too well when he had said, 'help yourself', because that is

what she commenced to do. Musarrat remembers taking the letter everywhere, remembers hot and sticky days, a child at her feet, another in her arms. Some of her father's friends were sympathetic and an Undersecretary in the Secretariat, Rasheed Ahmed, was particularly helpful. A good friend of Musarrat's Moradabad grandmother, Rasheed was known for his equal and fair handling of new arrivals. Unable to bypass the quite vindictive bureaucratic blockades that the establishment secretary had put in place and at some risk to his own position, Rasheed kept Musarrat informed of the various twists and turns in the situation. Musarrat eventually decided she had had enough, and when that happens, watch out world. *My feet were sore and I was totally tired of running here and there and drinking tea but getting nowhere.* She decided to go right to the top, right to the famous Dr Khan Sahib, then a minister in the federal cabinet.

Although Khan Sahib was a long time friend of the family, Musarrat was uncertain of her welcome. Her father had written many highly critical articles about his politics. She shrugged and said, *but anyway, what else could I do. So I wrote a small note which said the daughter of Abdur Rahim would like to see you.* At first, the minister's secretary refused to accept the note, but ten rupees changed his mind. Fifty years later, on a winter evening in London the thought of having to bribe someone just to deliver a note still leaves Musarrat spluttering indignantly, *it was disgraceful.* And so it was but it did the job, a small price to pay but one that still rankles.

Khan Sahib was a gentleman of the old school and there, parked in his hot stuffy antechamber, was a damsel in distress. Musarrat said he came out immediately her letter was placed on his desk, said please come in straight away to his cooler office where fans whirred and a tea tray was set. Vague at times, Musarrat remembers that all-important day as if it were yesterday. She smiles mischievously, she does this often, says *this is what happened.*

Seated at last and with the ear of an important man, Musarrat did not mince her words. I said to him, *Sir, I wanted to come in but they stopped me because they did not know the truth of the relationship between you and my father. And then I told him the whole story. Straight away he agreed it was all nonsense because we indeed had so much land. He said, 'right, I will guarantee you. Who is the man who has done this to you, my poor child?' So I told him saying that I did not want anything but to put things to rights.*

Not a man to waste any time, Khan Sahib immediately telephoned the establishment secretary and having given his instructions called for his own clerk to dictate a letter. 'But Sir,' his secretary had murmured, 'don't you know this is Rahim's daughter, the man who writes articles against you every day?' Khan Sahib had apparently sat back in his chair grinning and said 'of course I know this but don't you understand, politics is politics and friendship is another thing'.

The establishment secretary, however, continued to try and scuttle Shoaib's candidacy. It seems that Khan Sahib eventually had to go to the prime minister to settle the matter, but settled it was. Musarrat laughed at the memory of it all, saying again and again, *you should have heard him saying, 'who is this man who is causing all this trouble?'* And then suddenly the laughter dies and she lifts a hand to brush away a tear, *he was a good man, a fine man and he valued friendship above all other things. When he (Khan Sahib) was killed a few years later I grieved so much. I did not have any food in the house for weeks. He was such a good man.* And then, on that night, she can say no more. Shoaib agrees emphatically that Dr. Khan Sahib was an exceptional man, always a gentleman. A few years later, when he was serving in what was then East Pakistan and read that the man who had secured his entry to the civil service had been stabbed to death in Lahore, Shoaib says that like Musarrat he had been totally shocked. *Tears just ran down my cheeks. Pakistan had lost one of its best.*

And so, as she was to do time and again, the 'unstoppable force' as her granddaughter Sarah once called her, Musarrat had achieved what she had set out to do—she had levelled the playing field. Shoaib recalls the moment equally well, *I was still in Swat and was out playing a game of tennis on the college courts quite oblivious of the furious game being played by Musarrat, when a bearer came rushing out with a telegram. I had been accepted as civil service trainee. I was utterly overjoyed. My lifelong dream had come true.*

However, while truly grateful to Musarrat and of course to Dr Khan Sahib, one of Shoaib's first actions was to telegram his grandfather in Azamgarh. *My grandfather was overjoyed when I sent him the telegram informing him about my selection in the Civil Service of Pakistan in particular as I was also able to tell him that as part of my training I was going to Cambridge for a year.*

The old man's reply was characteristically cryptic, a simple *well done*, but this was more than enough for Shoaib. *I was determined that on my return from Cambridge I would persuade my grandfather to come and live with me but that day never came. One day while I was away in Cambridge I received a letter from my uncle saying that my grandfather had passed away.* Shoaib was utterly devastated and grieved for a long time, *my role model, the one who had given me everything and put me on a firm footing, was gone.* Shoaib resolved to work harder than ever.

Before they could leave Swat there was one additional small hurdle to jump. Shoaib had signed a five-year contract with the college in Swat, but unknown to the principal, the Wali had given Shoaib a personal letter guaranteeing he would be released if he gained entrance to the civil service. Shoaib says with characteristic understatement *I was somewhat dismayed to find the Wali was holidaying abroad when the official civil service admittance letter arrived.* However, the Wali's son Aurangzeb accepted his father's letter without demur,

and that was that, Shoaib smiled. *I was sorry to disappoint the principal but after all, he always knew my intentions*. Shoaib was on his way at last. He was about to enter the mainstream and did not really mind leaving Swat. But unknown to Shoaib, Musarrat did, very much. It had been their first real home and she remembers being very happy. *I could have stayed forever*, she whispered, *in my heart I wanted Shoaib to be a professor*.

Not only was Musarrat reluctant to leave Swat, once again she would be homeless. There was no place for wives at the Civil Service Academy, and candidates were not permitted to live away from the academy with their families. She also did not want to return to the furious debates and frequent domestic rows of her father's household. So she jumped at the offer of one of a group of lecturers who were visiting from Lahore. The lecturer had a large house close to the academy and offered to have Musarrat, her children, and her servants stay for as long as they liked. There were two. When they first arrived in Swat the young family had been allocated two women, both widows, as nannies for the children. Musarrat immediately treated these two as family. Shoaib laughed, *you know we created a bit of a fuss in Swat by paying our two nannies. It was not very much, maybe ten rupees a month, but until then nobody ever paid for this sort of service. We set a precedent that annoyed some people.* The two Swati widows were to stay with Musarrat all their lives. The situation was ideal from Shoaib's point of view. He could study and work untroubled by the demands of a family, and yet, when he had time off, it was just a short walk and he was a family man again. Shoaib had smiled, leaned forward in his chair and lifted his hands as if to say, 'well, who could ever resist Musarrat?'

There was not a lot to pack. Shoaib and Musarrat had few possessions and sent them all to Peshawar. It was not difficult, rates were cheap and they had plenty of help.

And so it was that after two magical years teaching in the serene State of Swat, Shoaib, Musarrat, their two children and their two faithful nannies plunged back into the roiling mainstream of life in this new country, Pakistan, but first, Shoaib was to be groomed as a 'young gentleman' of the elite Civil Service Academy.

And now let me tell you a story, a little tale about how fate may conspire to change our direction in life. For Shoaib, it was a postman's failure to deliver a plum job offer from Burmah Shell during the time he was studying for the civil service exams, an offer he may well have found hard to turn down. The lost letter led him to embark, instead, on a life of service to humanity; a life that would go on to affect the fate and well-being of millions of the poorest and most disenfranchised people in the subcontinent. Strange to think of the debt they owe to a careless postman.



Grandfather Sultan Ahmad Beg



With childhood companions (Sohail in the middle)



Lucknow University Study Circle (5th from left)



Presiding over Lucknow University Study Circle UN Mock Session as UK's Sir Gladwyn Jebb. Student as India's Vijaylaxmi Pandit speaking (1952)



Marriage photograph (1950)



Photograph of Roohi,



Photograph of Afshan



Falaknaz: 3 months before her leaving this world,
visiting Great Wall of China



Photograph of Shelley



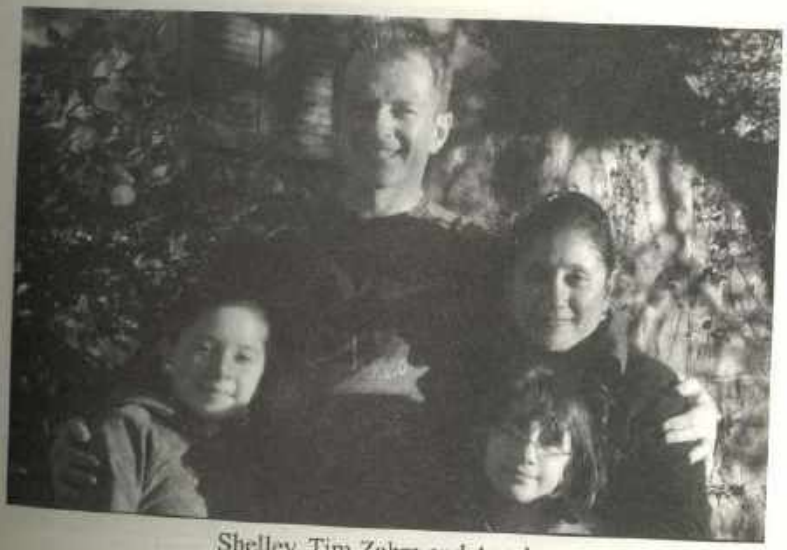
Falaknaz with children



Flanked by grandchildren Amil and Sarah



Family Group photograph at Shelley's marriage (1993)



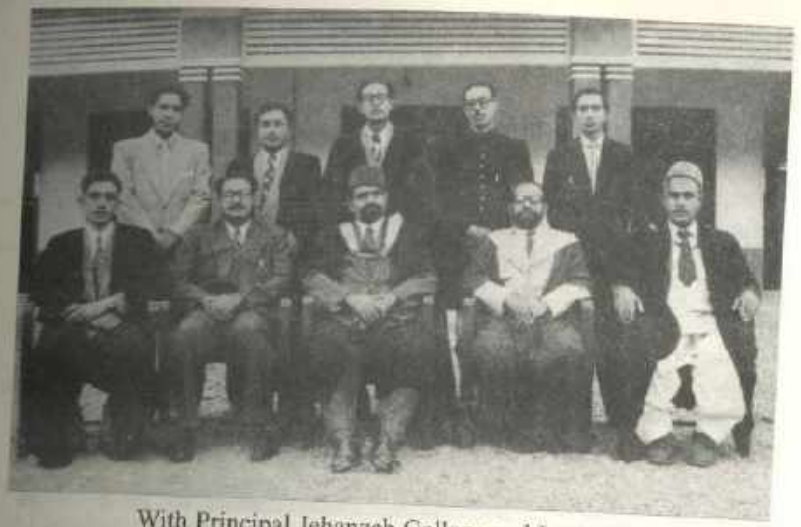
Shelley, Tim Zahra and Ayesha



Hassan with Sarah and children



Photos of granddaughters and great granddaughters



With Principal Jehanzeb College and Lecturers



Meeting my student Ahmad Jan in Swat (2012)



With Mahmood Sultan at a Safari in Tanzania

2
THE HEAVEN BORN

The Golden Rule

The Civil Service Academy is located on a broad tree-lined avenue in the once gracious and cosmopolitan city of Lahore. Set on more than twenty acres, the old academy is a magnificent white edifice that had once been the Residency for the Punjab and Patiala States. Built at the height of the Raj in the grand Indian style, the Residency was meant to convey a sense of enduring pomp and power equal to the palaces of India's princes. Apart from the Resident's magnificent private quarters, there were elaborate suites in which guests of the Resident, maharajahs, governors, vice-regal parties and their like, had taken their leisure. There were also great dining rooms, at least one ballroom, countless smaller reception areas and dozens of intriguing nooks and crannies.

The rooms and halls are still vast and spacious. There are wonderfully curved staircases, high doors and windows and everything is built on a larger than life scale. But a feeling grows and will not go away; something is missing. The walls should be draped in costly hangings, exotic carpets on the floors, guards in gloriously gaudy uniforms, peacocks in the gardens, and servants padding quietly and busily about. Instead, the whole place echoes emptily of the past and there is a faint smell of mildew. But you could see how grand it must once have been, how the young gentlemen officers would be just a little overawed, how it might have made them feel special, just a little more certain of their assured place in the world they were to rule.

Today, a new academy block has been built and the former residency, once home to a succession of the best and brightest young gentlemen of Pakistan, has been converted to a State guest house. In December 2007, the most recent guest had been a Saudi prince. The genial General Sikander Shams, the current director of the academy, was delighted to receive us. Of course he was; we were friends of the legendary Shoaib Sultan Khan. However, access to the old

academy building was not that simple; strings had to be pulled. When he finally put the telephone down General Shams beamed with pleasure and said, *yes, we could have a quick tour, but no photographs, not when the security of Saudi princes and their like was at stake.*

When Shoaib arrived in 1955, bursting with pride and determined to succeed, the director was the formidable Burgess. Later to be Sir Geoffrey, man of many parts and a former ICS commissioner, Burgess was to leave a lasting impression. He had two 'golden rules' which Shoaib remembers to this day.

The first was that although you may be feared, you will not be respected simply because you have the three letters 'CSP' after your name. Respect has to be earned. As Shoaib once wrote, 'he drummed into us that unless you proved your ability clearly and demonstrably no one would accept you as a leader'. What this has meant for Shoaib he makes crystal clear: a person in a position of authority has to lead by example. One has to encourage people, build trust, so they are unafraid to propose and act on their own ideas; and more than anything else, one has to listen.

The second 'golden rule' was perhaps even more important. Shoaib laughed and told of Burgess pacing about while the probationers sat in nervous silence, contriving a drama, an atmosphere that guaranteed attention. He would then intone his unbendable second 'golden rule'. It was this. During their lives as administrators and magistrates they would come to occupy positions of unparalleled power. When they did there would be rare occasions when their moral fibre would be tested, when they might be tempted, sometimes sorely tempted to bend the rules. He would explain, Shoaib said, *look, in a thousand situations that you have to deal with, nine hundred and ninety-nine will be straightforward, but there will be one, the thousandth, where your integrity and very moral fibre will be tested. And it will be hard, but if you buckle, just that once, if in that one situation you do not act according to your conscience and what is right, if you do not act according to the sense of justice that has been inculcated in you, all the other nine hundred and ninety-nine good judgements will count for nothing and you will be lost.*

Excellence, integrity, and impartiality, the three essentials for anyone in public service, and of course, an unswerving belief in moral fibre; today such sentiments might be dismissed as laughable, unworldly, as ridiculously naïve, as being fine for a boy scout troop but in the real world, forget it. But not Shoaib, he never forgot; either the words or the sentiments behind them. He committed Burgess's 'golden rules' to his memory and they are all still there. *Burgess was right*, he says with absolute conviction, *and strangely enough, I have never found it hard.*

It may not have seemed hard for Shoaib, but it meant that one day it would cause him to leave the service he loved. But that is a later story.

Shoaib entered the portals of the academy in awe and anticipation, feelings that were heightened as he and the fifteen young elite of Pakistan were directed to the palatial apartments that were to be their home for the first of their two years as probationers. However, it was to be no sinecure. The director of the academy, Burgess, was one of the last of the old school of imperial civil servants, a Victorian gentleman of the Raj in every sense. He set a punishingly exact regime for his young gentlemen. Shoaib smiled and said, *life at the academy was very regimented.* Up at 5 am for riding, dress for breakfast, then classes on law, international relations and so on, perhaps some guest speakers, and then games in the afternoon, in part to ensure the young gentlemen were too tired to think of other, more negligent pursuits. Burgess' aim was not only to produce fine young gentlemen and first-rate civil servants imbued with a strong moral code and work ethic, but also gentlemen who not only knew how to work but also how to play. He also aimed to create an unbreakable bond between the fifteen young batch mates in his care.

The young gentlemen were also schooled in the social niceties. Before they arrived, the young men were given a kit list. For those who had not brought kits back from London, there was a special tailor in Lahore who knew exactly what was needed in the way of dinner jackets, sports gear, and so on. The tailor was very knowledgeable and would say 'oh yes Sahib, a young gentleman will need all this'. It was all very efficient at the academy; even the bearers knew exactly what to do and would willingly show the new incumbents.

Once a month a senior guest had to be entertained and this required the formal wear the tailor had made up. Influenced by the life-long habit of his grandfather who always wore English tailored suits, Shoaib chose a dinner jacket, although a black *shalwar-kameez* was a permitted alternative. Shoaib's choice of clothes remains unchanged. He wears a *shalwar-kameez* only in the privacy of his house agreeing, *yes, I suppose I am a bit conservative and set in my ways; that is my character.*

His grandfather's character too.

As part of their training, the probationers were packed off on 'attachment' to different districts to observe how things were done. A private bus was invariably chartered as transport, or if the journey was by train the young gentlemen were accommodated in some style in a private carriage. Shoaib had smiled, *first class of course.* For Shoaib, the year passed in a whirl of regimented work and play. You know, *I used to love it all, and yes, it was quite a strict and disciplined sort of life but*

for me it was a joy. With Musarrat and his daughters a short walk away, Shoaib admits to having had the best of both worlds.

Musarrat's cousin, the world-weary, ex-ambassador Humayan Khan, was a batch mate. He recalls travelling by bus to Rawalpindi with Shoaib and booking them both into a 65 rupee room at Faletti's, an amount Shoaib apparently thought extravagant. Humayan said of Shoaib in amused and honest reflection, *at first I thought him to be a bit dull, but then I was just down from three years at Cambridge and was probably a bit of a prig.* His batch mates found Shoaib to be solid and hardworking. He was acknowledged as the best horseman by far, but not in the top academic group, serious certainly but not a high flyer.

Shoaib was in fact the only married probationer, and as such, Humayan describes him as very correct, quite modest, and given that he hardly knew him, surprisingly affectionate. It is this unaffected warmth, as well as the small thoughtful kindnesses that unwittingly win a lifetime's loyalty from his subordinate staff. For Hamid Saeed Satti, now a receptionist for the coordinating group for all rural support programmes in Pakistan, it was something as simple as an aspirin given to him by Shoaib when Satti was suffering from a toothache. *Nobody had ever done that before,* says Satti, *No one ever noticed us. After that I would work day and night for him.*

It was acts like this that were to set Shoaib apart from his more socially affected peers; his ability to see and feel for the problems of those who served him, and prodded always by Musarrat, his life-long concern for the poor. Shoaib also has a rare capacity to remember the people he encounters; his recall of the names and faces of thousands of village people throughout the subcontinent has become part of his legend, part of the mystique that has set him apart, and one of the reasons he is so widely loved and admired. Who can resist a leader who never forgets one's name or the humble problems of one's farm and family? Who can resist a man who cares?

It was not only his studious approach to life; Shoaib's married status also set him apart from the others, especially a group whom Humayan describes as the 'gay young blades' who were always ready for a party, and who were yet to take life seriously. Unlike them, Shoaib also had the misfortune, in their eyes, of having studied at an Indian university rather than in England. Further, as a 'displaced Indian' Shoaib was 'not quite' Pakistani. He had no social history; his reputation in Pakistan depended entirely on Musarrat's well placed but very eccentric family. It was also Musarrat and not Shoaib whom Humayan describes as socially animated, Musarrat who, in the early years at least, was the driving force. She is said to have had great ambitions for Shoaib. Having given up both India and Swat she was determined that Shoaib would achieve great things in his chosen profession. Achieving great things was fine by Shoaib, and so with

Musarrat safely lodged outside the academy, and with the stern Burgess nodding approval, Shoaib cheerfully ignored the partying, was careful not to talk too much about his ambitions because such things were not seen as fitting attributes for a gentlemen, and focused on his work.

Humayan again, a quick wry smile as he rocked in his deep leather chair, *if you had asked me then who would become the most famous of us all, I would never have picked Shoaib, none of us would have picked him. Most of us are now either dead or retired. We have sunk into a sort of stuffy anonymity, but not Shoaib. He has become world famous. Now we warn him to be careful not to become a cult figure.* Even after all the years Humayan says he cannot remember his life-long friend and relative as being particularly articulate. But then he laughs and says *but look at what he has achieved.* Then he laughs again, says perhaps he was being a bit hard, that he thought Shoaib could best be described as a man of many parts, a man of surprising ability, a scholar of English and Urdu literature, not an all-rounder but *a damn fine shot,* and a man whose work has meant a great deal to him, *he was always a very likeable chap, quite affectionate, and it has been the friends and contacts he made in the civil service that have served him so well.*

In this Humayan hit the bulls-eye. The right contacts, the right person for a specific task, the right time to act, were all to be crucial to each one of Shoaib's astounding future successes.

It was also not only Burgess' 'golden rules' that were to shape Shoaib's future, he also instilled a habit that anyone at all associated with Shoaib still finds remarkable, the practice of perceptive observation and of noting and then writing down these observations at the close of every day. *One of the main things that Burgess was totally insistent on was keeping an accurate daily diary.* Shoaib remembers clearly that not only did Burgess insist his young gentlemen rigorously maintain a daily diary, but that Burgess's unfailing practice was to read and comment on each of his probationers' diary entries before the next day. This was quite a feat, and one that the probationers found both challenging and encouraging. Shoaib confesses he was initially puzzled at the insistence, *I wondered at first why he was such a stickler for that.*

Burgess's reasons were in fact quite simple. What he hoped to achieve with his daily editing and critical annotations was acuteness of observation, accuracy of description, and a means by which a future leader might unify his command; create a sense of unity. Time and again he would point out the deficiencies in a probationer's notes, and at least in Shoaib's case, gradually instilled a quality and accuracy of observation that he still practices today: crop types and variety; type of people and their social and economic pursuits; place and village names; obvious problems; the list is as long as imagination and curiosity will allow.

Nothing was too small or too insignificant to escape attention. It was a practice that Shoaib himself unerringly followed in later years, and just as Burgess had intended, it was also a practice that won him loyalty and respect at every level.

During the amazing decade Shoaib was to spend in the Northern Areas of Pakistan it was one of the many things that his staff held in awe. Wherever we travelled and whomever we talked to it was something that no one failed to mention. *How did he do it*, they would shake their heads and ask in awe, *we would leave him working on his own notes in the evening and yet when we came back to our desks next morning there were our own daily diaries or reports back on our desks?* And not only were the diaries returned, they were packed with tightly written annotations, commentary, suggestions and commendations. Each page had been read. Shoaib says the benefits worked both ways. *When I began in development I insisted my social organizers kept diaries and I used to always read them, in part because it was tremendously informative and kept me in touch, but also because it trained those social organizers to be observant and to take a detailed interest in their areas.*

Shoaib's own way of maintaining a diary was in the form of 'notes for the record'. Having read through and enjoyed hundreds of these relaxed but informative 'notes' I realized that nowhere else does Shoaib write so well and so fluently. Shoaib shrugged off my praise and said, *I will believe you if you say so but yes, I became convinced of their value and I continued the practice all through my life.* If you take the time to log into the archives and pull up some of the more lyrical of the 'notes for the record', you will find that not only do you end up knowing in some detail where Shoaib went and what he saw, you will also know what he felt. You will realise this is no modern bureaucrat writing a tediously dreary formulistic report, instead the style is uniquely antique, the diary of a Victorian traveller: it is as if you have received a personal letter.

Shoaib's English is that of a Cambridge don of an era past, carefully constructed, romantically exact, beautifully modulated but outdated. A dialect spoken only by older expatriates or in exclusive subcontinental clubs, he would be at home conversing with the ageing Queen Elisabeth, but slightly lost and puzzled talking with new graduates with their monochrome everyman accent. Shoaib writes fluently and accurately by hand, a dying art but one that was once *de rigueur* for any administrator, and although he may send emails, Shoaib continues to rely on Rauf, his stenographer-typist of countless years, to convert his notes, reports and ideas to typed text. Words flow from his pen and he will quickly fill a page. Few details escape his attention. He will note the comfort of some vehicle, the passing kindness of a minor official or friend, or a delicious roadside snack. He can be romantically poetic at times, unashamedly emotional, grave and serious when this is required, and although always unflappable and ready to laugh, uproariously at times at a good

joke, he is not himself a joke maker. Good humoured yes, but Shoaib is a serious man and it is almost as if words are too precious to be bandied about in jest too often or used idly. Words have a purpose, as does life; both are far too important to be used without thinking.

One short setback occurred when Shoaib contracted a painful case of mumps. Musarrat refused to just stand by. She shooed out the nursing orderlies, took over the task of looking after Shoaib and under special dispensation, was allocated one of the outside guest rooms. Shoaib remembers it was 'not a lot of fun'. The illness also meant he missed the normal three week attachment to the army. *I never really got to know them* (the military establishment) *or had anything to do with them*, Shoaib said thoughtfully one day, *I suppose it might have been useful if I had.*

Mumps did not slow him down for long. Shoaib was soon back in the saddle and in more ways than one because he rode well. There were about twelve horses in the academy stables and the probationers rode in two groups. Of them all Humayan said, Shoaib was easily the best. However, unlike the police or army, the academy did not field a polo team and so it was a game Shoaib never learned to play. Hunting was another matter. *Shikar was in my blood*, he laughed, *I went hunting whenever I could get the chance, 'at the drop of a hat'.*

It was not only *shikar* that was in Shoaib's blood, for although he did not boast about it he was also an accomplished shot, and so the story, gleefully told, of a brief five-day attachment to Sargodha district where his accurate aim led his team to win the clay pigeon target shooting competition. The shoot had got to the point where it seemed as if the district sessions judge might win. The district commissioner was quite agitated. As the elite service, the CSP had to be seen to prove its worth and on that day it was failing. So Shoaib was quickly roped into the commissioner's team and to the chagrin of the others, went on to win the shoot. However, when the commissioner had to leave for a meeting in a hurry, the others convened a meeting and ruled that as Shoaib was a probationer, and so not from the district, he did not qualify as an entrant to a district competition. The prize was promptly awarded to the district judge. At this point Shoaib burst out laughing, *and you know, the commissioner was so utterly miffed when he returned that he found another prize and awarded it to me.* Honour was salved.

For Shoaib, it was a very good year, one of his best.

There was also a glowing report. Shoaib can paraphrase it to this day. *Burgess wrote of my attainments that my viva marks did not do justice to my intellect, personality, or to my qualities. Overall he thought me to be first class officer material.* And so the small niggling doubts created by the disappointing

viva voce results were finally put to rest. Perhaps irrelevant to everyone else, Burgess's comments were important to Shoaib. He had been vindicated.

At the end of the year, probationers were sent for a three-month attachment to East Pakistan and then for a year at England's Cambridge University. Neither posting was any problem for Shoaib. He was fluent in Bengali, the most fluent of any of the non-Bengali probationers according to Humayan, he was permitted to take his family, and a year at Cambridge had been part of the great dream he had shared with his grandfather.

Shoaib set off for East Pakistan with a spring in his step. One of his batch mates was a Bengali and as Shoaib noted *this helped ease the way*. However, given his total lack of cultural or racial prejudice and his natural ability to make friends anywhere, in reality Shoaib needed little help.

When Shoaib, Musarrat, and the two girls arrived for the three-month attachment, they were accommodated in the circuit rest house until a more suitable alternative could be found. In those days the older officers took a somewhat fatherly interest in the new probationers, seeing themselves as mentors rather than superior officers. The deputy commissioner was an older man whom Shoaib describes as being very nice and very kind. However, he was also reasonably staid and when he was transferred and a younger replacement arrived, the fun began.

Shoaib smiled, *Musarrat, of course, was in the thick of it and we had a really great time. In those days everyone played bridge all the time. My grandfather was good at it and I became a bit of an addict right from childhood although I have not played much since those days.* They were slow-paced carefree days; there were few roads and much of the touring of the district was done in boats or carts. The commissioner had two launches at his disposal and sometimes made one available to the probationers. They were well appointed, Shoaib, smiling again as he said, *you know, you could live on those launches for days like minor rajahs.*

The three months passed in a happy whirl and then the minor rajahs were packed off to Cambridge for their final polishing.

Perhaps polishing is not quite the right word. Many of Shoaib's batch mates, particularly those such as Humayan, were already old Cambridge or Oxford hands and their jolly times, as Shoaib laughingly said, *were very different to mine. Humayan was at Trinity, he had a lot of friends, and was always away on shoots for the weekend and things like that, all too expensive for me*. Shoaib was not at all tempted by English beer which tasted bitter to him. *If I have to have a drink to be sociable* he said, *then I will drink something I like.* Shoaib's preference was a sweet cordial. He did not care at all if this made him

seem very provincial. Humayan described the year as a very good time, really a paid holiday. He would!

It was no holiday for Shoaib. His idea of a good time was the opportunity to study under a number of world famous minds. The director of studies engaged by the British Council had just retired from Prince William's College and in Shoaib's opinion was first class. Subjects included common and international law and economics. Shoaib chose as his elective a delightfully obscure course on the 'eighteenth century mind' taught by the famous A.V. Lucas. Shoaib describes the year as being quite relaxed compared with the Lahore academy 'although you had to appear for an exam at the end so you had to read and study'. To reinforce his earlier reputation, Shoaib took the exam more seriously than most, rarely joining the general partying and youthful roistering. The 'young blades' may have admired Shoaib's application but they also thought him tediously studious.

Shoaib had arrived in England in advance of Musarrat, travelling by air with the other probationers. He had been posted to Selwyn College, a college that had previously only accepted men of Anglican or Presbyterian faith. Back at the academy in Lahore, Burgess and his staff had pondered the selection of a probationer whom they thought would be least likely to rock the boat. They had chosen a level-headed young man, Siraj, who was to marry a lovely Italian woman. However, one of the Cambridge tutors, one D.P. Hardy, in a previous life happened to have been a convivial district magistrate in Moradabad and so had known Shoaib's father rather well. When Hardy saw Shoaib's name on the list he apparently said without hesitation, *'I know this chap's family. I will take him'*.

So Shoaib became the first Muslim resident of Selwyn, and to his obvious satisfaction, in 2006, was able to attend Selwyn's fiftieth matriculation celebration dinner. *After all those years it was quite something*, he said. Quite something could also describe Musarrat's arrival in England; to Shoaib's astonishment, she took to Cambridge *like a duck to water*.

In those far-off days when the power and glory of the Raj and the spendthrift hi-jinks of bejewelled princes was still a recent memory, the probationers were feted as first class visitors. As we already know, Musarrat had been left behind in Pakistan to allow Shoaib to find his feet at Cambridge during the first term, and so that the children were not left too long with her family. As December drew near, Shoaib discovered that KLM was offering cut-price fares. The cost would be no more than the longer sea passage. In those days, flying was an adventure in itself. Added to this was the fact that the couple had no idea that England more or less closed down at Christmas. As a result Musarrat's telegram sat in the post office and when she arrived at London airport no one was there to meet her. Equipped with only a smattering of English, Musarrat

managed to take a bus into London, find a telephone and call the Pakistani hostel. *In those days,* Shoaib smiled because in those days the name Pakistan still carried a resonance of prestige and privilege, *the hostel was located in Knightsbridge and was a very posh place. People like Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh were neighbours, and somehow Musarrat had the number.*

Having extracted the address from the very reluctant caretaker—*it was like getting blood out of stone*—she took a taxi there hoping that she might find Humayan or some other cousin down for a party. They were not in residence but luckily one of Shoaib's batch mates was. Hurrying down the stairs in dressing gown and pyjamas he was totally nonplussed to find a tired and irritated Musarrat calmly ignoring the caretaker who was in a right old fuss, because following the traditions of the Raj, the Pakistani Civil Service was still an all-male establishment. *The poor old chap* laughed Shoaib, kept repeating *no Madam, you are a woman and you cannot stay here.* With the diplomatic aplomb of an academy man, the batch mate soon calmed the caretaker, tea was produced and a hotel found for Musarrat. Next day she was squired up to Cambridge and delivered to a surprised and apologetic Shoaib. It had been quite a trip.

In anticipation of Musarrat's arrival, Shoaib had moved out of Selwyn and taken rooms. His landlady was the sister of the college librarian and as well as being a committed pacifist was also a follower of Gandhi. She was also a lady of sensitivity, and to Shoaib's alarm, once fainted away while watching a film about the bombing of Hiroshima. Shoaib recalls living a quiet but happy life in part because of Musarrat's total enchantment with all things English. They used to invite a lot of friends although in the undoubtedly academically gifted Humayan's opinion Shoaib missed out on much of the fun and gaiety of the year. Shoaib laughed and said, *well, of course, Humayan was a senior having already spent three years at Cambridge so he knew a lot of people. And anyway, his definition of a jolly time was very different to mine*, and here he laughed again, *and it probably still is.*

Musarrat remembers loving England from the beginning, and feeling this was the place where she should live, where she felt at home. Then and there she decided that one day she would live in England, and as everyone so often said, *when Musarrat makes up her mind, well that is that.*

Oh yes she had agreed on the instant, *I was filled with love and admiration. England was what I had hoped Pakistan might be, a place of honesty and freedom where people were quiet and very polite and where you could leave money out at night for the milkman and nothing would be stolen.* Quixotically, it was perhaps the milk money that most impressed Musarrat. She decided that she wanted her children to be brought up in such an environment, that as soon as

they were well grounded and knew their origins, she would bring them to England. And one day she did.

Blissfully ignorant of Musarrat's plans, Shoaib now sees the inevitability of it all with the clarity of hindsight. *Yes,* he admitted one foggy winter morning in Islamabad *she was sensitive and very political and hated the authoritarian regimes that had taken control of Pakistan. She saw England as a country where everyone and everything seemed to be free, where you could object to the government and be a socialist or a humanist and not be branded as a radical or a communist. And it was not only public freedom that she admired, although in Pakistan, even though she was limited to an extent by my status as a civil servant, she paid little heed to any rules or regulations that she believed stifled her freedom.*

Ever an emotional dramatist, events such as the death of the iconic American President Kennedy would leave Musarrat distraught and grieving. As did so many across the world, Musarrat saw his killing as the death of a beautiful dream, as an enormous personal loss. Musarrat took to her bed and would not eat for days.

England has become a disappointment for Musarrat. She believes the country has changed into another place, lost its quintessential Englishness, its place as the centre of the world, and its reputation as a country of gentlemanly behaviour and fair play. Today, she rarely ventures into the outside world, tossing a parting comment over her shoulder one night as she climbed the stairs to the refuge of her bedroom, *anyway, if I do go out now, I rarely see an Englishman.* Shoaib, too, is sometimes distressed by twenty-first century England. No longer in possession of United Nations' documents or under the prestigious aegis of the Aga Khan, he travels on a Pakistani passport. Unlike the gentlemanly civil service study visits of years past where he was treated as an honoured guest, he has joined the ranks of those who are viewed by the British with increasing suspicion, a citizen of a state where terrorists have made a home. He is an Anglophile of course, and a lover of English literature, but unlike Musarrat, his heart and hopes remain in the Indian subcontinent. But still he grieves for the golden age when the young gentlemen from Pakistan were treated with respect.

The year passed by in quiet contentment. Musarrat was in love with England and Shoaib with the academic dignity and intellectual challenges of life at a great university. He took both seriously and steadily unlike Humayan who had sailed flamboyantly through the year and finished with a flourish, purchasing a Morris Oxford for his father. Three others followed suit, buying various cars to take back to Pakistan but not Shoaib, until, as always seemed to happen, Musarrat produced a rabbit from the hat. Handing over the emerald and

ruby jewellery set she had inherited from Shoaib's mother Husna, she packed a startled Shoaib off to London to hock the jewels and raise the cash. Shoaib found himself in Bond Street and catching sight of Asprey's discreet sign, entered that august establishment and innocently enquired if they bought jewellery. Well, he had heard that they did but would the gentlemen-jewellers in their pin-stripes and impeccable manners stoop to deal with a simple country boy like him?

Asprey's certainly would. Musarrat's jewels were more than acceptable, 'certainly sir, a sale could be arranged'. And it was. The sum of one hundred and fifty pounds was eventually sent up to Cambridge which, added to the amount Shoaib already had in hand, was enough. Shoaib promptly purchased a Ford Anglia for three hundred and fifteen pounds. For once Humayan was completely discomposed. It was not the Anglia; *what*, he had exclaimed in shock, *you went into Asprey's. We dare not enter such a place at all.*

Four of them, Siraj included, packed into Shoaib's modest Anglia. Humayan Khan was in another car with three more batch mates. There was yet another car, a Ford Zephyr. Musarrat remembers the overland trip to Pakistan as a lot of fun and because of Siraj's wife, Italy featured in their travels. Musarrat loved Europe and wished they could just go on forever. It was an adventurous trip, and in the late 1950s, Europe was wonderfully cheap, not at all crowded, and without the biases of today. They were treated royally, travelling mainly by day except for one alarming sector along the Black Sea, working from maps provided by England's Automobile Association. European roads were fun and those through Turkey gravelled and fast, but Iran came as a shock. Described as 'first class' by guards at the border, the road dwindled to a rough track with not a town for miles. They journeyed on, making their slow and often dusty way through a land that had yet to acquire the dubious trappings of the modern world. It says something of the Ford Anglia of the '50s that the car survived the trip, *we didn't even have a puncture*. It was July and if Europe was hot, Iran even hotter, and once over the border into Pakistan, Balochistan was roasting. Shoaib, answering my question with a laconic, *well yes, it was hot. Sibi at night was 51c*, but still the sturdy Anglia soldiered on until it had to be abandoned for a time, impounded with customs in Quetta. Musarrat hurried off to see her children and Shoaib went down to Karachi to arrange the import duty payment and for an interview for his first posting. He remembers taking a buoyant Afshan back with him to Quetta to collect the still surprisingly intact but slightly travel weary Anglia.

Then, Shoaib dryly said, there was a *bolt from the blue* when the mail arrived. Shoaib had been posted to East Pakistan.

Once he got over the initial surprise Shoaib took the news with a shrug. After all, he had a reasonable grasp of Bengali and the post could well be an

interesting one. Not Musarrat. She blew up or as Shoaib put it, *well yes, some people were displeased.*

And so she was; for not only did Musarrat have to up stakes and travel again, not only would she have to live in a hot and humid climate cut off from family in West Pakistan and India, but the trusty Anglia had to be sold. There were few roads in East Pakistan and no easy or affordable way to drive there. The beautiful heirloom necklace had been exchanged for a month's motoring adventure, and she also and very definitely did not like humidity. To rub salt into her wounds, the dashing Humayan was posted to the Frontier.

And so off they went, this earnest and idealistic young man, this volatile determined young wife with her two excited and rambunctious children, off to the flat and fertile floodplains of East Pakistan. And as he rushed about organizing his new life, as Musarrat grumbled while she packed, little did Shoaib know that this posting was to introduce him to a man who would change his life forever, the caustic tongued, inspiringly cerebral, admirably ascetic and much loved guru Akhter Hameed Khan.

The dancer

Musarrat's grumbles soon stopped. Yes, East Pakistan was hot, flat, and humid but for Musarrat there was one marvellous advantage. As she had done in India as a girl, she could dance.

Although he knew it was unlikely because his Pashto was far from fluent, Shoaib had secretly hoped to be selected for the Frontier (NWFP) list. However, he was packed off with nearly all his other West Pakistani colleagues to the Eastern wing of the new country on the orders of the independently-minded Prime Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy. Similarly, graduates hailing from East Pakistan were posted in the West. From the point of view of promoting unity and opening the eyes of those trained to mete out justice this made sense, but for the new young officers it was an unwanted and irritating step sideways. Many would find themselves completely at sea, working with people they either despised or feared and with whom they had little in common. Fifty years later Shoaib sees the reverse postings as visionary, that the exchange of officers provided a slim and perhaps the only chance the two distant and very different segments might see themselves as one. He admits it was all doomed of course, perhaps even hopelessly naïve, as events were to show less than twenty years later, but Shoaib still thinks it was a brave decision which might have worked.

Although East Pakistan was not a popular posting at the time, Shoaib determined to make the best of it and to follow his orders to the letter. Thus, leaving Musarrat behind with the children and the packing, Shoaib rushed off.

He went by air and flight time was just four hours with the introduction of the new Super Constellations. From childhood Shoaib had suffered from motion sickness and to his irritation he was airsick. He had a miserable flight and on landing the situation did not improve. Arriving by train at Kushtia in September 1957, to his utter chagrin he found that all offices were closed for the twenty-three day Hindu *puja* holiday. It seems no one in Karachi had been aware of this. As Shoaib was to write, *I cursed myself for not listening to Musarrat and taking so literally my orders to report for duty immediately. Like everyone else, I should have taken 'joining time'.*

Having to cool his heels for more than three weeks became increasingly intolerable for Shoaib. He was bursting to start his career, and there, just out of reach were one million people waiting for him to take up the post of assistant magistrate, all of them wondering how many of them this new young man from West Pakistan would send to prison for a month or fine the princely sum of 1000 Rupees. *Yes, it was an exciting prospect. I was to be one of the heaven-born; my word was to be law; I was to be a demi-god,* and here Shoaib chuckled at the follies of youth, *or at least I thought I was.* Shoaib hated being idle and it rankled that just out of reach all this exciting power waited, and so as he rarely was to do again, he lost his temper.

Shoaib had been posted to the famous district of Tagore, but he found no house had been allocated for the post. As a temporary measure he was put up at the inspection bungalow of the Ganges-Kobadak irrigation project. Under the rules of the irrigation department, a visitor could only stay at an inspection bungalow for a stretch of one month. Shoaib knew this very well and it should have been no surprise that when the month was up he duly received a quit notice from the sub-engineers office.

With disarming honesty Shoaib admitted, *I was furious at this treatment. My pride had been hurt; how dare a lowly sub-engineer treat a CSP officer in this manner?* He confided his petty fury to a senior engineer who was also staying in the rest house, blustering that he could easily teach the fellow a lesson and haul him in under some section or other of the criminal procedure code. Shoaib admits that the reaction of the senior engineer stopped him in his tracks. *I was ashamed and humiliated when my colleague expressed his total shock and disappointment.* The older man told Shoaib he was behaving exactly like one of those petty police tyrants who sometimes rise to be in charge of some local village station and that he had never thought he would live to see a CSP officer behaving in this manner. It was a lesson Shoaib was never to forget. A horrified Shoaib had almost broken one of Burgess' 'golden rules'.

But it was hard sometimes, Shoaib said ruefully. *I think we were all a bit big-headed and arrogant to start with. People with influence would defer to you*

and you would think, My God, this is me they are deferring to. And then with some embarrassment he went on to say how, when travelling by train, CSP officers not only automatically travelled first class but were allocated the entire compartment, or if he happened to arrive late at a cinema the projectionist would stop the film, rewind it and start it from the beginning. Position and prestige, yes, there was all that, but the job that faced each new officer required not only an understanding of the law and of various procedures but also an understanding of human nature. It was this that set a CSP officer apart.

Shoaib says he was lucky. On his very first posting he was taken aside by a very seasoned lawyer who said that if the new young magistrate thought he knew more about the law than the subordinate magistrates who had been sitting for twenty years then he was sadly mistaken. He then said something that became imprinted in the young Shoaib's mind: *what the subordinate magistrates cannot bring to bear is the human angle, the quality to empathise with the plight of those appearing before the court, the ability to transfer yourself to their shoes and know what they are feeling and going through. If you can do that then you have done your job.*

'Let me give you an example' the lawyer said to Shoaib, 'a story about a young magistrate fresh to the post'. Most of the court's work concerned routine minor appellate cases and involved such things as the theft of a few vegetables and such like. Traditionally, the accused was required to pay a hundred rupees or so as security but the new young magistrate demanded the maximum which was five thousand rupees. No one could possibly raise this amount so he ended up jailing an embarrassingly large number of minor offenders. Soon the jail was full and the people were sullen and resentful. It was an impossible situation. The young magistrate had dug himself into a hole and his senior had to step in and sort things out, not before giving the young man a decided 'flea in his ear' the lawyer had laughed. Learning the value of the human qualities meant such foolish situations were avoided, and as Shoaib said, *stood us all in good stead when we went out into the wide world with the power of being able to incarcerate our fellow man should we choose to do so. We realised it was an enormous responsibility and should not be taken lightly. The pointless exercise of power should be avoided at all costs.*

Pointless too was the superior attitude of many serving officers from West Pakistan. Shaking his head, Shoaib had sighed *well, I don't really know why some of them looked down on the East Pakistan people. They were delightful.*

Shoaib thoroughly enjoyed most of the three years he spent in the East Wing, riding his bicycle to the office every day while Musarrat frequently rode horses. *We did all kinds of things,* said Shoaib, his eyes alight with happy memories; *we mixed freely with the people and did not act as high and mighty*

beings. And you know Shoaib added without the slightest hint of conceit, *I believe we were well regarded.* And so they were; the serious young magistrate, and his gay and beautiful young wife.

The gentle Kunwar Idris, who was once a probationer under Shoaib, returned to Shoaib's sub-division of Brahmanbaria in the late 1960s just before the awful trauma of separation. Ten years earlier, Shoaib had described how one of his CSP predecessors, N.M. Khan, was regarded by the people as a legend and how a canal had been named in his honour. When Kunwar returned he found that of all the officers who had served in the district only two were remembered with respect and affection. The people would say *yes, first there was M.M. Khan and then there was Shoaib Sultan Khan. These were men to remember.*

Musarrat's arrival in the East Wing was as usual quite dramatic. Flying to Calcutta to join Shoaib her plane had caught fire and had to make a forced landing. In East Pakistan, their first home had been a railway station building and although it was rather long, there was plenty of room and an enormous veranda that had once served as the platform. They were not there for very long. After four months, Shoaib was posted to Brahmanbaria subdivision. It was a coveted posting because not only was it served by electricity it was also one of the larger subdivisions with a population of one million people. Shoaib may remember his first posting with sentimental fondness, but there were events that left memory scars; deep regrets that will never go away.

Music and the military, an unlikely pair, and it all happened like this.

If Shoaib found the Bengali people delightful, so did Musarrat, she *took to them like a fish to water.* And of course she would, the Bengalis were artistic and musical. There was also a large Hindus population in the district and the mixture meant a rich and vibrant cultural life. In no time at all Musarrat set about organizing all sorts of functions in which she sometimes played a role.

One night in London Musarrat had asked a little shyly, *did he tell you about my show in Brahmanbaria, did he tell you about my dancing? You know I never tired of dancing; I could dance all day, this was my life. I did not want to become a film star or anything like that, not for a moment, but I liked an audience, I liked to dance for people.* And then she became very still, her eyes no longer focused on us, reaching into the past to a time when she had dared to dance on a stage in front of an audience, an almost unthinkable act for the wife of a member of the elite civil service, the wife of the magistrate. *Oh yes,* Musarrat said, this time with a tinge of regret and sadness, *he made such a big fuss of it all*

Being young and ambitious, untried and untested, Shoaib suddenly found himself in the middle of a minor 'scandal'. He knew how Musarrat loved to

dance and sing, but he did not realize that she was not simply a good dancer, she was brilliant. And then there came this one occasion when she was tempted to show the world what she could do; Musarrat became the principal dancer at a cultural festival. Her grace and talent were so exceptional she was offered a contract to dance for a film being produced in Bombay, the heart of India's film industry. Although she turned down the offer, her performance at the festival was enough to scandalize other civil service wives; cause religious leaders to troop to Shoaib's office and lodge protests; have Shoaib's superiors cough in embarrassment and 'hope the boy would do something about it, bring his wife back into line'. Shoaib was shocked and appalled; how could he go amongst the people unless the venom of the scandalmongers was neutralized? Young as he was, he could only see one option open to him. *She had to stop, or at least I thought so then,* said Shoaib softly, guilt so obvious in his voice, *and of course she was quickly forgiven by those who had led the condemnation, but what a silly storm in a tea kettle it all really was.*

It did not seem silly at the time. Shoaib forbade Musarrat from ever dancing in public again. No longer an ambitious, rising civil servant, nor quite so conservative, perhaps more worldly-wise, certainly more liberal, Shoaib said, *one of the few great regrets of my life is that I stopped Musarrat from following her great love of dancing. She was a wonderful dancer and could have been a star but all I could see at the time was my own career. I thought there was no room for a dancer in the life of a CSP officer.* Musarrat never danced again.

But, said Shoaib, *she did keep an interest in cultural functions and shows.* But in his heart of hearts he knows that an interest was not what Musarrat really wanted. She longed to dance and she could not. Shoaib knows this and it nudges at his conscience still, *yes, she could have been a star and I stopped it.*

Both Humayan and Munawar recalled Musarrat's dancing episode in Brahmanbaria and how shocked Shoaib was at the time because he thought it threatened to undermine his position as deputy commissioner. They both smiled, saying that a DC's wife was supposed to act with decorum, giving staid tea parties to other wives, maintaining a very proper, supportive and subsidiary profile. Acting as a principal in traditional Indian (Hindu) dance performances, or being offered a contract to go to Bollywood and take up a career as an actress was very definitely not in the script. Munawar said that Musarrat had confided in her that *when they were in Brahmanbaria, Shoaib had no idea what she was doing because as usual, he was totally engrossed in his work. He had the shock of his life when he found she had danced the main role in a theatrical performance, but that was the last time she ever performed.*

Rahat, Musarrat's sister, frail and gray in her crowded Peshawar print shop with its background of street noise and bustle, said she was never surprised that

Musarrat had danced in Brahmanbaria, *she is very loving, very sympathetic and kind-hearted but also daring, very daring. Far more than me.* And of Musarrat's upbringing in India, Rahat says, *I always thought the family there were far more conventional or conservative than we were in my father's house in Peshawar.* Her cousin Humayan fondly describes Musarrat as a maverick but also very ambitious and believes that during those early years, Musarrat was far more worldly-wise than Shoaib. A man's view, he also believes she was entirely focused on advancing Shoaib's career, and gave up dancing as soon as she realised it might have negative repercussions. *Yes,* said Humayan, *in the early years it was really Musarrat who was the moving force; she worked hard and was ambitious for him and used her money wisely to buy property.*

But as she should, Musarrat has the last word. She thought Shoaib was not only concerned for his career, but that he was also genuinely shocked by her dancing. *Oh yes,* she said with a small smile, *he was really quite conservative for a long time. It was his upbringing. Even later when my daughter Roohi married an Englishman he made a face like this,* Musarrat had screwed up her face until she looked like a lemon, and then she giggled, clapped her hands, *but he is a good man, a very good man, and slowly he became a liberal. I just said, think about our daughter, this is her life not our life; do not think about what others will say.* But it was hard not to think about what others will say when you were a civil servant and your reputation was everything.

As for her never dancing again, Musarrat had just shrugged. *Life brings what it brings.*

Afshan, Shoaib's second daughter, a rebel amongst rebels, remembers Brahmanbaria as a place of water, a place where her father had a boat instead of a car to visit the villages and islands. One of the islands Afshan remembers was Akhora where the grand old soldier and family friend, Major Mohammad Tufail had his bungalow. Shoaib has described Tufail as being a very kind and fatherly man, and that although much older, he became a close family friend. Musarrat dubbed him Clark Gable after the famous film star, and playing the game, Tufail would innocently ask everyone just who this Gable chap was. The two girls thought the old soldier was marvellous and loved having him as a babysitter, with their nannies of course, which gave a grateful Shoaib and Musarrat time to themselves. His bungalow became a second home, and the family would often stay overnight whenever they arrived at the station too late to make their connection. Akhora was a major junction for trains to Sylhet, Chittagong, and Dacca [now Dhaka].

Tufail had once been officer-in-charge of the Gilgit Scouts, now he commanded a detachment of the East Pakistan Rifles. He was of the old school, one of those Indian gentlemen-officers who had been the backbone of the Raj.

One evening, playing in the garden, Afshan remembers her whole world suddenly changing. She heard her mother sobbing. *That was the first time I discovered death. Uncle Tufail had been killed near the Indian border.*

Tufail's death was a needless waste. It fixed forever in Shoaib's mind the military's pointless inflexibility, the cost of thoughtless orders, and of the casual acceptance by senior officers of the loss of lives, their own troops and those of the 'enemy', just so long as an objective is achieved, honour is satisfied, and political ends met. The story begins with the ridiculously hurried partition of India and ends on a minor hillock near a long forgotten dot on the map called Lakshmipur.

So hurriedly had the 'line of demarcation' been established by the departing British Raj, that villages, stations, railway lines, and even houses were divided, one part in India one part in Pakistan. The situation was painfully untenable and a slow process of mutually agreed demarcation was initiated by both governments. Disputes were of course inevitable but were to be resolved in a fair and amicable manner by the civil authorities of both countries. This particular dispute somehow evaded the fair and amicable clause, and began when Shoaib received a message that a detachment of the Indian Army had occupied a small knoll that was obviously regarded by some locally ambitious military mind as of strategic significance.

Shoaib was advised however, that the knoll was well inside Pakistan, so he accompanied his district commissioner to a meeting with their Indian Civil Service opposites who were led by the Deputy Commissioner of Agartala, Colonel Butalia. The colonel was accompanied by a number of other officials and had obviously received his instructions. Despite Shoaib's reasoned argument that with the border demarcation nearing completion and a formal exchange of territories likely to take place within three months, the Indian occupation of this unimportant knoll seemed to make little sense, Butalia's refusal was point blank—the Indian force would not withdraw. *It looked very much like he had been given no leeway because he responded that Lakshmipur clearly fell on the Indian side of the line and the army detachment would dig in and stay and that was the end of it.* With no room for further negotiation, and no obvious way around this unnecessary impasse, Shoaib despondently returned to Akhora.

Several days later Shoaib happened to visit Tufail *found him closeted with an emissary from Dacca. After the meeting I could see he was very down and sensed that something was bothering my friend a great deal.*

That 'something' was an order, and if Shoaib had found the Indian military command ridiculously inflexible, the orders given by the Pakistani command in Dacca were equally incomprehensible; Tufail had been ordered to occupy the knoll and throw out the Indians without firing a shot. Shoaib was appalled. He

had seen how well the Indians were dug in and that light machine guns covered every possible approach. Clearly, it would be impossible to dislodge the Indians without firing a shot. However, his reasoned argument ran head-on into an old soldier's ingrained belief in honour.

Even today, Shoaib feels that he was in part to blame for what was to happen. *I tried to argue that Tufail should query the orders but to my despair my friend quietly refused. He said to me, 'look this is a soldier's job; and yes, it is a minor thing and if I succeed few will notice and those who do will think I was just doing my duty. But if I do not follow this order to the letter or I do not succeed, I will never be able to live it down'.*

The two friends, one old one young, talked into the night as men will do when the morrow is uncertain and full of deadly promise, with Tufail confessing his unhappiness at the imposition of martial law in Pakistan. He believed that the role of the army was to serve the state and not to rule it. Dismissing Shoaib's offer to accompany him on his mission, Tufail sent his sorely troubled young friend back to Brahmanbaria on his personal engine-powered railway trolley. As Shoaib's trolley rattled through the humid night he remembers being extremely upset and very gloomy. *I believed my friend had been ordered to take an action that was as stupidly brave and no less deadly than the 'charge of the light brigade' and that if he obeyed the orders I would be unlikely to see him again.* Next morning Shoaib received the call he dreaded. The knoll had been re-taken but Major Tufail and his Subedar Major Sawar had been badly wounded.

The major had done exactly as ordered. Approaching the Lakshmipur knoll just after dawn, Tufail had divided his command into two columns, one he led, the other his subedar major. As soon as the two columns were in position, Tufail called upon the Indians to peacefully withdraw. In response, the troops on duty had immediately opened fire, cutting down Tufail and his subedar who stood with him.

The Pakistani troops immediately returned fire and mounted a bayonet charge. Outnumbered, the Indians were over-run. Later, the captured Indian major confided to Shoaib that he owed both his capture and his life to Tufail. Although badly wounded, the old soldier had managed to trip the surprised Indian and had then stopped his angry soldiers from bayoneting the major, shouting that he wanted him alive for questioning. When the knoll had been secured, Tufail and his subedar major were loaded onto a train and sent to the military hospital in Comilla. The journey took twelve hours. The two men bled to death.

Shoaib is uncharacteristically bitter to this day about the whole affair. *Some senior officers arrived that afternoon in a seaplane to investigate the incident. The plane would have saved my friend's life.* Tufail's silver-framed photograph still sits on Shoaib's mantelpiece. Years later when visiting the Gilgit Scouts, Shoaib noted that the commander's residence had been named Tufail House, and yes, he admits it made him happy, *but despite all this glory, I would rather my friend had lived. It was all so stupid, do or die that is what it was, and he did and died.* Shoaib took a deep breath and shook his head, *it was all so stupidly futile.*

Although Shoaib believes his friend more than earned his posthumous award of the nation's highest decoration, the 'Nishan-e-Haider', he suspects it was also a face-saving gesture by the generals to cover up a military bungle. Led by Shoaib, the people of the area built a memorial and a dispensary and named it after the major. Flowers are placed there to this day. The military authorities requested a plaque. Shoaib had it inscribed 'here the heroes fell as commanded'. It was not quite what the generals had in mind.

If Lakshmipur marked the time when Shoaib first began to see the military for what they would become, an extraordinarily rich and powerful conglomerate which, when it was not ruling the state certainly called the shots. Brahmanbaria also opened his eyes to the schemes and deceptions of politics, and the pitfalls of impartiality.

Shoaib's refusal to 'look the other way' or to act other than with scrupulous impartiality was to cause him a bucket-load of future grief, and although Burgess had assured each one of his probationers that they would be tested sooner or later, the test came in Brahmanbaria, Shoaib's first independent posting, sooner rather than later. It was as simple as this: the local representative of the party in power, the Awami League, expected preferential treatment at all times. Outraged when Shoaib granted permission to the former Federal Minister and Member of the Muslim League Taffazzul Ali, to hold a rally in his home town of Quasba, the local Awami League President, Abdul Bari, decided to gather his supporters, disrupt the rally, humiliate the former minister and deny him any chance of positive exposure. However, and entirely matter-of-factly, Shoaib had issued an official meeting permit, and Ali, the former minister, had already publicised the meeting. Summoned by Shoaib, the Awami League president refused to back down, so with an exasperated sigh, Shoaib instructed the police to restrain the Awami Leaguers and prevent them from disrupting the meeting. He smiled at the memory as he sat back in his chair and the heater quietly glowed on a grey winter's morning in his house, *the Awami League came to me in high dudgeon alleging that I was being totally unfair and was favouring the Opposition. I, of course, replied 'no, it is simply that the other chaps asked first and once I have given permission that is that'.*

A lawyer, the local Awami League president rushed to the chief minister, lodged a serious complaint about Shoaib, and requested his transfer. The chief minister parried the request, but expecting a ministerial visit a few days later,

Shoaib instead answered a priority telephone call from his commissioner. He would not have to worry about whose political toes he might have stepped on, said the commissioner gravely, because martial law had been declared. The military were now in control. Shoaib had not been perturbed by the petty political intrigue, for him it was just part of the job but he had an awful feeling about the declaration of martial law. He was right, of course. It was the beginning of the end of the fragile unity between East and West Pakistan.

One of Shoaib's first actions was to send for Bari and reassure him that even though the Awami League no longer held power, Shoaib would try to ensure that in a possibly increasingly difficult situation he would continue his policy of absolute impartiality and fair play, and that both personally and professionally, he held no grudge at all. *And funnily enough,* Shoaib laughed, *after that we became friends. I explained I was just doing my duty as I saw it and he accepted that.*

They were to stay firm friends for the two years Shoaib served in Brahmanbaria. In the future though, Shoaib's run-ins with politicians were not to end anywhere near so amicably, and even in Brahmanbaria, malicious secret whispers and petty professional jealousies were to continue to bemuse him. One whisper Shoaib recalls with great amusement concerned something as simple as the use of a goat shed.

More often than not, the office of a sub-divisional officer was located in a separate wing of the official residence. An officer could take his breakfast and then stroll leisurely along the veranda or through a corridor into the office wing. There were also always a number of sheds and outbuildings in the compound and in those days in Bengal, many of these were constructed of bamboo. One such shed was sitting vacant in Shoaib's Brahmanbaria compound. He could see no reason to deny a request from one of his staff that it be converted into a canteen for litigants and their supporters while they waited for their cases to be heard. *Then I forgot all about it.* Several days later Shoaib received a telephone call from his superior officer to the effect that he had decided to make a snap visit. Shoaib of course made no connection between the ramshackle bamboo shed and the sudden visit, and duly met the commissioner in a brand new pick-up. *This caused a few raised eyebrows* laughed Shoaib; where had the vehicle come from? The explanation was simple. Various donors had started pouring money into the agricultural sector, and the visiting agricultural secretary, seeing how Shoaib was obliged to get about on a bicycle, had sent a pick-up for his use. With that issue sorted out the commissioner still seemed uncomfortable. He asked to be taken directly to Shoaib's office.

Once there, he got straight down to business. It was not something he enjoyed, found such things awkward, but was obliged by circumstances to ask,

look here young man, I hear you are opening a canteen or something somewhere. Surprised and not a little puzzled, Shoaib had replied, *well yes, there is a shack out there and I have indeed given permission for it to be used as a canteen.* The commissioner got to his feet and asked to be taken to it. *Now this is the funny part,* Shoaib said laughing at the memory, *nothing had been done yet and all we found in the bamboo shack were two goats chewing bits of fallen thatching.* Some time later, the reason for the visit came to light. A disgruntled sub-judge had complained to the session judge that the sub-divisional officer had acted in a very high-handed manner and had allocated a portion of the sub-judge's record room for use as a staff canteen. What Shoaib had not taken into account was that there was always some competitive edginess between the magistrates and the judiciary. Noses out of joint? *Oh yes, considerably so. Can you believe it? Of course,* Shoaib explained, *it is very different now but in those days the judiciary rarely mingled with the people or went to parties because they were supposed to be seen to be totally neutral and to avoid anything that might influence their decision in this case or that. Yes, we were on good terms but they kept apart.*

Shoaib chuckled, *there might well have been a few red faces when he made his report and of course the canteen went ahead.* It did, but it also meant that, not for the last time, Shoaib had unwittingly created an enemy, someone who would look for an opportunity to 'get his own back'. However, this has never stopped Shoaib from trusting people, from making sensible decisions, from believing the best of anyone, or from forgiving. He is that sort of man. *But all in all,* Shoaib said, working as a junior officer in those far off days *was a lot of fun and very satisfying. You had to make do and work out your own way of doing things; you were a boss with very little interference.*

Kunwar Idris, old school gentleman and true, is in despair. Not only is the military government by-passing the civil service, the service itself is no longer a close-knit band of brothers whose word and judgement are totally fair, absolutely impartial. No mistaking the regret; tears glistened in his eyes as we dined in the fading colonial glory of the Sindh Club, enveloped in a buzz of conversation as Karachi's elite met for Sunday luncheon. Is Kunwar the odd man out? Old memories returned so powerfully that he often choked up that day, memories that had been long put away because they were of times so good and this age of turmoil was not. Kunwar despairs of Pakistan today, and looking at India with longing regret, sees what might have been in Pakistan. He says of India that six hundred district magistrates were summoned to Delhi after Independence and told, *look, you might be part of the colonial heritage but remember, it was a grand enterprise and you ran it and India still needs you and relies on you.* When Kunwar was young Pakistan's elite civil service was a proud service. *People showed a dependence on us and if you did some good for*

them they gave you more than you deserved in congratulations and praise. Kunwar, who was a brief two years behind Shoaib, won his place in 1957. Before heading off to Cambridge for final polishing, Kunwar shrugged resignedly (another tradition now carelessly discarded) he was assigned as a probationer to Comilla District which lay midway between Dacca and Chittagong. Arriving in Comilla, the district magistrate, whom Kunwar describes as a kind but older man, sent him on to work under the sub-divisional magistrate in Brahmanbaria where, he said, Kunwar would have a much livelier time with a younger colleague. Stepping down from the train, Kunwar encountered *a youngish chap in a solar topee marching up and down the platform. 'Are you Idris'* the man had asked, and when this was confirmed held out his hand and said *'well, I am Shoaib Sultan'.*

A further surprise was in store for the young and impressionable probationer when a day or so later, Shoaib marched up to the rest house and said, *look, you better come and stay with us, it does not seem proper for you to live here on your own.* Kunwar explained that in earlier times it was standard practice for a senior magistrate to put up a junior in his guest house or room and take a personal interest in his well-being, but this practice had lapsed.

Shoaib was only a year older than Kunwar but he was married with two girls and Kunwar describes his house *as a jolly place. It was all very happy and easy going.* Kunwar believes that perhaps Musarrat was friendlier, more informal, less inhibited than many officers' wives because although she had been born in Dera Ismail Khan which, he said with a slight smile, was a fairly backward part of the North West Frontier Province, she had been brought up in India in Uttar Pradesh. He fondly describes the young Musarrat as *very welcoming; a very liberated, very modern woman for the times.*

Even without her dancing, Musarrat had not kept herself distant from the people. Kunwar recalls going out as a party together with Roohi and Afshan whom he fondly describes as *mavericks in their own right even then, but fine girls.* He smiles again as he says, *yes, I became a member of the family for the six months I was there and the affection has always remained.* So many of those with whom we talked were to echo Kunwar who said, *Shoaib is a very affectionate person and I am not, but he managed to overcome my shyness and draw me into his family.* Kunwar and Shoaib were to meet again in the NWFP and later in Karachi. The warmth and friendship never faltered; for Kunwar it is all still there.

In Brahmanbaria, Kunwar travelled the district with Shoaib, poled along canals or across shallow lagoons in 'country boats'. He was amazed to see that although Shoaib had held the post only for a year, everybody knew and respected him. Following his grandfather's practice, Shoaib would conduct most

cases on the spot whether criminal, revenue or civil. Kunwar found the people preferred this manner of dispensing justice. There were no lengthy delays, no costly travel to the sub-district headquarters, no lawyer's fees, and although a defendant might sometimes grumble at Shoaib's judgements, they believed him to be absolutely fair. As Kunwar quietly said, almost whispering in the strangely shaded darkness of his Karachi business office, *the experience set a standard and a modus operandi that I attempted to follow all my life. And you know, I may have come close but never did I have his easy facility with people. It seemed to come to him naturally.*

The irrepressible Dr Shahida Jaffrey, whom we will later meet, born to a feudal aristocratic liberal Lahore family, married her much older husband Tariq Jaffrey as a gauche sixteen-year-old in 1963. Shahida shrugs off her teenage marriage, *it turned out to be a good one and in the 1960s good families thought it was their duty to get their daughters married off as soon as they could.* Tariq first met Shoaib at Lucknow University in India; his sister was one of Shoaib's classmates. Chance brought them together again. As a civil service probationer, Tariq was assigned to Mymensingh where Shoaib was serving at the time. As was to happen wherever Shoaib was posted, Tariq was one of many who came under Shoaib's spell. From that time on Shoaib would apparently always say *Tariq Jaffrey is my student.* Shahida had laughed, *Tariq would unfailingly agree even when he was an ambassador or a senior officer with the Asian Development Bank.*

One day our talk inevitably began to touch on the early concepts of development and Shoaib immediately said, *well of course, an active sub-divisional officer could do a lot of things if he wanted to, but if he didn't want to get involved in development then nobody would question him. The good thing was that the people were willing to try almost anything, but the bad thing was that nothing much was done in an organized way.*

During the Raj, the main task of the Indian Civil Service was to ensure fair play and the maintenance of law and order. Development was seen as an eccentricity and was by no means central to an officer's main responsibilities. It was certainly not discouraged but the approach was in the mould of Victorian philanthropy—the poor were seen as 'unfortunates' who needed to be encouraged to get off their backsides and work. They were not seen as active participants, as people with ideas and enterprise who had amazing potential if only a way could be found to unleash it.

Shoaib's eyes began to open when the ordinary people of Brahmanbaria had willingly raised nearly two hundred thousand rupees to build a dispensary in memory of Major Tufail. *Yes, it opened my eyes to the way poor, ordinary people can work together and raise quite large sums and do amazing things.*

Shoaib already knew the power of leading from the front, but what seemed to be a puzzle with no obvious answer was how to harness all this potential in a way that would do lasting good. For example, water hyacinth was a curse, clogging the waterways across Bengal *so every now and then I would give a call to go and clear the stuff away. Because I was there up to my knees in water everyone wanted to be there too. A lot of weed was cleared but after a week it would all be back again. We had good intentions but no results. It was all very frustrating.*

In the 1920s, a man called Brain, an ex-ICS officer, was given the task of launching a programme the British called the Rural Reconstruction Programme. Brain's idea was based on the widely held notion that a lot of the time, villagers could be found sitting around doing nothing and so why not use this wasted time; why not mobilize them to plant trees or dig ponds to improve the general environment of the village, or even clean canals. But as Shoaib pointed out, *what Brain did not take into account was that villagers who sat around did so because they were either tired or sick or something like that, and if they spent all their time on improving their environment they had not enough time to earn something to support their families.* And not only was this true, but the selection of the things that would improve village life mostly came from above. Villagers were rarely consulted. The concept of directed self-help had some merit, but it failed because of the way it was put into practice. As the old guru and Shoaib's life-long mentor Akhter Hameed Khan succinctly said, *the programme cost government nothing and achieved nothing.* No cost, no fuss; it suited government very well.

However, in Brahmanbaria, the young Shoaib understood that he was in charge of the welfare of the one million people in his subdivision. It was a responsibility he took very seriously. Having concluded that programmes based on missionary zeal and self-sacrifice alone would not cure the problems of the poor or offer permanent solutions, what could Shoaib do? At this stage he had no idea; *I just kept trying my best and doing what I could, looked for opportunities.* One opportunity was this. *In the 1950s in Bengal there was a great tradition of public schools. There were about eighty-four in Brahmanbaria alone and as sub-divisional officer I was president of the managing committees of each one.* There was always a desperate shortage of funds and desperate times call for desperate measures. Amusingly apologetic, Shoaib confessed that he had reluctantly allowed *some fellow to run his game of skill stall at the annual exhibition. Of course it was nothing but gambling and not a very moral way to raise money I know but the fellow was prepared to pay almost anything for permission to set up his stall.* So, whenever one of the schools needed funds for a sports stadium or a laboratory, Shoaib would give the gambler a permit. The problem was that there was no other source of money, the gambling stall was it.

The flood of donor money that was to wash across the developing world was yet to come.

During the great Bengal famine of the 1940s when more than a million people died, the British had initiated a desultory relief programme employing men to dig irrigation canals. It wasn't much help to the hungry. Shortly after independence this food for work programme was replaced by the much lauded but eventually ill-fated Village Aid programme. None of this mattered to far off Brahmanbaria until one day a young man appeared in the subdivision. He said he had been trained to be an officer in charge of Village Aid, and had been sent to implement the programme in Brahmanbaria. This was news to Shoaib who quickly saw there would be problems; *none of the other nation building departments, agriculture, animal husbandry, education and so on had any idea what this new boy on the block was up to. Even I was simply told just to organize an advisory committee with me as chairman. It was bound to create problems with the other departments.* It did.

The brainchild of the Americans, variously disguised to suit specific cultural environments, Village Aid was introduced *with some fanfare* in forty-four countries across the world. The Americans poured billions of dollars into the programme until in 1958, they suddenly stopped. American aid can be like that, often throwing out the baby with the bath water as happened in Afghanistan in 1987. In 1953, Nehru in India described Village Aid as the panacea of poverty; four years later, in 1957, he spoke of his sad disillusionment. It was not to be the last. This was the age when all good things, all the best ideas were thought to derive from the developed West, when teams of Western experts would flock to the developing world and devise a plethora of schemes that would supposedly lift them to the same dizzy heights that the West had attained. It was an arrogant concept at best, and one that mainly succeeded in plunging the developing world into debt.

But back to Village Aid in East Pakistan. As Shoaib said *the American's grand idea was that if you sent a generalist to the villages as a friend, philosopher and guide he would be able to mobilize the people. And then if you also threw in a few incentives such as input supplies, this would work wonders.*

Inevitably, the officer who arrived in Brahmanbaria began to create jealousies straight away. None of the other departments had a jeep nor did they have a *bag full of money to spend in the villages on whatever they wanted. Villagers are not saints so anyone who could do this became an immediate friend, a big man.* Not only did the eager young man antagonize the serving officers of other government departments, in his ignorance of local politics he also managed to upset the elected local government representatives. In Bengal, such bodies had traditionally been well respected even though they had little

money to work with. The position of an elected representative carried a good deal of kudos, Shoaib had sighed, the very picture of an exasperated sub-divisional officer, *in his naivety and ignorance the foolish chap often worked with and funded projects proposed by defeated candidates. This undermined the positions of the elected members who quickly became quite antagonistic.* The officer could hardly have done worse if he had tried.

The situation was resolved in a very curious way. Whoever had given the officer a jeep had not asked if the young man could drive it. He couldn't and so his driving was *rather a matter of trial and error* Shoaib said, *in fact more error than trial.* One day, instead of selecting forward gear he accidentally put the jeep into reverse, and backed over his ten year old daughter. Musarrat had rushed to the hospital to help while Shoaib arranged the transfer of the child to Dacca where she would receive proper treatment. To everyone's relief the child survived and eventually recovered. Shoaib gave a 'what else could I do' shrug, said, *it was certainly not my intention to take advantage of his misfortune, but the man was so beholden to me that he started to come to me for everything. Whatever little I was able to achieve under the Village Aid programme was not because I was the SDO and could give him orders, but because out of a sense of personal gratitude which I did not believe I had really earned, this man referred to me all the time.*

Shoaib believes to this day that the main reason the programme failed is that one person cannot become a jack-of-all-trades on the instant, or will know better than the local people what they really need and want. He maintains that if only the Village Aid officer had been given the role of social organiser, a concept that twenty years later was to work so brilliantly in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, and if that social organiser had listened to the people and had also been tasked to link the village people and their needs with the specific expertise of government's technical departments, there was a chance Village Aid might have worked. It is probable that Shoaib is being optimistic, but he nevertheless believes that the Village Aid programme was a step in the right direction, albeit an expensive step, and that it was at least an improvement on Brain's ideas.

And so life drifted pleasantly on for Shoaib and his family in East Pakistan. His family was happy and thriving, and their third daughter, the much loved Falaknaz, was born. Shoaib also revelled in his work which he found absorbing, enjoyable and very rewarding. *I found the work to be immensely satisfying. I tried my best and in return got the most warm and loving treatment from the people of Bengal wherever I was posted.* And so he was, this time from Brahmanbaria to Mymensingh.

There, the deputy commissioner's name was Kazmi, *a very nice fellow.* They became good friends. Afshan remembers playing with their two children, and later the Kazmi's lived with Shoaib's family for a year in Lahore when, on

their return from a study year in England, there was no housing available. Before this, the Kazmi's were to play a key role in saving Musarrat's life. It all began with something as simple as a bad cold and a wobbly stomach.

A routine prescription was written and sent off by messenger to the dispensary. *In those days such things were made up in the dispensary.* It was Musarrat's bad luck that a very inexperienced assistant was on duty. The medicine was delivered at lunchtime and taking a dose Musarrat remembers immediately having trouble with her vision. Before she fainted Musarrat still remembers calling desperately to Shoaib, *Shabbu, I can only see half the faces of the children.* The medicine was, in fact, totally poisonous, a terrible mistake made by the student who mixed it. The affect was systemic, the damage was extensive, Musarrat's heart raced so fast she thought it would explode. *I don't know how I survived,* she says today.

Shoaib carried a barely conscious Musarrat to their bedroom, desperately calling for a doctor while the frightened Roohi and Afshan clung to Maijano, their Swat nanny. Everyone was in a panic but luckily Kazmi's wife was a competent doctor. She rushed to Shoaib's house and quickly determined that Musarrat had been poisoned. Afshan firmly believes that it was this lady whom she fondly calls 'aunty' who saved Musarrat's life. Many of Musarrat's oldest friends say that she was never strong but this incident precipitated a state of frailty from which she never fully recovered. Ill for two years, an enfeebled Musarrat was taken by an increasingly desperate Shoaib first to doctors in Calcutta and then to the family doctor in Moradabad. She became so weak she weighed just seventy-eight pounds. *I went as black as this cushion* Musarrat said, snatching up a dark brocade cushion, *my mind became affected and I had a nervous breakdown. And you know all this happened on his first posting; it was hard, so very hard. Only my will is strong, only my will kept me going. But Shoaib looked after me so much. He used to sleep in the office sometimes he was so tired, so I forgave him for everything, I always have.*

And then one day in late 1961, Shoaib was posted back to West Pakistan. Despite everything they were sad to leave. From a professional point of view Shoaib's first posting had been all that he had hoped; there had been lots to do and much to think about and although he had lost a good friend in Tufail through military bungling and there had been dreadful months after Musarrat's poisoning; despite having to give up dancing she had been very happy for much of the time and so had her daughters, and his family's happiness was very important to Shoaib.

They took a train to Chittagong and then travelled by boat to Karachi.

Shoaib had a restless and uneasy voyage, for while his family seemed to enjoy every minute of the ten days they spent on board, he had been queasy, and

unaccustomed to relaxing, had become bored. On the first day, while the boat had been loaded with cargo it was pretty hot and after that *well, after all, what do you do on a sea voyage; just sit around*? They travelled first class, *I was a CSP officer after all, and it was all quite luxurious, but nevertheless, I resolved not to travel by boat again if I could help it.* Shoaib was a landsman although in later years he took to flying *like a duck to water.*

Odysseus's Son

When the hero of Greek mythology Odysseus reluctantly sailed away to the Trojan War, he left his life-time friend Mentor as tutor to his son Telemachus, and as steward of his palace. Favoured and encouraged by the goddess Athene who took the form of Mentor to avoid detection, the quiet and hesitant Telemachus stole away from the horde of unruly suitors seeking to marry his mother Penelope, and set off to find his missing father. Of course Telemachus did not find his father but his many adventures changed him. He returned brimming with confidence and assertiveness to find his travel-worn father already back in Ithaca but in hiding and in dire need of help. Reunited and reinvigorated, the pair slew every one of the troublesome suitors and in the triumphant final scene of the Odyssey, together, father and son faced down the slain men's outraged relatives.

Mentor's name has now passed into common use to describe an experienced and trusted friend and adviser. His student is known as his protégé. However, and more accurately for the recondite, a mentor's protégé should be called the 'telemachus', a youth whom, as in the Odyssey, a mentor expects will one day emerge triumphant.

In the story this book narrates, if the 'telemachus' is Shoaib Sultan Khan no less, who then was his mentor? Well, let me give you a brilliant man whose razor sharp mind and incisive ideas unwittingly made fools of intellectual charlatans; a man who sought no personal glory; eclectic philosopher, romantic poet and muse; noted linguist; student of comparative religion; sufi mystic; a man who chose the life of an ascetic when he could have lived like a king; a man who foreswore power to serve the poor and who died despairing of government but with his belief in the power of the people undiminished; an enviable man who knew no envy; a man loved by many.

And if this singular thinker became Shoaib's mentor, is there a conundrum, a division of loyalties because as the story so far relates, there is no doubting the enormous import of Shoaib's grandfather Sultan Ahmed Beg? And no doubting either that the fondly stern old man remains indelibly fixed in Shoaib's mind as his boyhood hero and role model. But was Shoaib his grandfather's protégé, his

telemachus? The answer must be no. Sultan Ahmed Beg simply ran out of time, his own and of the new world his grandson would occupy.

But do we find it coincidental that the man who picked up the baton Sultan Ahmed Beg had carried so well through the long happy days of Shoaib's boyhood and the dramas of his youth; this man was also once one of the heaven-born, a former member of that elite band of brothers, the Indian Civil Service? No, we do not; for the ICS were a band of exceptional men in India, gifted individuals who stood above and apart. Nor are we surprised that as Shoaib grew in stature and honed the skills that would one day make him famous, this one exceptional man would become Shoaib's guide, mentor, and social conscience; would profoundly influence Shoaib's thinking; and one day stand at the crossroads of Shoaib's life and point the way.

No, we are not surprised, and this is why.

In 1914, eighteen years after the gloriously extravagant celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of Victoria, Empress of India, a child was born. His name was Akhter Hameed Khan. It was soon clear that this child was endowed with a precocious intellect. He also had an insatiable appetite for knowledge, a disarmingly incisive clarity of thought, and an irritating decisiveness that in a lesser mind would earn the label 'stubborn'! Then again, perhaps stubborn is the right word as many in later years can verify; but it was stubbornness in the pursuit of excellence; in defence of those unable to defend themselves; a stubbornness that also brooked no apologia of the rightness of his thinking. However, although quick to make up his mind, and formidable in defence of an idea, throughout his life and in common with many other super-bright people, he had no problem being proven wrong—he was always prepared to revise his opinion.

Education was not a challenge to this boy who was eventually to master no less than seven languages as well as a startling range of other subjects. As you might expect, he went on to study at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom and later gained a doctorate at Michigan State University in the United States. In 1936, this highly educated, even brilliant, youth was inducted as a member of one of the most exclusive and powerful clubs in the world at that time—the Indian Civil Service.

There is no record of when this happened or whether it was a gradual process, but by the time Akhter Hameed Khan entered the ICS he had resolved that his task in life was to serve the people. He soon came to realize that for all the bureaucratic power and authority his position conveyed, for all the deference he commanded, his main role was to maintain law and order. The ICS was no less than the 'steel framework' of the British Indian Empire and his position in it set him above and apart from the people. He saw himself as an enforcer, his

position and powers in no way designed to solve the problems of the poor. As he later wrote, *it gave me no pleasure to play God and watch poor people grovel at my feet for the smallest favours.*

A younger contemporary of Shoaib's grandfather, and equally committed to serving the people, the two could have been friends although they most certainly had very different ideas on how best to achieve this commitment. It was Sultan Ahmed Beg's firm belief that the best way he could serve his people was to work within the system as he did for his entire life. However, Khan Sahib, as Akhtar Hameed Khan became known to a devoted inside circle of friends and admirers, decided such a course would only lead to a stultifying *cul de sac.* Some suggest that Khan Sahib was influenced by his dissatisfaction with the general lack of sensitivity and high-handedness of the Raj, and of the British administration's bungled handling of the Bengal famine of 1943. Particularly galling was having to enforce one of those incomprehensibly stupid bureaucratic rules to which the Raj Sarkar in all its wisdom occasionally fell prey, that in times of famine, rice could not be transported from districts with a food surplus to villages where crops had failed or production was in serious deficit. Curiously, this rule continues to be applied in Pakistan in times of wheat flour shortage, a demonstration of how enduring stupid or restrictive rules can be in an inherited bureaucracy.

Shoaib insists that if Khan Sahib was indeed dissatisfied he also was all praise for the British for respecting his views and his way of living and never interfering with his personal life. This is no surprise. The British were known for their fond tolerance of eccentrics, and Khan Sahib was nothing if not an eccentric.

So, despite the commonly accepted view that Khan Sahib resigned because he was disillusioned with the British, Shoaib disagrees. *When I would ask him, as I sometimes did in the early years 'why did you resign from the ICS', he always insisted he had not resigned in protest against the colonial regime. He said he had learnt a great deal from the British but he realised they had nothing more to offer him. Although masters of good administration and of having brought about the Pax Britannica, they had little to offer to alleviate the sufferings of the impoverished.*

And this was the nub. Khan Sahib found it simply impossible to wear blinkers and ignore the realities of the world he lived in. He had come to the conclusion that as one of the fortunate, it was his duty, his sworn task in life, to do what he could for the many poor of India. As he was to later write about the ICS, '*I realised that if I did not escape while I was young and vigorous, I would forever remain in the trap, and terminate as a bureaucratic bigwig*'. Having made up his mind, Khan Sahib chose a characteristically drastic course—he would leave the service, leave all the power and promise of an ICS career, live

as simple a life as he could, and pursue his ideas and ideals as an independent thinker, or as other less kindly critics would put it, as a naïve and irritatingly ascetic, intellectual Gandhian maverick.

His contemporaries and friends were astonished and dismayed. Some attempted to dissuade him but of course such attempts were futile. In later life, Khan Sahib would often recount the story of how they thought him to be a fool, but a good fool—he took this to be a marvellous compliment. Happily putting behind him all the pomp and circumstance of his ICS life, in 1945, he began 'a different kind of apprenticeship', persuading a no doubt somewhat bemused locksmith in Aligarh to take him into his employ. Not a man to take the easy route, he had decided to learn first-hand the way of life of the working classes and that meant he had to live the life, not just observe it. The 'apprenticeship' did not last long. Yes, he did not relish his bruised fingers or the long hours of work for little gain but these were not the reasons he moved on. It was simply an acceptance that the life of a labourer was a waste of his education and talents. If he were to best serve the poor it was little use being one of them, admitting he had not even been a very good locksmith. Was this a blow to his pride? No it wasn't. Khan Sahib actually relished the idea that he was less than excellent at something. It made him feel more human. However, one result was that for the rest of his life he was to live as simply and frugally as he could, something he now knew how to do.

A scholar of comparative religion and an iconoclast who did not hesitate to challenge cherished beliefs, Khan Sahib counselled Shoaib of the dangers of reading original sources in matters of religion only to discover the false hypocrisy of many latter day versions. Shoaib remembers Khan Sahib, hand lifted and forefinger extended in the characteristic gesture of a teacher making sure his acolytes are listening carefully, saying *followers of those who have already interpreted the old original sources to serve their own ends will fight tooth and nail and force you to retreat for the safety of your own skin.* He did not need Khan Sahib's warning. A man to whom God certainly exists, but by inclination and instruction an entirely tolerant pragmatist and a defender of the right of anyone to choose his belief system, Shoaib was always careful to steer well clear of religious dogma and argument. Once, when talking of such things late on a winter-bleak Islamabad day he nodded his head and said, *yes, I have always tried to be totally tolerant and accepting of the religious views of others; I have always tried to steer clear of religious matters. I was taught by my grandfather never to ascribe to any sect or even country too closely, except perhaps England.* That was the way they were in Ahmed Beg's day.

Poet, Sufi scholar, mystic and linguist, and master of no less than seven languages, Khan Sahib was a man of many parts and a source of constant surprise.

Described as a 'walking encyclopedia', in Sri Lanka, when taken to a Buddhist Monastery to meet a particular monk, Shoaib writes how everyone was completely taken aback when he recited the Dhammapadda in original Pali, a language incomprehensible to the monks who had only learnt from the Sinhalese translation.

Profoundly influenced by Buddha's teachings, sometimes perhaps just to confound those who sought to pin him down on religion, he would call himself a Buddhist Muslim. Shoaib once wrote that Khan Sahib used to say he would have liked to have chosen Buddha's way and rid himself of all worldly desires, but then he would sigh and say *but I love my family too much and I can't leave them.* The classic dilemma that unless a man gives away everything he owns, he is still better off than most people, has confronted humanists in India since the time of Buddha. As Kremmer wrote in his book, *Inhaling the Mahatma, 'it is not possible to live justly in an unjust society unless of course you renounce it...the same dilemma exists in all societies to an extent—we sleep soundly while others suffer, but in India, the co-existence of wealth and poverty, of glamour and squalour, education and illiteracy is colossal'.* Khan Sahib solved this dilemma for himself by living as simply as he could, wearing homespun clothing and spurning personal wealth. In later life, Shoaib would sometimes jokingly accuse him of being insensitive to those who simply could not manage as he could, on a few thousand rupees a month. *He would relent in the case of others,* Shoaib said with a smile, *but never in his own case.* Khan Sahib's wife sometimes had to resort to minor subterfuge so they could live in reasonable comfort. In later years, the old man would boast of how he managed with just two sets of clothes which he always washed himself. In an interview after his death, smiling through her tears, Khan Sahib's quietly serene wife admitted she kept many spare pairs of identical clothing which she would substitute from time to time. AHK never knew.

An unflinching critic of poor logic, Khan Sahib was not an easy man nor did he suffer fools. However, Shoaib believes one of the 'old man's' curiously contradictory strengths was his gullibility, his willingness to accept everyone on his or her face value. More often than not people rose to the challenge but sometimes he was to be sorely disappointed. In one of his many written tributes to his mentor Shoaib wrote, *he could not think ill of anyone at least not until they erred because his heart was so honest and full of innocence.*

The economist Tariq Husain, now an independent consultant based in Islamabad but once one of the 'famous four' who in 1982 and fresh from Chicago University set out with Shoaib on perhaps the greatest of his adventures, came to know Khan Sahib well. A man who writes freely and well, he described Khan Sahib's insistence on personal frugality as making life very difficult for all but the saintly. Tariq also wonders if Khan Sahib's habit of

dealing with the rest of the world as if it was saintly too was entirely sensible. It may have paid off most of the time but every now and then there were quite spectacular repercussions. One such was the infamous blasphemy case instigated, to his great embarrassment, by a disgruntled relative of Shoaib's. In a country where the religious hierarchy can be singularly dogmatic and the courts tediously Byzantine, the case was to dog him to the grave. It did not, however, cause Khan Sahib even an hour's lost sleep.

Khan Sahib was often curious about what he perceived to be contradictions in the life of his worldlier protégé. As Shoaib said ruefully one day, he would sometimes innocently ask me 'do you really need to earn so much money'? He could never understand that I did not need the money for myself but like him, I also loved my family and wanted to give them everything in this world. And indeed Shoaib tried to give his family 'everything in the world', showering them with worldly possessions, the best available schools, cars, gifts, whatever he could afford, everything except time. Strangely for such a sensitive and intelligent man, and perhaps feeling increasingly guilty, Shoaib made the same mistake that so many high flyers make: he thought, he hoped he could compensate his family for his absences by giving them whatever money could buy.

Still he worries, as he has worried all his life about his style of living, although his Islamabad house is certainly modest, its furnishings genteelly faded; Shoaib even worried about the clothes he chose to wear— did he really have to live simply with little money and wear homespun *khaddar* to do the work he was doing? Khan Sahib had smiled at the foolishness of his Telemachus. *Of course not* he had said impatiently, *you don't have to become a 'behroopia'; don't insult the intelligence of the people; they will recognize your true worth in any garb.* Shoaib was relieved but Khan Sahib was right. In the Northern Areas of Pakistan, Shoaib's Western dress and hat, and his later use of a helicopter made no difference as Khan Sahib had said, *to poor people recognizing your real worth.* In fact all these things were to contribute to Shoaib's legend.

A pacifist, Khan Sahib despaired of hero worship which he thought to be rampant in Pakistan, and although he began his great social experiments convinced of the essential role of government, in later years after he had moved to Karachi and started the world famous urban Orangi project, he came to conclude *that in Pakistan there is no government and no governance.* He described civil servants as *'ghatia'*, meaning petty, and for those who would enter government service Shoaib often talks of Khan Sahib quoting Dante's *Inferno—'abandon all hope ye who dare to pass through those portals'.*

In his increasing distrust and disillusionment of government in Pakistan, and his constant warnings to Shoaib of *the dangers of supping with government,*

in the roller-coaster ride of Shoaib's future life, Khan Sahib was to be proved right time and again. Strangely perhaps, in this one matter, the mentor has not been able to entirely convince his Telemachus. Strange, because Shoaib's outstanding successes in Pakistan have been in the non-government sector, and stranger still because he has been several times betrayed or suffered significant reversals at the hand of one government or another. He also readily agrees with Khan Sahib's contention that much that eventually went wrong in Comilla, killed off Daudzai, the carbon-copy scheme Shoaib later initiated in Peshawar, these examples alone clearly showed the sometimes vindictive fickleness of government and the foolishness of such reliance.

But still Shoaib hopes. Despite everything that was to happen, Shoaib has never been entirely won over to Khan Sahib's view of simply 'going your own way' and staying totally clear of government in Pakistan. Perhaps his grandfather's influence was just too strong even for Khan Sahib to overcome. And perhaps in this he is right and Khan Sahib wrong. Whatever the truth of the matter, Shoaib has retained his belief in the ultimate and inescapable importance of government to any development initiative, and in India, as we will see later in this book, this belief has paid off in spades. Never one to deny mistakes, Khan Sahib would be the first to concede he may have been wrong.

So there you have it, the man who became a legend himself a mentor to a legend. And if you think I have been extravagant in writing of this brilliantly crusty eccentric ascetic who has now left us, try delving through much of the effusive godwottery that is written about him, essays that I am certain would be dismissed as arrant nonsense by the man himself. Perhaps though, Khan Sahib was happy to be described as 'hero of the poor' in his Magsaysay award citation because that is exactly what he was. But even better for this man who avoided self-aggrandisement with a passion, he was a hero whose name many of the poor he was to help did not know. That was his way— an extraordinary man of extraordinary achievements, he never cared who took credit for his ideas. All that mattered was that he understood what it is to be poor and disempowered and that the poor must not be viewed as helpless beneficiaries. Instead, they must be treated with dignity and their initiative must not be destroyed by charitable handouts.

Many who would help the poor never understand this simple dictum. Kremmer, for example, writes of the young Rahul Gandhi of having an intellectual commitment to the poor and of doing his best to connect with them, but, as he wrote in his book Inhaling the Mahatma, the poor might as well have been Martians for all he shared in common with them. Kremmer believes Rahul's father suffered from the same problem, writing of a leader schooled in English in a country where less than four in a hundred people were fluent in that language. Shoaib, however, believes Kremmer is wrong. Rahul Gandhi is beginning to connect with the poor of India.

And he should know. If there was one thing that both Khan Sahib the mentor and Shoaib his Telemachus had in common it was that both were able to empathise with the poor; both were able to connect.

Let us return now to Khan Sahib's restless search for a way he could use his formidable talent to best serve the poor, a way that unknown to him at the time, would lead to his first fateful meeting with Shoaib. Having realised, as he would often say *that God had not created me to be a labourer*, and certainly not a locksmith, Khan Sahib decided to join the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. Established by nationalist intellectual Muslims in the 1920s and entirely secular in nature, the university was nevertheless elitist. Disappointed at being even further removed from contact with the poor he sought so desperately to serve than he had been as an ICS officer, once more Khan Sahib moved on. The interim period is of no consequence to this story, what is important is that by 1955, ten years after his resignation from the ICS, he was back with his feet firmly on the ground as the much admired principal of Victoria College in Comilla. There Khan Sahib was at last in a position to set to work as he had always wished. It was at Comilla that he began his lifelong task of discovering how best to mobilize and harness the power of the poor; to develop and test his ideas; and to win as a lifelong follower, Shoaib Sultan Khan.

Despite all that has been written of his intellect and understanding, Khan Sahib always protested that he had never pretended to be an original thinker or a born teacher. He always maintained that while everyone seemed to think he was a natural 'master teacher' he found this puzzling. Khan Sahib held no illusions about the source of his own skills and ideas. In his view, master teachers are never born and only achieve this status after years of study. Shoaib once quoted him saying in a somewhat exasperated manner that he felt himself ready to teach *only after I had devoted much time and labour learning from many sources. What my sneering friends often dismissed as charisma was a hard earned skill; a skill acquired after a long period of apprenticeship under British, Gandhian, and American masters.* This skill was to be honed and refined by the study of successful models in many other countries. Of course brilliance helped.

Khan Sahib's choice of models was indeed eclectic, and ranged from the experiments of the nineteenth century German social thinker Raiffeissen, to Japan between the wars, and those in countries as diverse as Taiwan, Yugoslavia, China, India, and Israel. There were lessons to be learned from them all. From his studies came one simple teaching: that poverty arises not out of lack of money but out of constant disempowerment. At the beginning the voices who spoke of these new ideas were few. There are many voices now, found in every corner of the developing world, voices who now chorus this basic idea. Recently, I happened to read a book by Valerie Browning about her life among the Afar nomads who live in the sand and

lava desert that stretches along the eastern foothills of the Ethiopian highlands and the Red Sea. Of her life there Valerie wrote, poverty isn't only a lack of food and money, it is total disempowerment. It shouldn't be described only in economic terms, it should be defined by the fact that people are not permitted to run their own lives....I know there are instances of aid being misappropriated, but that is probably because it has been given in a way that encourages corruption...maybe I am too idealistic having lived with third world people, but I believe aid should be given at the basic level, and given so that people can make their own decisions about how it is spent.

Gone from us now, yet can I hear the sounds of Khan Sahib's quiet applause? I can also hear in his voice regret and bemusement, *as I grew old I thought I too could become a good teacher and in my delusion I thought that at last I too had become a wise old man and could give guidance to enlightened young men.* To his dismay this was not to be. Perhaps his standards and expectations were too high, perhaps he was too stern a master, too demanding; whatever the case a humbled Khan Sahib later wrote that in all his years of teaching and searching he found only one young man *who cherished me as a worthy teacher.* This young man was Shoaib Sultan Khan.

The two were unlikely soul mates.

Tariq Husain puzzled at their closeness, *always so full of mutual respect and admiration.* He thought it obvious to anyone who cared to see that the mentor Khan Sahib and his Telemachus, Shoaib Sultan Khan, had quite different personalities and approaches, so much so that the differences seemed greater than the similarities. However, the common ground they shared was vitally important; both men were totally committed to letting villagers have the final say, and both believed that a flexible trial-and-error approach was streets ahead of the fixed 'blueprint' approach favoured by most governments and international development agencies, an approach that was the root cause of so many project failures. Despite his academic outlook, Khan Sahib believed that offices were only places to be used as a temporary respite, as a place to write reports between long periods out in the field in direct contact with the people. It was a practice in which Shoaib also had implicit belief, a practice that his own grandfather had followed, and one that Shoaib had loved from the time he could first remember. As Husain wrote, both men led from the front, both men were living examples of Khan Sahib's maxim that *anyone who wanted to work in development needed strong legs.*

Men with strong similarities also, the differences between the two were quite startling.

Husain describes Khan Sahib as deliberate and analytical while Shoaib was always quick and action oriented, perhaps making more mistakes but moving so fast that these were soon forgotten in the face of so much success; he also thought that where Khan Sahib was an innovator who believed in carefully planned small-scale pilot demonstrations, in keeping a little distance between himself and the people in order not to influence them at all, and in stepping right back and allowing people to select what they wanted from the 'display shelf', Shoaib believed in rapid total social immersion and expansion, close personal contact, and in moving quickly into large scale implementation; and where the sometimes crusty and acerbic Khan Sahib impressed an awed people with his encyclopaedic knowledge, Shoaib would win people with charm, warmth, and perhaps unintentional but nevertheless flattering, attention. But Shoaib had not always worked this way, and against his natural inclinations and impatience, had acceded to Khan Sahib in the ill-fated Daudzai project, keeping it small which, as we will see, helped those who set out to wreck his civil service career. Shoaib would not stay small again. He feared if he again confined himself and *concentrated his efforts on a small area a project could more easily be stopped or washed away by vested interests.*

It also seems that Khan Sahib suffered from an affliction common to the super-bright for although he had a mind, as Tariq wrote *that could simplify ideas so everyone could understand,* he also believed that all you had to do was to demonstrate the obvious and the world would come flocking to your door. When this did not happen he would simply shrug and keep on doing what he had always done, think of new ways to help the poor to help themselves. While Shoaib also believed in the importance of demonstrating in practical terms that an idea actually worked, he understood the vital importance of publicity, of cultivating important contacts; of making sure the right people, government ministers, presidents and prime ministers, ambassadors and international bankers, bureaucrats and donors, all heard about what was being achieved and saw it working on the ground. He is, in fact, a past master at attracting financial support, at publicising his ideas and ideals, at exploiting any opportunity that would further his cause of the moment.

One of the best examples of this innate ability was the way Shoaib picked up on the immense publicity value of the simple film 'Valleys in Transition', a film made at the behest of the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva to publicise the early successes of the ground-breaking rural support programme in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Shoaib was to use this unashamedly evocative and emotional film again and again to win understanding and support. It was a brilliant tactic and it worked, and although he never said so, I have an idea that Khan Sahib may have found the film just a little tacky. Tariq, in fact, thinks Khan Sahib was always a little critical of Shoaib's publicity seeking ways, of his practice of

rushing off at a moment's notice to 'butter up' some notable or other. Miffed to find Shoaib had dashed off to Islamabad and was not there to meet him in Gilgit, Husain later quotes Khan Sahib as smiling just a little cheekily and advising *look here*, in dealing with any politician by all means *show them your beauty like a nautch* (dancing) *girl, but don't let them grab you.* Had Shoaib been 'grabbed'? Tariq laughs but does not know.

In 1956, as a civil service probationer, as we already know, Shoaib had been posted to East Pakistan for three months. The 1955 CSP intake had not been large, with the nineteen young male probationers more or less equally divided between West and East Pakistan. When they were sent on their three month assignment, probationers were usually paired off. Perhaps because of his relative fluency in Bengali, Shoaib was partnered with *a rather nice chap from East Pakistan*. His partner's brother happened to be studying at Comilla Victoria College in Comilla at the time of their assignment. Shoaib recalls the brother as being a bit of a nuisance, *continually babbling on about his principal being a former ICS officer.*

In the 1950s, the old colonial ICS was still held in awe by probationers from Pakistan. Officers of the ICS had been the crème de la crème of an all-India service, the very essence of Imperial India, *and you know, an ex-ICS officer was really something*, Shoaib said, and then choosing his words with care, *although we were proud of our own new successor service, the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) we really knew that it was in many ways but a pale shadow of what the ICS had meant to India.*

Every time Shoaib met his partner's brother, and it was fairly often as the quietly gregarious and unassuming Shoaib had been warmly welcomed by his partner's Bengali family, he would have to listen while the young man *would talk non-stop* of how his principal had spent three years at Cambridge, *and had been a high official in the ICS, and had put it all aside, had resigned, from the most prestigious service in India, and now he lived as a very simple man and wore homespun clothing*, and here Shoaib laughed, *yes, all that kind of thing.*

Shoaib admits he hadn't paid much attention to this casual friend's young brother, and that all his attention was given to observing and noting the tasks he would have to undertake once his training was complete. The prospect of a dazzling year at Cambridge, one of England's premier universities, tended to put most other thoughts out of his head; so understandably, as soon as the probation period was over, Shoaib promptly forgot all about the eccentric ascetic, the principal of Comilla Victoria College. However, as we already know, on their return from the esoteric sophistry of a year studying public administration at Cambridge, Shoaib was posted back to East Pakistan where, after a brief orientation period at district headquarters, he was posted on to Brahmanbaria as

the sub-divisional officer. By one of those tricks of fate that Shoaib so firmly believes in, Brahmanbaria was in Comilla District.

If you believe in fate, or synchronicity as Shoaib prefers, the posting was inevitable, one of the many instances in his life when sudden opportunities or chance meetings were to transform his life. The trick was, of course, to be able to recognize the significance of such happenings. Shoaib admits that although later he was *absolutely taken* with Khan Sahib's ideas, his first thoughts were how to best use these ideas within government as a CSP officer. At that early stage, leaving the CSP even on secondment was simply not an alternative, and in fact, in a few years time and without hesitation, he would forego the opportunity to work directly with Khan Sahib, leave the humid East, and happily head back to West Pakistan to pursue his civil service career.

So there was Shoaib, an earnest and hard working sub-divisional officer on the torrid and densely populated flood plains of East Bengal, out to earn the approbation of men like Burgess, and show himself worthy of his grandfather's belief in him. He was determined, he said, to make a name for himself in his first posting, an ambition which left little room for anything else. And then Shoaib smiled, perhaps at the thought of himself as a young man, so naïve, so full of ideals, perhaps even a little pompous, certainly conservative, and of his surprise when *one fine day three young men presented themselves in my office and said they had come from the Pakistan Academy of Rural Development at Comilla.* The young men gravely handed over their cards as was the custom in those days. Shoaib was immediately impressed not only by their demeanour and the fact that they were faculty members, but that all three held doctorates from prestigious American universities. They had been sent, they said, by their principal to learn first-hand the work of a sub-divisional officer and would be very grateful if Shoaib would permit them to accompany him on his rounds in the field.

Of course I agreed, Shoaib said. Curious about Shoaib's 'of course' I asked if he hadn't wondered what they were really up to. Didn't he have any reservations? Apparently not, and in answer to my question simply smiled and said, *none at all, things were much more straightforward and honest in those days, you just did not expect any trickery.* And so the three young men travelled with Shoaib for a month. In those days, Shoaib was also sub-divisional magistrate with five other magistrates under him. He mostly saw cases under what was called section 110 of the criminal procedure code, a section more commonly known as 'bad livelihood cases'. This section was used when a suspect was not caught red-handed. The police would round up a hundred or so people who would be obliged to testify about the character of the suspect, good or bad. The Comilla staff attended many such cases where Shoaib was happy to

explain his rulings. *The trick was to know who was lying and who was not, and whether the fact that a man seems to be living beyond his visible means has any bearing on the case, and so on.* \

Shoaib delighted in the challenge of such cases, in trying to think his way through the sometimes cheerfully deceitful behaviour of his people; situations where an officer only succeeds if he really knows his subdivision and its people like the back of his own hand, if he is totally unbiased and fair. He also needs to be sympathetic. Always consistent, Shoaib kept in mind the advice he was given as a probationer to always put yourself in the shoes of the accused before you make a decision, and to make doubly sure your judgement is entirely fair and impartial.

Sometime later, while on tour—in those days there were few roads and travel was either by boat, bicycle or train—Shoaib boarded the Green Arrow express train on his way to Akhora. He found himself sharing the first class compartment with a tall and very impressive looking man who wore a simple bleached *kurta* (a traditional homespun garment). Before sitting down, Shoaib remembered his manners and introduced himself. To his considerable surprise, the distinguished stranger had smiled warmly, *oh, so you are the one. You know we put you under the microscope and you came out with flying colours.*

In the house on Aga Khan Road that winter morning as the gas fire hissed and we sipped our usual morning soup, Shoaib had laughed. There was lightness in his voice, something I had not heard before. He was young again, the many accolades, the many sorrows that now weighed heavily on his shoulders were still in the unknown future, and there he was, all those years ago, a young officer bursting with enthusiasm, in a first class compartment being given praise by a fine-looking stranger, an older man who was obviously out of the 'top drawer'. Later, Khan Sahib sent the proceedings of the faculty meetings. Shoaib had laughed again delightedly, *and you know I found that I really had been put under the microscope*; in fact Shoaib's every professional move, his every decision, his every way of working had been dissected and discussed.

They had, of course, talked away the journey these two men, the brilliant and ascetic guru and his as yet unknowing and still publicly ambitious acolyte, but when they arrived at their destination, having made his mark, Khan Sahib simply disappeared without a word. At the time Shoaib admits he was quite disconcerted. He did not know then that it was the old man's style; he had made his mark and there was nothing more to say. It was a style that Shoaib would one day find amusingly unremarkable, would only make him smile. Khan Sahib preferred to be seen as living simply, as being self-sufficient. Shoaib, on the other hand, was only just beginning to enjoy some of the trappings of power, a few of the fringe benefits. Officially, Shoaib only had the use of a bicycle or a 'country boat' that some obliging boatman would pole along the shallow canals

or out across the wide lagoons, but there was a contractor at Brahmanbaria who was more than willing to make his jeep available to a man as important as the sub-divisional magistrate. This was one such occasion, and perhaps looking to impress this impressive man, Shoaib was entirely disconcerted to find Khan Sahib had vanished. As he was to later write, perhaps a little plaintively, *I could not even offer him a lift.* Shoaib drove home alone that day but he had something to think about. As he wryly said to me one day, *on such chance meetings hangs the fate of man.* Shoaib drove home alone that day but he had something to think about.

And in fact when the two men met in the train that fate-filled day Khan Sahib was in the process of putting his theory to work. It was a theory he had spent the last ten years refining, and it was this—East Pakistan had inherited a very good law and order administration from the British but if the millions of poor farmers were ever to be helped to achieve their full production potential, the administration needed to be converted into one where rural development was a priority. In order to achieve the conversion two actions were required: a viable administrative unit had to be identified; and a new post needed to be created whose incumbent had powers equivalent to a district magistrate or Collector. At Khan Sahib's suggestion this post came to be termed 'Additional Deputy Commissioner Development'.

Khan Sahib was at that time also a firm believer of the value of cooperatives. Unfazed by past failures in the subcontinent, he had reasoned that the problem lay not with rural communities but with the government. Rather than promoting self-governing, democratic co-operatives, a concept that had worked so well in the countries he had studied, government had reduced the co-operative movement to an extension of the bureaucracy, to organizations dominated by richer elements. To Khan Sahib the logical and most equitable way to manage the large investment in infrastructure he believed essential if agriculture was to develop, was through village co-operatives. Undoubtedly Gandhian in his way of thinking, and although not opposed to the idea of allowing market forces to work, Tariq maintains the old man was a vehement opponent of middlemen moneylenders, a class of men whom he believed kept the poor in thrall with interest rates that started at fifty per cent per annum.

However he was also totally opposed to the idea of a 'free lunch'. No matter how poor, Khan Sahib believed that loans should not be given unless the full costs were borne by borrowers. Otherwise development would be unsustainable and an unhealthy and destructive reliance on government or foreign donor subsidies would be created. In this, Shoaib has always been in full agreement except for one important exception, the essential utility of an initial grant to encourage communities to mobilize and work together. The basic ideas of Khan

Sahib's were a beginning, even a good beginning. Comilla was a work in progress and the ideas could be expanded and applied almost anywhere government chose to do so. However, at the time and in their new found enthusiasm, neither Khan Sahib or Shoaib could know that eventually these sound but simple ideas would be watered down to ineffectiveness, would die in the dusty corridors of an uncaring bureaucracy. Government sponsored projects were not the answer. However, in the bright new days of an independent state as yet only ten years old, Khan Sahib's ideas seemed obvious and imminently workable and the government seemed keen to provide support. Not only did it all seem workable but other positive forces were afoot. In the 1960s, Islamic idealists and Western conservatives feared that the alluring promises of communism might subvert the poor in countries such as Pakistan. Given the green light by America and the West, and the initial enthusiastic support of Pakistan's government, Khan Sahib's ideas on how to lift the rural poor out of poverty were showcased as a brilliant alternative. At the outset, things also just seemed to fall into place *a suitable administrative unit already existed.*

Blame the British. When they first began to impose the benign if stultifying weight of *Pax Britannica* the British needed to define areas that could be easily controlled from a single police station and so the concept of the *Thana* was born. In the days before motor vehicles, the boundaries of a *thana* were established by how far a mounted officer could easily ride and get back again in a day. To Khan Sahib a *thana* seemed to be an ideal unit, because as part of his grand development plan, not only did he want a representative of each of government's nation-building departments located at each expanded *thana* office, he also wanted poor farmers to be able to come to that office seeking advice and assistance and then be able to return to their farms again the same day. By simply adding a few rooms to already existing government buildings a ready home for the newly posted government officers became available, and the sometimes impossible barrier for most peasant farmers, of having to find money for travel and accommodation if they wanted to access advice or information, was neatly removed.

His standing as a former ICS officer was a decided door-opener for Khan Sahib, allowing ready access to the offices of former colleagues and acquaintances who were the new decision makers. Whether they grew tired of being badgered or genuinely supported Khan Sahib's vision, whether there was an element of political opportunism involved, the Government of East Pakistan happily acceded to the idea. So the orders went out to create fully staffed development centres at each *thana*. A new post was also created—Additional Deputy Commissioner Development.

And to cap it all, the chief secretary also agreed that orientation courses for the new development officers would best be held at the Comilla Academy.

The next step? Capture Shoaib's attention.

Khan Sahib of course asked for Shoaib's specific help to plan and participate in the training programme, explaining that although his faculty members were highly qualified sociologists and economists, very few had ever actually done anything. They were theorists not practitioners and although he had no qualms about the abilities of his staff to manage formal classroom aspects, field work was to be a major part of the course. As the participants were all likely to arrive with considerable field experience under their belts, and as officers of an elite service and men of some consequence, Khan Sahib thought that in practical matters, they might not take his staff all that seriously. Khan Sahib firmly believed he needed someone who could teach from firsthand experience; someone whose views would command respect, someone who also had his full confidence. That 'someone' was Shoaib.

Of course, Khan Sahib also secretly hoped that Shoaib would become so enthusiastic about the academy that once this first training course was completed, he would agree to become a member of the faculty. Unaware of the full import of the request the chief secretary readily agreed, anything perhaps to get the brilliant but annoyingly obdurate Khan Sahib out of his office. In any case, it did all seem like a very good idea so Shoaib received his orders.

It was 1960 and Shoaib was still brimming with quiet ambition about his civil service career. His course was firmly set—to follow in his grandfather's footsteps and hopefully make a stellar career for himself. Direct as ever, when I asked him how he felt in those days, Shoaib made no apologies, *I was still young and ambitious and very much wanted to succeed in the civil service. Of course I also had young children at the time and I had a very good idea that they and Musarrat would simply revolt if I joined the academy. I had been grateful that Musarrat had agreed to come to East Pakistan in the first place but who knows what might have happened if I had announced we were going to stay 'ad infinitum'*. Who knows indeed for even then Shoaib had learned to step lightly around the fiery spirited and unpredictable Musarrat. He was also learning to do the same with his equally rambunctious daughters.

It is possible that he had a very good idea of what Khan Sahib was up to when Shoaib boarded the train to Comilla, but he was no doubt confident that he could resist every one of Khan Sahib's blandishments to join the 'great experiment' that Comilla was to become. Khan Sahib was not a very good dissembler. Nevertheless, he looked forward with some anticipation to a challenging and educational month or so in the company of a man who was

already a legend; it would also be a welcome break from the absorbing but demanding routine of a young civil service officer.

In 1960, Khan Sahib's academy was located in one of Mahatma Gandhi's old haunts, Abhoy Ashram. The name loosely translates to mean 'a house where there is no fear'. Gandhi had lived there for a time in the 1920s when he was planning the great salt march. In his own way, Khan Sahib was also a quietly clever publicist, although in this he was never a match for Shoaib, but as he wanted to make the point that simple living was one of his basic ideals, he had chosen the site of the *ashram* for the academy. Shoaib writes of being somewhat overwhelmed and embarrassed when he found Khan Sahib waiting on the railway station to welcome him. It is curious he should have felt this way when, continuing the traditions of an earlier era, he always made a point of meeting his juniors when they arrived at Brahmanbaria. Driving into the academy, Khan Sahib had stopped his Volkswagen outside one of the cottages, remarking, as Shoaib laughingly described in a laconic and offhand sort of way, that the cottage was vacant because the previous occupant had died of tuberculosis. A chronic sufferer, the man had lived in the cottage for fifteen years before finally succumbing to the disease. Shoaib confesses to having blanched at the prospect of occupying the cottage for a night let alone a month, but Khan Sahib had breezily assured him not to worry as the cottage had been thoroughly disinfected. It had been some years since the poor man had died. Shoaib says he was nevertheless a little shocked and uneasy, and that for some time, he secretly examined himself for any signs he had contracted the disease. Khan Sahib was said to have a sense of humour, so were his comments made in jest, or was he so little concerned with matters as mundane as a disease then common in India, that he found the matter inconsequential? I would like to think the old man was being mischievous.

Shoaib threw himself, as he often says, 'heart and soul' into helping design the course from a practitioner's viewpoint, and then with seventeen would-be additional deputy commissioners, participated in three intensive weeks of field and classroom training. Soon after the course, Shoaib himself was posted to Mymensingh as the first Additional Deputy Commissioner Development. Life is sometimes quirky. A few years ago, when on a mission to Bangladesh for the United Nations that by chance took him to his old district, and curious to see what the years might have changed, Shoaib dropped into the building that had been his office. His eyes crinkled and he smiled happily at the memory because after all the bitterness and division, some things remain unchanged; there on a polished wooden board, at the very top in fading gold lettering, was his name, Shoaib Sultan Khan.

The word 'develop' can be defined as 'to cause growth or expansion'. It is a moveable word because in the economically advanced countries of the West, development is often associated with rapacious money-makers who pay little heed to environmentally fragile areas. The word can also apply to soberly suited money-men with big ideas who build towering sky-scrapers or plush resorts. However, in much of the world it is a word that still denotes hope, standing for the yearning of people in poor or underdeveloped countries to become more advanced economically and socially, to move from a state of poverty to one of comparative affluence.

In the 1960s, in a world inspired by the words of the charismatic American President John F. Kennedy, this all seemed possible; today it does not. How has glowing optimism changed to dour and glowering loss of hope? For a start, the richer Western nations did not so much use their wealth to achieve the development of people in poor countries than to work, wittingly or not, at teaching those same people to consume—to embed the concept of infinite want deep within their psyches and to accept as an unquestionable national goal never-ending economic growth.

Out of all the early wildly altruistic aims, two matching monoliths have grown—a massive world-encompassing conglomerate of development consultants, academics and contractors who have made a very good living while the living of people to be developed has declined; and an equally massive and complex set of international and national bureaucracies whose employees are paid well no matter what happens to the lives of the multitude of poor they are meant to serve. In a way, development has replaced the potential for business and the opportunities for employment that were always an implicit part of colonialism. How did this all come about? In the late 1950s, following the resounding success of the American led Marshall Plan in rebuilding a war-shattered Europe, and when the red tide of world communism was an appealing option to the idealistic and the poor, the developed world's attention switched to the millions of poor rural families who lived in conditions of abject poverty in most of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa, countries that as a group were to become known as The Third World. Very quickly a development formula was evolved by agencies and institutions in the richer Western countries, a formula which specified a number of seemingly logical steps. Although many variations of this formula evolved, the underlying theme was this: improvements needed to be brought to bear on traditional systems where endemic poverty existed, and these improvements would be derived from developed systems in what came to be known as 'the West'. However, as Tasha Alexander wrote in her book *And Only to Deceive*, '*It is very easy to have strong opinions when holding them does not threaten the comfort of (your) daily life.*' And that is exactly what has happened with development.

Poverty alleviation projects invariably involved employing teams of consultant experts mainly derived from Western countries. These teams were to become a ubiquitous part of an essentially flawed process. It was the task of such teams to study a particular system, in other words a community of people, and then develop a number of ideas into a fixed blueprint that would form the basis of a development project. More often than not, the people to be unwittingly developed played little or no part in determining the nature of projects that often required radical and unwanted changes in traditional activities and outlook, projects for which their government would be loaned or granted large sums of money. In the years that followed, donor governments and agencies and their client or recipient governments were continually confounded at the dismal failure of most development projects. Debt levels of developing countries also rose alarmingly, and rather than diminishing, there was a dramatic increase in the number of families living in abject poverty.

Obviously, something was seriously wrong.

Part of the problem was a certain arrogance. As the Canadian philosopher Ronald Wright wrote in his book *A Short History of Progress*, *'from ancient times until today, civilized people have believed they behave better, and are better'* and this of course includes knowing how best to manage the most recent of humanity's many flawed beliefs, the inevitability of material progress. Over the last few hundred years, not only has 'the West' leapt ahead of the rest of the world in pursuit of material progress, but as Wright argues, nations such as the French, in their imperial heyday with their 'civilizing mission', the British with their 'white man's burden', and now the Americans with their claims of 'safeguarding the civilized world' all have made the arrogant assumption that when it comes to civilization enhancing development, they obviously know best.

Well, do they? Mahatma Gandhi was one who did not think so. Shortly after his arrival in England in the 1930s for talks on Indian self-rule, he was asked by a reporter what he thought of Western civilization. Wright reminds us that having just toured the slums of London Gandhi had replied, 'I think it would be a very good idea'. Perhaps one basic flaw in the West's approach to development was this—as was so clearly demonstrated in the West during the Industrial Revolution—progress and development, although enriching a minority, does not necessarily result in alleviating poverty for the majority. Sometimes progress does exactly the opposite.

To continue this pocket history, so profound was the failure of Western planned, financed, and executed development projects to alleviate poverty across the developing world that by the late 1980s many donor countries decided that development simply did not work. Quietly, and without advertising the fact, they began to divert their resources to disaster relief and other short-term

palliative relief work whose results can be clearly seen, particularly on a TV screen. Of course, although justifiable in humanitarian terms, these interventions did nothing to solve the root causes of poverty. However, and although only whispered in the corridors of power, poverty alleviation was beginning to be seen as an intractable and possibly unsolvable problem. Has the world forgotten the truth behind John Donne's famous words *'no man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.....'*

But this is not the only problem. There is another deeply confounding issue.

In the 1960s, based on Western standards, only about fifty percent of the world's annually available known resources were required to provide a reasonable living for all the people estimated to be living on the earth. By 2005, in little more than forty years, the world's population had grown to six billion. This number of people would need to consume the world's resources at twice the postulated sustainable annual rate to achieve the same result—a reasonable living. If the growth and consumption models of the West were to be the goal, the situation had moved from highly possible to be nigh on impossible. Is there another way?

From the 1960s onwards, at the same time as most of the major aid agencies began to waste millions of dollars on obviously flawed methods, a small group of eccentric lateral thinkers began, tentatively at first, to work out an entirely different approach. One of these was Khan Sahib. His years of wide-ranging study and analysis had led him to a simple set of ideas, a set of ideas that Shoaib was to embrace and one day put to work so wonderfully well; that development must come from within and not from outside and that while organisations for the poor are useful, even essential, their function is a simple one—to provide the spark that starts the conflagration of organisations of the poor. There was however a catch. In order to achieve this state of confident development from within, the rural poor had to be empowered, learn to believe in themselves, have confidence in their own abilities. Empower the poor? Now that is a novel idea. Why would you want to empower the poor? Khan Sahib's answer was simple—only then would real development begin.

The idea did not mean that outside technological advances should be ignored. It meant instead that the identification of problems and the choice of specific technologies and the method of their deployment to resolve those problems should come from within a social group, from within a village or community, and not be decided and then imposed by outside experts, no matter how well meaning. Governments would still need to govern; outside experts and equipment would still be needed. It was just that their deployment would be decided by the community.

Khan Sahib's views were quite radical for the times. He believed that because of their addiction to international finance and their subservience to Western technology, contemporary third-world governments would be of little help, and this applied to Pakistan. In his entertaining paper 'Zombies and Khans', Tariq Husain wrote that throughout his life Khan Sahib firmly believed that whatever the solution, it must be affordable according to the standards of those who were meant to benefit, and for governments, projects had to be able to be funded from within or at levels that did not dwarf internal fund raising capabilities. In short, governments should not be entirely dependent on foreign assistance.

Khan Sahib used irrigation and sewerage to make his point.

The Punjab system was the largest irrigation scheme in the world when it was built and yet, said Khan Sahib, it was built by Indian experts. The chief engineer was indeed an Englishman but he had worked in India for thirty years. He was no fly-in, fly-out foreign consultant. He knew and understood India from years of experience and he spoke the language. All his assistants were Indians and it was they who designed and built the system. Yes, the engineers may have used technologies borrowed from elsewhere, but they also deployed a lot of home-grown knowledge and experience and they were all Indians, not foreign experts.

And then the old man would quietly point to the sewerage system in Karachi, a system grossly neglected for years, a system overwhelmed by massive population growth. Unable to ignore the stench and the pollution, or the increasing clamour of the people, including many of the influential who were starting to be affected, Khan Sahib had shaken his head at government's *mad rush to the international development banks asking for loans.* As a condition the banks required foreign experts to design the system. Without hesitation government acceded. The experts flew in and a colossal and expensive ultra-modern system was designed. However, not only was it expensive, the technology was so complex it was totally impractical in Karachi.

Ignored by government, Khan Sahib's local experts had already come up with a far simpler low-cost design and had successfully tested it in Khan Sahib's famous Orangi project. The beauty of the design was that it was able to be put in place in association with community-built local street feeder systems. Ironically, it was not the international banks that proved to be the sticking point but a government department whom Khan Sahib described as *being just as willing to give up the thrills and highs of a foreign loan as a heroin addict is willing to give up heroin.*

But the situation is changing, slowly perhaps, but nevertheless changing. Governments are beginning to recognize that there just might be something in

the idea of development from within, of the notion that the people may in fact have some good ideas.

And if they do, if development from within at last becomes universally recognized, for Shoaib and for his mentor, it all began in Comilla. But wait a minute, if we are to believe the many critics, academics and others who have studied and written their career-enhancing papers and publications about Comilla in the post-liberation years, the project was a failure. A major criticism, particularly by foreign academics was that the project's main beneficiaries were land owners and that it succeeded in making rich peasants richer while landless people were ignored. Are they right? Shoaib says no; he sees this criticism as a sign that the project succeeded. He believes that the critics have never understood that when Khan Sahib started working in Comilla, only about fifteen percent of rural people were in fact landless. Those who took advantage of what was offered were smarter poor peasants who were able to maximise the output of their one or two acre farms just as the farmers of Japan had once done.

Khan Sahib had a very good idea that this would happen and always argued that Comilla-style development would at least create jobs for the landless minority, and was infinitely preferable to the major and very often disruptive social changes that would otherwise be required. He also argued as does Shoaib, that helping the chronically unemployed or the unemployable such as the old, the ill, or the incapacitated, no matter how admirable or desirable, is a social service rather than a development function and requires a very different set of working rules. In the West, social services are provided by specific government programmes but as we shall later see, in the Indian State of Andhra Pradesh, in a move that seems to validate Khan Sahib's basic thesis and Shoaib's own insistence in believing in the power and ultimate goodness of rural society, communities themselves have begun to provide such services to their less advantaged members. Having failed to factor special provisions for the landless poor into the Comilla project, the critics concluded Khan Sahib had also failed. Perhaps they should visit Andhra Pradesh.

In later years Khan Sahib was himself very critical, openly admitting there were many flaws, among them a reliance on government which permitted, even encouraged many of the cooperatives to fall under the control of the richer, more influential members. He would patiently explain however, that although he had hoped for better, in reality he had expected nothing else. It was a learning experience; there were bound to be mistakes.

Shoaib's view is very simple and in this he always quotes Khan Sahib's oft repeated message that the acme of sophistication is simplicity. His view is this. If ever a community project fails it is because of one of three simple reasons. If people are not willing to cooperate and work nothing will happen; if an active,

competent and honest activist cannot be found nothing will start or if it does it will soon fizzle out; and if a support organisation that is willing to listen to and respond to the wishes of the people is not there, local development initiatives will falter and gradually fade away. If any one of these vital elements is absent or problematic then there will be a failure. And this is what Akhter Hameed Khan pointed out about Comilla in his final monograph, his study of 'Twenty-two Thanas'.

But no matter the furious academic debates, and that the experiment may have resulted in biased advantages for the more able and capable so that landless people may not have benefited as much as landowners, it was a landmark scheme. Many years would pass before Comilla was replaced by anything better. And when this happened it was in the form of two remarkable and very different projects, one that helped to transform a wretchedly poor part of Karachi from desperately unhealthy chaos to organized and thriving communities, and another that metamorphosed an equally poor society of farmers in the high mountain country of the north. However, all this was in the troubled future.

Ten years after leaving East Pakistan, in 1971, just before the disastrous war of separation, Shoaib went back to Comilla, this time as member of a study group to see if there were any ideas worth borrowing for a similar project in West Pakistan, to be run by the newly created Pakistan Academy for Rural Development. At the time, Shoaib was still firmly entrenched in the civil service, as Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, and although he remembers meeting Khan Sahib occasionally in Lahore, he had lost direct touch. He was happily surprised to find the grand old man in Comilla busy writing his famous monograph of his tour of twenty-two thanas. In answer to Shoaib's many curious questions, he encouraged him to visit his own old subdivision. Borrowing a jeep, Shoaib set off. The journey proved to be an eye-opener. *I found it a different world altogether. The whole countryside had been transformed in ten years.* A network of *motorable roads* had replaced the narrow, rutted and often deeply mudded foot and bicycle tracks of his day, and these roads connected thriving markets stocked with an abundance of produce. He writes of hardly being able to believe his eyes when he drove into Thana centres *alive and pulsating with energy and activity*, and of his own Brahmanbaria centre crowded with people all *jostling to learn new techniques or obtain services.* Dazzled by the effectiveness and utilization of the Thana Centres, brimming with enthusiasm and with Khan Sahib's encouragement, he decided to try and make the concept work in the new project near Peshawar.

Then the bitter war of separation began. It was to prove a perilous time for Shoaib. All ideas of doing anything at all about development were shelved as he

fought for professional and personal survival. Eventually posted away from Peshawar, that was the end of it, or so Shoaib thought, as he had ten years before in 1961. Then, after designing a training course for the academy and a year as an Additional Deputy Commissioner Development, Shoaib had left East Pakistan with some alacrity for a posting in the West wing. He did so with no apparent second thoughts, something that Khan Sahib would later smile about. So had Shoaib as he told of how Khan Sahib would sometimes accuse me of running away in a joking sort of manner whenever I started to complain about this thing or that. Khan Sahib might have lost Shoaib in 1961, but he was nothing if not patient. His many studies had taught him of the value and comfort of a long term view.

And sure enough he was right.

Cavagnari's ghost

Sir Louis Pierre Napoleon Cavagnari was one of those larger than life men whose legend still lives on in the Frontier. The son of a distinguished French officer, himself the son of an Italian aristocrat, private secretary to the Emperor Napoleon who went into exile with him to Elba and then to final defeat on the fields of Waterloo. An officer and a gentleman, Cavagnari's father was of course quietly welcome in England where he married an Irish lady of note. His son, Louis Cavagnari, chose service in India after being educated at one of the great English military colleges. Louis went on to become one of that small band of elite officers who were greatly admired by the hill men of India's north-west frontier. At the age of 36, Cavagnari was a Knight Commander of the Star of India and a Knight Commander of the Bath and a glittering future promised. This was not to be; in common with many of his illustrious contemporaries, he was destined to die young. *The New York Times* of September 1879, citing a number of English newspapers described Cavagnari as being so fearless that it was generally assumed in Peshawar that it was only a matter of time before he would be assassinated.

In aspect Cavagnari was apparently utterly un-English. The *London World* described his gallant manner, style of thought and character of action as recalling Continental diplomats of another age. A slight man, Cavagnari never carried arms but was said to 'have an eye like a two edged sword'. He was also never seen to lose his temper but 'on occasions to hit wonderfully hard' once flooring a towering tribesman and so defusing a potentially explosive situation. Cavagnari later confided to a companion officer that 'you should not think for a moment that I had lost my temper. I was perfectly cool, but I was forced into action to maintain my ascendancy', and then after a moment's thoughtful silence he added, 'and of course I wanted to save my life'.

His luck could not possibly last. In 1879, Cavagnari was to lose his life leading a brave but futile sortie at the infamous siege of the residency of Kabul. His severed head was paraded through Kabul on the end of a spear by the mayor. The Raj was not impressed. The stern but militarily brilliant British general Lord Roberts took Kabul and hung the unfortunate mayor on the spot. The mayor did not hang alone dangling from the gibbets in the company of a hundred or so other mutinous Afghan soldiers who may or may not have participated in the attack on the residency. Held back by the bayonets of Robert's disciplined troops, the people of Kabul are reported to have watched the hangings with 'seething anger'. However, it is not for his exploits of miscalculated bravery and 'derring-do' that I write of Cavagnari. It is instead for two reasons, the first eccentric; the second curious.

In common with so many of the idiosyncratic individuals who strode the stage of India in the nineteenth century, this diminutive foreigner who served the British Raj so well had caused to be built a remarkably eccentric house in the remote northern frontier town of Kohat. It was a house whose size and elegance would not look out of place in Europe, a house that was to be known thereafter as 'Cavagnari House'. The residence of a succession of deputy commissioners, few were to ever again match Cavagnari's flamboyant style or gain the same respect from the frontier tribesmen.

In 1963, it was to this grand residence that the newly appointed Deputy Commissioner Shoaib Sultan Khan brought the impulsive and irrepressible Musarrat, two spirited older daughters and baby Falaknaz, and although this quiet new DC may not have matched Cavagnari's flamboyance, he was one of the few to gain the tribesmen's respect.

Wonderfully elegant, the envy of other officers' wives, described by Musarrat's sister Rahat as *simply marvellous, full of light and space*, Cavagnari House also had a decidedly curious aspect—it was a house of ghosts and secrets, a house of restless spirits, and Musarrat saw them: a face would appear before her as she sat by the fireplace. Unable to shake off the vision, Musarrat went to a noted portrait painter and commissioned a portrait based on her description of the floating face. When the portrait arrived it was hung in the great domed living room. And there it hung until one day Shoaib happened to take the time to examine some of the old paintings and sketches hanging on the walls of his office. Shoaib says he could hardly believe his eyes because the painting Musarrat had commissioned, a painting which as Afshan wrote, 'had eyes that followed you', was an unmistakable likeness of Cavagnari. It was all very unsettling so Musarrat had the painting moved to a little-used drawing room.

The mind can play tricks, so can an extraordinary imagination as Afshan has. So there she was, and there sat a room with its spooky portrait. Intensely curious, she

opened the door and looked in and froze. A British soldier wearing a very old fashioned uniform was sitting there quite relaxed in one of the chairs. He looked exactly like the man in the portrait. The child of course fled, ran like the wind calling for her nanny but when they got back the room was empty. Musarrat had shrugged, said it was all nonsense. But that night, after the children had gone to bed Musarrat ordered that the door to the drawing room be locked.

When the family left Kohat and Cavagnaris's extravaganza, the portrait did not leave with them.

But before Kohat, before the haunted magnificence of the Cavagnari house, before settling a mundane land dispute involving the famously infamous Ajab Khan who in the 1930s as pay-back for the British upsetting the *purdah* of his own womenfolk, had caused an enormous uproar by temporarily spiriting away the daughter of a British major, and with a murmured apology, slit the throat of the good major's wife when she would not cease her shrieks; before all this there was a boring year marking time in Islamabad, and then the all-absorbing exhilaration of study at Oxford's Queen Elizabeth House while the young Roohi and Afshan ran wild in Dera Ismail Khan.

And then of course, there was Musarrat's renewed love affair with England.

Shoaib never did gain his sea-legs on the boat from Chittagong. He was happy to set foot on land at the former sleepy fishing port of Karachi, a phenomenally fast growing city inundated with the influx of refugees from India after Partition. His orders were to report to the new capital that was growing out of the plains beneath the Margalla Hills, a few kilometres east of Rawalpindi. It was a relief to travel by train. Finding the federal secretariat was easy. It was located in the former office of the divisional superintendent of railways and so was just a short walk across the lines from the station. There Shoaib presented himself to the establishment secretariat. The federal bureaucracy was in one of those periods of change that inevitably happen from time to time. This time the bright idea was to do away with a lot of lower grades and introduce a new post called 'section officer'. It was more or less equivalent to the old position of undersecretary, and as Shoaib had recently been promoted to a senior scale, section officer is what he became. It was one of those tedious in-between paper-pushing periods for Shoaib. *Yes*, he said with a shrug, *unfortunately it was something that we all had to do*. The post came with an assistant and a peon. Shoaib hunted for a descriptive phrase finally saying, *well, yes really, it was a bit boring*, which probably means compared with the challenges of East Pakistan, it was monumentally dull.

But of course, the good officer Shoaib put up with it. As recompense he was given a room in East Pakistan House (which he regarded as a privilege) until he

was able to find a suitable guest house so that Musarrat and the girls could join him. They did, and so passed an unremarkable year, until to Shoaib's satisfaction and Musarrat's delight, it was off to England again. Perhaps there are some advantages to an otherwise boring job that keeps you in view. *Yes,* smiled Shoaib, *somehow I was selected to be sent off to a course* at *Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford.*

Although Musarrat was cheered by the news, Roohi and Afshan were not. The first time Shoaib and Musarrat had gone to England the two girls had been left in India with Shoaib's family in Moradabad. Neither remembers it as a particularly happy time although life improved when they contrived a move to Karachi to live with a grand-aunt who obviously totally spoiled the two. Whether or not Shoaib and Musarrat intended to leave the girls this second time is not entirely clear. Musarrat says she wanted her girls to come, had told them often how wonderful England was. However, once the girls met their maternal grand-aunt who lived with her gentle lawyer husband in the wonderfully sprawling family *haveli* with its many rooms in the ancient trading town of Dera Ismail Khan on the upper Indus River, England just dropped off the horizon. There was also of course the girls' much loved and always beautifully dressed nanny Maijano who was often taken to be Musarrat's sister. Given special permission to leave the Swat Valley by the Wali—women were not usually permitted to leave—Maijano remained part of the household for her entire life. *No, we were never neglected* said Roohi reflectively during that long day of talk in Bangkok, *my mother always looked after us when we were young, but when we were older she was more like a friend although she insisted on some rules and some discipline.* Roohi had smiled then, *and yes, we really ran wild in D.I. Khan and had a wonderful time. We did not miss them for a minute. They were not bad parents of course but by then we were already such independent children and as you can imagine, we were the spoiled 'princesses' of D.I. Khan.*

Sometimes, talking with Musarrat deep into the night at the house at Heather Walk was like trying to capture a vagrant breeze. Time or topic did not matter; past events melding seamlessly one into the other. After awhile I was ready for it, ready to leap from Lahore to London in a sentence. It certainly wasn't that Musarrat was vague, simply that she preferred to follow whatever took her fancy. She would not be restricted by having to walk stolidly along a linear time-line. I am certain she knew very well what she was doing as she would smile and her eyes would twinkle as I scurried to keep up. It became a game, where would she take us next? This time it was eating chips in a Rawalpindi picture theatre using twenty rupees borrowed from an Islamabad shopkeeper, and then it was back once more to England and Oxford.

Before Musarrat arrived Shoaib was allocated rooms in Black Hall. With his knife sharp memory for detail he said with a smile, *yes, it was just short of Carfax at 17 St Giles.* The antiquity of his rooms at the hall rather took his fancy but they would not do for a family. *But I was lucky again,* said Shoaib; *I managed to get a flat in 14 St Giles, just next door.* Musarrat arrived carrying the baby Falaknaz. *I don't know why Roohi and Afshan wanted to stay in D.I. Khan with their uncle and aunt,* she had said shrugging her shoulders, her tone suggesting she thought they were silly to miss such an opportunity, *I had told them London was wonderful, but they did not want to come so we left them for six months.*

Shoaib was in his element at Oxford. The course focused on the practices of central government which may well sound tedious, but for a keen young man with his sights still firmly set on climbing the civil service ladder it was like icing on the cake. Shoaib remembers it as being *all very interesting, all the more so because the British Council had managed to attract officers from most of the former colonies. It was not all that formal, a nice exchange of ideas,* bright young men, all with ideas and ideals, eager to prove to the world that independence would work.

While Shoaib's memories centre on the college and his studies and the life of a gentleman-scholar, Musarrat's are those of mundane domestic difficulties. By then she had begun to have money of her own, but transferring funds was not a simple thing and somehow the money she had given to a sister's friend had not arrived. Down to her last ten pounds, she was shopping for ice-cream for her toddler 'Munchu', who was a fussy eater, when an older Pakistani man approached her respectfully. He had begged her to listen, and overcame her initial caution by saying that she looked so honest and nice and that he needed to send money to his children quickly but was worried that normal transfer just would not work. *Oh yes,* lectured a suddenly worldly-wise Musarrat, *normal channels were very unreliable in those days so I told him to come to our flat and talk to my husband.* The man, who was to become a friend, did so. *Hah,* smiled Musarrat, *he gave Shoaib two hundred pounds,* a lot of money in those days, the equivalent of eight or nine thousand pounds now. Shoaib had no idea what to do but ever practical, the land-owning Musarrat did. *I called my father's manager and told him to go himself to the village and give the money to the family. And off he went straight away,* of course he did, and as for Musarrat, well, she saw the whole thing as a small miracle because *at last we had some money just when we needed it, and all by chance.*

Then she had smiled and said, but you know I should not have been surprised. All through our lives people have trusted us, have trusted Shoaib, and in life trust is very important; and here Musarrat had looked at me directly to make sure I would

take in what she was about to say. Shoaib is a man anyone can trust, and then she had smiled a little secret smile, yes, always you can trust Shoaib.

Musarrat was far more confident on this her second trip to the UK. In Oxford, the flat Shoaib had taken had a drawing room and it was there that Musarrat began her practice of establishing a salon, a social centre that quickly became a hub, a home away from home for all the young Pakistani gentlemen-students. She was the only wife and a woman with wonderful presence and force of personality. As Roohi said, laughing at Musarrat's cleverness, *there she was, away from all those conservatives in Pakistan, 'contaminating' the minds of the young friends of my father, turning them into thinkers and activists instead of staid civil servants who will always 'toe the line'; all those young men.*

And it was not only politics, said Roohi full of gleeful admiration, *but she was also at work as a matchmaker, finding 'suitable' wives for them all, and lord knows what else—she was such a busy-body. And of course, she was slowly changing the way my father thought as well. You know it was then I think she started to push him, really push him. He was quite laid-back and just a bit conservative and cautious although he wanted to do good things, but it was she who pushed him.* The Oxford salon was a 'behind the scenes' experiment that Musarrat was to repeat again in other places. Roohi was sure that the salons were an experiment that worked. *You know,* she said with total surety, *years later they still used to talk about her huge influence on them, how she made them question everything.* And of course Shoaib was there too, and who knows how much of this was due to his own quiet and ever thoughtful contributions.

The months passed all too quickly for Shoaib and more so for Musarrat who found that her dreams could come true. Amazingly, British citizenship was available, a never to be repeated opportunity; she wanted Shoaib to grab this with both hands. To her bitter disappointment he refused point blank. For me it was simply out of the question at the time, absolutely unthinkable. Totally dedicated to pursuing his civil service career in Pakistan there was no way he would consider staying in England, and although dual citizenship was allowed for others, it was forbidden for government officers. And then he smiled ruefully, I suppose I could have done it, but could I have kept it a secret from them, and then Shoaib had smiled again and shaken his head, no, not me, I could not have lied. Shoaib believes that Musarrat still fumes at his unwillingness to even consider her proposal, and even wonders himself if his flat refusal was the sensible thing to do. It was right for me, he said after a little thought, but perhaps not sensible. Today, even for a man of Shoaib's stature, obtaining a visa is becoming increasingly bothersome, and when you arrive in London with a Pakistani passport they ask you all kinds of questions. It must be absolutely irksome for a man of Shoaib's stature; a world apart from those heady earlier days.

If we could go back in time there are things that most of us would do differently and for Shoaib this is one of them. He believes now he just was not thinking, that what he should have done was to arrange for Musarrat to become a British citizen when it was so much easier, yes, that is what I should have done, upset still at this rare failure to consider the interests of those dear to him, but I was too full of my own ambitions to think of this. Now all her daughters are British citizens and she is not. She is allowed to stay there only because she is so ill. If she were to leave she may not be able to go back. That is the only real regret I have about it all, but you know, you just don't think of these things at the time.

No, you don't. All you think about is the brilliant future your grandfather mapped out for you, and of course for Shoaib the car enthusiast, a New Opel Record and another adventurous overland trip. With a visa for Bulgaria they were able to avoid Greece; it was a lot of fun as always and this time I arranged for someone to be waiting for us with the money so there was no delay in Quetta.

Maybe the trip back helped mollify Musarrat, maybe it was seeing her children again, but whatever it was, life for the family seems to have settled once more into the peripatetic pattern familiar to all ambitious civil servants. No sooner had Shoaib arrived back in Pakistan and had done the rounds of family and friends than he was posted to Lahore to the secretariat as deputy secretary and ex-officio secretary to the provincial cabinet and the governor, who at the time was the powerful feudal leader, the Nawab of Kalabagh. It was a brief but fortuitous posting, all the more so because unknown to him at the time, Shoaib's integrity and manner greatly impressed the nawab. After five months in this hothouse of power and intrigue, and despite Musarrat's love affair with this cultured city, the only one in Pakistan it was, as Shoaib said, time for me to go to the field.

Shoaib sought a posting to Hazara, then one of the biggest, most interesting and most coveted districts. It had a good climate which would suit Musarrat, and included such gems as the valley of Swat. However, the Chief Secretary Mr. Abbasi, an ex-ICS officer and friend of the family, counselled against it. Hazara was Ayub Khan's district and so was politically sensitive. By this Abbasi meant that the president was accustomed to having things go his way in matters big and small. He was sure that the ethically conscious and totally unbending Shoaib would have trouble, and most probably sooner than later. So this is how, instead of Hazara, Shoaib was posted to Kohat.

Even there, he lasted less than a year and a half.

Ah yes, Shoaib sighed, *Kohat and the Cavagnari house, a magnificent place, yes, I was King of Kohat.* In a way, Shoaib felt he had come home. Kohat was tribal country, Pashtun to a man, as were his own ancestors. There was also a hill station for the family to escape the torrid summer heat, the work was

absorbing and even exciting at times, the DC's house was magnificent—it was *a dream posting*. At first Kohat had seemed trouble-free, but this was not to last. It all began with buses.

Ayub Khan had formed a new political party, the Muslim League. In Falaknaz House in Islamabad there is a portrait of Musarrat's famous grandfather, a finely-drawn old man, crisp turban, white beard clipped and disciplined, the ribbon of a decoration across his chest, the sort of man you instinctively knew was a man of honour, a man whose word could always be trusted. The scion of an old landowning family, he had served in Kohat in 1919 before being posted as Political Agent in Parachinar. It just so happened that the father of one of the Muslim League candidates for the provincial assembly was a great friend of this wonderful old man, so Musarrat's father had sent a message asking Shoaib to look out for him. The Muslim League was the president's 'new political baby', a party he himself had formed to counter the powerful Awami League and the new Sindh-based Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

So, of course, said Shoaib, *as the man was a family friend I was very nice to him.* But niceness has its limits and when Shoaib received a peremptory message asking him to arrange twenty or thirty buses to take people from Kohat to meet the visiting president, Shoaib was affronted. The office of the DC was not a travel agency nor was it there to 'fix' things for any politician. Older and wiser now, Shoaib admits he may have been overly prickly because instead of a diplomatic refusal what he did was this. *I called him straight away and said 'are you out of your senses asking the DC to arrange buses for you? Yes, you are close to our family and I respect you very much for this, but please never again ask such things of me'. And that was the end of it,* said Shoaib. Except, of course, it wasn't the end, it was the beginning. The new Pakistan was a very different place to the India of Shoaib's grandfather, and Shoaib knew this. At this stage in his life he may well have been a bit imperious but he was no fool.

With the benefit of hindsight and age, Shoaib admitted as much. Of course, it wasn't the end and slowly I think small things built up. The small things were to culminate in the Kohat circuit bungalow. A close family friend, again from Dera Ismail Khan, arrived in Kohat. A retired judge of the high court, the man had become a minister in Ayub Khan's government and as a family friend, counselled Shoaib that the president was very unhappy with him. Of the incident Shoaib says, well, at first I thought he meant the president of the local Muslim League, but no, to my astonishment it was no less than the President of Pakistan. Unfortunately, this took place in front of a number of other people, in public, as Shoaib recalls, which for Shoaib the DC was very embarrassing. I was completely taken aback, and my only recourse seemed to be to offer to resign. I remember saying that my letter of appointment stated that I served at the pleasure of the president, and if he is unhappy then fine, I would resign. This was very definitely not the reaction the minister and family friend had sought and he immediately retracted his remark. It was too late. A four-column headline was splashed across the pages of a national English daily newspaper, 'Minister on the Hunt'....'What the Deputy Commissioner said'.... and so on, Shoaib said, laughing now, although it was no laughing matter then. It does not pay to embarrass a president in public. The story even reached the United States, where Musarrat's cousin Humayan was studying for his doctorate. Humayan had immediately penned a letter saying how proud of Shoaib they all were in America. It was the best thing to come out of it all, admitted Shoaib. More was on its way.

In 1959, Ayub Khan had introduced a new system of local government known as Basic Democracies. Shoaib had been DC Kohat for a bit more than a year when in 1964 and 1965, first local government and then the presidential elections were held. After five years or so in power, General Ayub Khan wanted to legitimise his position and so decided to hold elections. Determined to win, Ayub Khan's party people began to lean on various civil service officers to ensure the opposition was kept out of sight. On one occasion, each of the presidential candidates was scheduled to address the newly elected local government candidates or 'Basic Democrats'. Ayub Khan was to talk first and was to be followed by the only candidate he feared, the founding father's sister, Fatima Jinnah. *What did they think we were,* Shoaib said, *the message went out for us to arrange that when Fatima Jinnah stood up to speak all the candidates should walk out? Of course, we couldn't do that nor would we. I was not there at the time but the commissioner later telephoned me and said he had told 'them' I would certainly not be party to such a thing. I was very grateful to him for this.*

In those days, deputy commissioners and political agents were extremely influential in the tribal areas; in Kohat in particular the tribal agencies were entirely under the thumb of the political agent. Shoaib began to come under increasing pressure. By now, Shoaib's former probationer and friend Kunwar Idris had been posted out of the principality of Chitral, a posting he had loved, to Peshawar and then as Political Agent of Mohmand, one of the most backward tribal areas in the Frontier province. An old man now, Kunwar smiled as he whispered in the shadows of his office, shutters closed as if to exclude the rude world of Karachi in 2007, one day the commissioner called us and said the governor of West Pakistan, the Nawab of Kalabagh, is very keen that the frontier tribal areas should return a 100 per cent vote in favour of Ayub Khan. Well, naturally there were rumblings amongst us. An older and more experienced man may well have simply stood his ground, but the commissioner was apparently new to the job and only a few years older than Shoaib and Kunwar.

To the commissioner's relief and almost to a man, his deputies and agents refused to interfere with the vote. As Kunwar said, *we tried to explain that in all*

probability every tribesman would vote for Ayub Khan, in part because they simply would not want a woman, even one as famous as Fatima Jinnah, as president. However we said point blank that as impartial officers, we cannot tell them how to vote. Shoaib was right in the thick of it, and although Kohat was one of the best postings possible, Kunwar describes him as standing totally firm and at the forefront, saying emphatically that as he could not in all conscience carry out the instruction, government had best transfer him to a less contentious position. *It was a brave stand. None of us would willingly leave a post like Kohat but he did.*

Shoaib himself provided a bit more detail. Somehow or other he had managed to get on the wrong side of a man called Azmat Ali, the Muslim League's local candidate, and Azmat had told his masters' that Shoaib stood firmly in the way of the election of any Muslim League candidate. Perhaps Azmat believed Shoaib could not help but be influenced by Musarrat and her family, all of whom were highly vocal supporters of Fatima Jinnah—during the election campaign the family house in Peshawar was said to be lit up like a Christmas tree there were so many lamps (Fatima Jinnah's choice for an election symbol). *Hah,* Musarrat had said derisively one night in London, her face animated, making no secret of her preferences, *when Ayub Khan said 'I will wring Fatima Jinnah's neck like a chicken' I had no more time for him, nor any time for his idea of Islamabad. I would not buy land there although later maybe a house, but not land. I had no time for Islamabad or Ayub Khan.*

Spurred by the urgent whispers of the devious Azmat and perhaps worried by the obvious preferences of Musarrat's family, the old feudal, the Nawab of Kalabagh, took himself to the frontier and summoned Shoaib to a meeting. Now Shoaib had only recently been secretary to the nawab's cabinet and so after a bit of talk about the games the president's son was playing, and the nawab's displeasure about the rising wealth and power of the new industrialists and the declining influence of the feudalists he came to the point: the president wanted an assurance from the DC Kohat that his man Azmat Ali would be elected. Shoaib, of course, refused courteously explaining that in all likelihood Azmat Ali would be elected, but as it was a secret ballot, he could not, and in fact would not, give any guarantees. Expecting the worst, Shoaib admits to being totally stunned when the nawab smiled and said he was proud of him, that he was certain this would be Shoaib's reply, and that he was only too sorry that he could not keep Shoaib on in Kohat but that the president wanted to be sure of taking the entire province.

Impressed, the Nawab of Kalabagh, a feudal lord, offered Shoaib his choice of alternative positions. The nawab had guaranteed any district in Punjab that Shoaib would care to select. As Shoaib said, *he was a feudalist of the old order,*

very rich and powerful and very used to getting his own way. He assured me I would not have to worry about any problems at all, that he would take care of them, and that all I had to do was name the district and he would see to it. But Shoaib believed otherwise and had quietly replied that if he was simply posted to another district, in all probability the nawab would be faced with having to deal with the same sort of problem all over again. Instead, he asked for a non-controversial position in the federal government while the elections were in process. Vastly amused, and secretly impressed—as a feudal lord, he knew only too well that men like Shoaib were few and far between—with a wave of his hand *this was granted,* said Kunwar, shaking his head and smiling at the follies of such comparatively innocent days, *so he left and went to an obscure corner of the secretariat. Unlike me, he was never as fascinated with 'colonial' positions as I was.* But that was not the end of it. Shoaib found that *to my great good fortune, and within only five days of my taking charge of a federal government posting, the position of deputy director of the civil service academy in Lahore became available. This was a dream of mine, it was simply wonderful.*

Could the old nawab be seen smiling to himself in the background? The Establishment Secretary, M. Azfar, a university colleague of Shoaib's father, admitted being totally nonplussed, and asking Shoaib what he had done to cause the nawab to praise him so highly.

In retrospect an older, mellower Shoaib admitted that *yes, I suppose I was then a bit arrogant and straight-laced,* and then he had straightened in his chair, *but then again, I had kept to Burgess' principles, I had not given in, I had not compromised.*

This event, this refusal to bend to the political will of presidents and their acolytes and of being saved by the casual munificence of a feudal lord may have appeared to Shoaib to be the main act in the unfolding play of life. But in fact it was a sideshow; what might then have seemed little more than a bit-part in the life of Shoaib and his family in Kohat would seethe in the mind of a man who ten years later would be one of those who connived to bring Shoaib and the trail-blazing Daudzai project down. Why did Bandial, for that was his name, why did this man, who in 1975 was Chief Secretary of the North West Frontier Province and the ex-officio chairman of Shoaib's revitalised rural development institute, why did he do this? What on earth could have happened in Kohat that it would still be remembered? How could it have been something so inconsequential to Shoaib that he says he has no idea what it was?

It was Tariq Husain who as we know was one of the 'famous four' on the epic trek to Gilgit in 1982, who believes he stumbled on an answer.

Daudzai was a puzzle to the ever curious Tariq. He had become increasingly intrigued by Shoaib's famous first attempt at rural development especially the way it had been closed down and totally puzzled about Shoaib's supposed disgrace. Already one of 'Shoaib's young men' Tariq found it hard to conceive how the 'Daudzai debacle' could have come about. One day, on his way to Gilgit, he happened to stay in Islamabad for a few days and was invited to dinner at a former school friend's house. Unknown to Tariq at the time, his friend's father was that same Bandial who as chief secretary, had apparently gone along with the trumped up charges of conspiracy and sedition, and who did not demur when the then Establishment Secretary, Vaqar Ahmad, a man whom Shoaib says had a 'great prejudice against CSP's as a class', in reply to a devastated Shoaib's cry from the heart *well, you might as well hang me*, Vaqar Ahmed had nodded his head and said levelly, *oh yes, we will hang you.*

So there I was, said the urbane Tariq as we sipped our drinks and nibbled on cheese and biscuits, *invited to dinner and of course my host's parents came in to say hullo. My friend introduced me. When they did, the father, this Bandial chap just stared at me and began to shout and spit with rage. I had never seen anyone spit with rage before, and then he shouted in a hoarse angry voice 'I hear you have met Shoaib Sultan'. The venom that came out of that man was just incredible.* What seemed to anger Bandial most, as we will later see, was that not only had Shoaib been cleared of all charges, Shoaib had also engineered his own unique style of escape. As far as Bandial knew, Shoaib was the only civil servant granted permission to leave on deputation to take up an enviably well paid UN consultancy and then some years later, an equally well paid position in the Aga Khan Foundation. And to rub salt into Bandial's wounds, Shoaib had gone on to achieve a level of national and international fame that rendered him untouchable by those in government who would have liked to see him humbled.

Totally embarrassed, the young Tariq had no idea what to do or say, but when he had eventually made his escape from the Bandial house, his curiosity was piqued. Obtaining no clear answers from Shoaib or from associates who knew Shoaib at the time, Tariq could not forget. What was it that had made Bandial so angry?

When I told this story to Shoaib his eyebrows had risen. Pressed further, he had shrugged and in a quiet and reasonable voice said he simply had no idea why Bandial should still be angry after all the years. Tariq says he simply could not get the incident out of his head, but as is so often the case, one day by chance he stumbled onto a possible explanation.

Sometime later, at a party in Islamabad, Tariq met the daughter of an air force officer who had been stationed at Kohat when Shoaib was taking over the post of DC from Bandial. In response to Tariq's gentle probing, she said she

thought there had been a dispute or a fight, possibly involving the men or their two wives and that it was rumoured that there were *shoes flying from one end of the house to the other.* A child at the time that was all she knew.

One night in London when I asked if she had upset Mrs. Bandial in any way, Musarrat had chuckled and had then said with a mischievous smile, *I never showed my temper to anyone.* Then she had shrugged and smiled, her eyes twinkling, *well, perhaps I did show my anger sometimes to my children but never to servants or to strangers.*

And with Shoaib, I had asked, wondering immediately if I had overstepped the mark. I hadn't, but she would not be drawn, instead she had laughed and shaken her finger. And of course there really is no secret; sometimes Musarrat had indeed been angry with Shoaib, sometimes furiously so. Afshan writes of Musarrat once lying down in front of Shoaib's vehicle to prevent him escaping before an argument could be concluded, before the last thing had been said. I can imagine Shoaib's driver just shrugging his shoulders, stepping out of the vehicle to perhaps smoke a quick *bidi* and wait for the commissioner sahib to sort things out with his wife.

And then in Bangkok there was a little more. Oh yes, said Roohi without hesitation, *she used to throw shoes if she became angry, high heeled Italian shoes, anything she could reach. She was a very funny person and she did not care what others thought.*

The granddaughter of feudal frontier landowners and raised in a wealthy, educated and sophisticated Indian family, Shoaib said *Musarrat was not very enamoured of these big places. She was totally unlike other wives who wanted big houses and prime postings.* She had no need of such trappings to bolster her self-confidence. She already knew who she was and where she came from and she was not afraid of confrontation. So was a shoe thrown in anger, was this enough to have Shoaib hung—it may well have been? For although denying absolutely that there was ever any fight in Kohat, that she threw a shoe and so offended Mrs. Bandial, Musarrat agreed without hesitation that *yes, somehow she* (Mrs. Bandial) *did become against us perhaps because we took over such a good and prestigious posting as Kohat was in those days.*

Musarrat's sister Rahat, who was a welcome visitor to the Cavagnari house, a tiny figure now sitting behind her desk at the Spinzer press in Peshawar where she had sat for fifty years, smiled softly. *Ah yes*, she whispered in a voice worn with work and worry, as a human being Shoaib was one of the best, the sort of person you think might be just too good to succeed. *But Musarrat saw things that he did not, and influenced him to be hard when he might not have been.* Musarrat, the first lady of Kohat, would certainly not have been above putting

Mrs. Bandial in her place and then dismissing it all from her memory as inconsequential.

There is a postscript to the 'flying shoe' story. Years later, when Tariq Husain was visiting Shoaib's mentor, Akhter Hameed Khan in Karachi, they happened to drive past the lush farm of a certain Agha Shahi, a man who had been foreign secretary when the Daudzai project had been closed down. Never one to mince his words, AHK had scowled, saying that Agha Shahi was not only robbing the poor of water with his pumps and deep wells but he also had been his nemesis. The old man had taken the closing down of Daudzai as a personal attack. It had been Agha Shahi in fact who had summoned AHK to his office all those years ago and accused him of collaborating with a CIA spy, supposedly Shoaib. Of course it was all a total fabrication but as Tariq said, smiling ruefully that evening in his farm house just outside Islamabad, what really mattered was that the flying shoe in Kohat not only came back to hit Shoaib, it also hit AHK, and it was still flying in 1991 in Karachi as AHK was still angry with Agha Shahi.

As for Bandial, well, he was just one more in the usual procession of unremarkable civil servants. When he left Kohat his name sank without a trace. In contrast, Shoaib was DC Kohat for a brief year and a half and yet ten years later, when the diplomat to be, Akram Zaki, sought rescue on the Kohat road, worrying for his family's safety when darkness fell, he found that it was not the current DC's name or even his own status that was of help, *but that everyone, from the villagers who fed and gave us shelter to the lorry driver who took our chit to Rawalpindi, everyone knew Shoaib Sultan Khan and that was the best help*. As he was to do time and again, Shoaib had written his name in the minds of the people in indelible ink.

How did he do it?

How did this quiet and unassuming man embed his name so quickly and so permanently in the minds of all who came under his spell? Perhaps it was simply that he was a man of honour, a man to whom the truth meant only one thing, a man the people could trust.

And it was not only on the big issues that Shoaib followed Burgess' 'golden rules' to the letter, it was not only refusing to fudge the books when traders whispered that they would pay a rupee or two over the minimum price government had set for the paddy rice Shoaib was once ordered to sell, promising that no one would ever know, *it was simply not the kind of thing I was willing to do and I made sure everybody knew this. You had to draw the line immediately where anything smelt of corruption. It was instilled in me from a very early age that government expected its servants to be honest, and to never compromise their integrity*. No, it was not only these larger issues in the affairs

of a district where Shoaib refused to bend it was also in matters that others might see as inconsequential, such as cinema tickets.

Roohi and Afshan were both tomboys and the great Cavagnari house and its grounds and orchards were their territory. When Shoaib and Musarrat were away on field trips, riotous games were played in the great six-arched dome of the house, and when bored by these, they would commandeer Shoaib's vehicle and demand to be taken to one of the several cinemas Kohat boasted. Their favourite was the privately run cinema in Kohat town rather than the army or air force cinemas. *Of course*, Afshan was to write, *as we were the DC's children we did not have to pay*, being ushered to sofas on the balcony and given chocolates and any drink they asked for. The film, 'Ajab Khan' was their favourite and they went to see it many times, demanding the scenes shot in the Cavagnari house to be replayed again and again, ignoring as Afshan unblushingly admits *the screams of protest from the audience*.

How long this went on is unclear but one day Shoaib and Musarrat returned from a trip earlier than the girls' expected. Finding them absent, Shoaib took himself to the cinema, and in Afshan's words, *sat there silently without letting us know while we stuffed ourselves and demanded the Cavagnari scene be replayed*. For once Shoaib was seriously angry with his daughters. Confining them to the house for a couple of weeks he summoned the cinema owner to his office and laid down the law. Never again was the owner to give free passes and free food to his children, or allow them to disturb the enjoyment of other people; if he did Shoaib would not renew the man's license. The owner was then dismissed but not before Shoaib had paid for all the movies his daughters had watched and all the free food they had been given.

And although it was not his intention, everyone in Kohat knew what Shoaib had done and it would be added to his legend.

A First Class Trench

It is 1965. In India, the government will not budge from the belief that Kashmir is an integral part of their country. India determines to hold on to this 'lake and mountain paradise' no matter the cost. It is 1965. Musarrat and Shoaib are playing bridge. Ayub Khan decides to go to war. The announcement stops the bridge game in its tracks. There is a flurry of action. The girls are immediately packed off to the comparative safety of the family *haveli* in Dera Ismail Khan. For once, they are not given a choice. They both remember being furious at being shunted off to a safe backwater, far away from any excitement or action, or so their parents thought.

It was not a good war for Pakistan if any war can be said to be good. Lahore was very close to the front line and citizens were advised to dig trenches and dugouts for their own protection in the event of an air raid; for government servants a trench was mandatory. At the academy there was furious activity as trenches were dug. Would the compound be targeted by the Indian Air Force? It might. Best take no chances. Akram Zaki, Shoaib and Tariq Siddiqui, all of whom were to become the best of friends, accordingly set their servants to work to dig trenches. *My trench was very ordinary,* laughed Akram as he sat in the inquisition chair at Aga Khan Road, *like all trenches, it was dirty and dusty or if it rained, full of mud and water and thick with mosquitoes.* Zaki says he did not care what his trench was like; if the academy was attacked he had decided to stay put in his house and die in comfort. As he said laughing, *a direct hit is a direct hit whether it is on the house or in the trench.*

Musarrat had other ideas. Akram again, indeed yes, Musarrat really went to town. Her trench should have been awarded a gold medal. It was in fact a work of art. Carefully constructed, there was a floor of woven palm fibre mats overlain by carpets, beds and bedding, tea making equipment of course and even a telephone. Musarrat was not about to stay in her house if Indian bombs started falling, nor was she going to be uncomfortable. The telephone was actually a curious addition because Musarrat disliked using them. Perhaps it was because she came from a generation where telephones were not for casual use, where penmanship was an art form and letters were the way friends and families kept in touch, and where, more often than not, telephone messages and telegrams were harbingers of tragedy or great change. Is there an answer? There is. The telephone had been connected to the trench for one good reason; to ensure Shoaib would be there too, and not remain sitting in his office poised, as good men do at such times, by a telephone waiting for a fateful call, waiting to take action.

Musarrat's trench replaced her house as a centre for gatherings and amusements, but eventually as air attacks against strategic targets intensified and as Indian tanks began to roll across the border, Shoaib and Musarrat decided that discretion was the better part of valour. They chose Kohat as a safe haven but overlooked the fact that although the town was a long way from the Indian border, it hosted a Pakistan Air Force base. Sitting back in his chair, Zaki had chortled, *yes, they left for the safety of Kohat and the very next day Kohat was bombed while Lahore was left alone. So they came back, and why not?* And then an uneasy truce was negotiated and life at the academy began again, a life for Shoaib that provided a new beginning and a refuge.

In 1961, government decided to take the final step away from the Raj, and remove the Oxbridge year from the training schedule of its young civil and foreign-service probationers. No longer would they stroll the ancient

quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge, instead, they would be given an entirely national perspective. The decision was met with glum faces as the social glamour of an Oxbridge education had yet to fade. The privileged education that Shoaib and his immediate contemporaries enjoyed meant that to some extent an Oxbridge man was super eminent. It also gave to those who were susceptible an unfortunate view of their own importance. In Humayan's words, *some of us were prigs.* They were also held in high esteem.

In 1964, the first two batches of civil, and foreign, service probationers, forty in all, entered the academy. When Shoaib took over as one of three new deputy directors in 1965, there was a full batch in training. *And then,* he said with great satisfaction, *I had two more batches pass through my hands. Of course, I missed the 1967 batch when I was away in England at the Royal Institute of Public Administration, but picked up again with the batch of 1968.*

In total, nearly two hundred young men, Pakistan's elite, were to pass through his hands. Many would go on to hold high positions as ambassadors and chief secretaries, and as if such a thing were commonplace, Shoaib continued, almost to a man they became my lifelong friends. In future, wherever in Pakistan or the world chance took him, Shoaib was certain to find one of these men in a position of influence and power. It was the beginning of the vast network of friends and colleagues that Shoaib was to develop and cultivate, a network that he has never used for personal gain but which perhaps more than anything else has been pivotal to his professional success. And not only did these men and others like them become willing members of Shoaib's invisible network, not only was he universally admired and revered, more than a few actually loved him.

If the civil service academy was a beginning for this quiet but increasingly charismatic man, it was also a refuge. Musarrat also bloomed. She started her 'kitchen salon', she wrote and published her first book of short stories, and loved Lahore with its cosmopolitan culture, its literature and art. As Shoaib enthused, *Musarrat was a wonderful hostess and people congregated in our house. There it was, twenty acres right in the middle of the city of Lahore, palatial buildings, liveried staff, a wonderful environment, magic in a way. I was reliving my childhood.* And so he was. The academy was a world apart from the harsh realities of Pakistan. For a precious few years he could ignore the increasing power of the military, and the outside world where standards of governance were fast sliding.

The ebullient politician and ambassador-to-be Akram Zaki and the curiously intellectual Tariq Siddiqui made up the trio of new deputy directors. Zaki believes they all developed a rare and close relationship. More often than not, Zaki explained, sitting forward with the pose of a politician out to convince his voters, civil servants in the same position in the same institution develop rivalries. For these three, rivalry

was replaced by comradeship, somehow we three fairly different types meshed. Zaki describes the academy years as being a really lovely time. We all worked with a oneness of approach, and we all tried to imbue the concepts of genuine service in the probationers so that they would not see themselves as elite and authoritarian. An older, former ICS officer invariably held the position of director as a sinecure. Father figures, these men rarely interfered with the daily regime of their younger and more enthusiastic deputies.

Tariq's Yugoslavian wife had slipped away, and although his parents lived with him, he was reclusive. Zaki described him as *something of a hermit*. A quiet man and an intellectual he became one of Shoaib's best friends. Widely read, he adopted Shoaib's daughters as his own, introducing them to writers such as Solzhenitsyn, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. A secular savant no more, although Tariq agreed to an interview he remained elusively enigmatic throughout and countered most of my questions with those of his own. Now a religious scholar and mystic, he seemed almost too clever to be real. He took his leave from Falaknaz House smiling to himself.

Humayan, frank and to the point as only a cousin can be, as someone very sure of his own abilities, said that although Shoaib was not a distinguished academic he nevertheless performed well at the academy. *Yes,* he had mused *it was a very good posting and very useful because he built long-term relationships that were very valuable to him in the future,* and then he had laughed, *actually I don't really know how he got it, I would have liked it myself.* Shoaib had burst out laughing when he heard of Humayan's comment, *it is just like him,* Shoaib had laughed, *always so direct, always so honest.*

If Shoaib was in his element at last so was Musarrat. It was not only the three men who, in Zaki's words, meshed, *somehow our families meshed also.* Zaki laughed at the memory, *yes, we were all just one big family and there was no distinction between our houses.* At any one time, any or all of Shoaib's and Zaki's children could be found eating or sleeping in any one of the three deputy directors' sprawling bungalows. For once, Musarrat had not hesitated, had not stopped to think when I asked about the academy years. Her answer was immediate, *Lahore? Oh yes, we loved it there. My children were young and Afshan rode horses* and unusually for the rebellious Afshan, she did not make trouble for anyone.

So many people used to stay with us Musarrat had whispered, as if the memory might take fright and vanish if she spoke any louder, *our house was like a railway platform.* The sprawling deputy director's bungalow had three bedrooms, *and I used one for children, always so many children but it had two bathrooms, one for Shoaib and me, and one for guests, so many guests.* Lost in happy memory, eyes misting with tears, Musarrat described her house as being

always full of people and of starting a weekly salon, a tea party for Shoaib's students, six or seven at a time. Afshan recalls how she and her sisters were always invited to the 'first sitting', the first time a group were invited', how the probationers were spoken of as 'brothers'. *I used to think how handsome they all looked in their black sherwanis.*

What a time it must have been, a wonderful chance for Musarrat to be able to influence so many young and receptive minds, men who were to lead the country. *We would talk for hours, at least two or three,* Musarrat smiled, triumphant still, *and I would tell stories about how to behave, how to treat people, how to help the poor, and they would listen and love me for it.* And they did, an entire generation of young men, indoctrinated with the ideas and ideals of this remarkable woman.

Shoaib must have known what was going on. And of course he did, was even a participant at times, although not always, as his presence may have limited conversation a bit—students were then in awe of their teachers. They also did what they were told; there was never a hint of student rebellion. Shoaib had grinned, oh yes, discipline was strict. Like Burgess, I was very fond of riding and I made sure everyone got up at 5am and rode before breakfast. There was grumbling of course but no one ever thought of staying in bed. They wouldn't; not then.

It was at the academy that Roohi says she really began to realise that her father was special; and not only her father, her mother too. Roohi well remembers Musarrat's open kitchen, *a 'salon' if you like where the young men came in batches to dine and talk.* Roohi lips twitched and she looked at me and said *oh yes there was talk and it was politics, politics, politics. There she was, my amazing mother, contaminating the minds of all these young men in her kitchen salon and nobody outside guessed what was happening. My parents were not that rich and it must have cost a lot to entertain all the time like that. I do not know why they did it.* But of course Roohi really does know. She would have done the same thing herself.

Whenever possible, the three girls were included in the life of the academy. They rode, played tennis and were taught manners and etiquette. They were introduced to banquets, taken on field trips, particularly by train, and of course these were no ordinary train journeys. It was not until much later when Afshan travelled independently from Karachi to Peshawar that she realized how different a standard public carriage was to the luxury of the academy's private train. Roohi did not have a lot more to say about life at the academy except that unlike Afshan, she did not really think much of the academy boys. *We were young and we had our own friends and we had a lot of fun.* Roohi had shrugged then and smiled, *in fact, I suppose you could say life there was a bed of roses.*

Zaki described Shoaib as a reasonably serious fellow, but said Zaki smiling at the memory *the house was a lot of fun because of Musarrat. She was the exuberant one, a lot of fun and very critical, sometimes telling people things they simply would not accept from others. She had such a charming way of attacking you that you simply could not take offence.*

Fun she may have been but Musarrat was no lightweight. Zaki described the book she wrote at the time as very funny in parts, outrageous even, but what else could be expected of the daughter of the Peshawar lawyer and original thinker, Dr Rahim. Musarrat was also practical. During the Victorian era, the heyday of the Raj, box-wallahs, men who traded, were not in the same class as the heaven-born, the ICS elite. Box-wallahs, those 'in trade' were treated with a modicum of disdain. This notion was still very much alive in the 1960s, and young men of a certain class, men like Shoaib, Zaki, or Humayan were trained to consider trade or money making enterprises as something other people did. They were born to rule. Not so Musarrat. She might have been the daughter of landowners but she also knew the value of money. In one of those super-fast conversational changes that politicians have perfected, Zaki became serious. *Musarrat,* he said, *wanted a solid and safe financial foundation and so she invested wisely in property. If left to Shoaib, the fortunes of the family would not have been anywhere near so good, and I am the same* he laughed. And of course, ever generous, without hesitation Shoaib agreed that it was Musarrat who had arranged all their finances, *without Musarrat's foresight* he said nodding in affirmation, *we would not have a single house, not in Islamabad and not in London; and not much money either.*

In 1967 Shoaib took leave from the academy, this time taking his entire family he flew off to London. His own notes record *a lengthy attachment, some sixteen months, with the Royal Institute of Public Administration.* Shoaib remembers enjoying it all very much and as always his diligence and concentration and his serious application to the work impressed the staff. John Sargent was deputy director at the time and Shoaib recalls getting along with John very well. So well that as the end of the attachment approached, Sargent wrote to the Pakistan government. The Institute wanted to appoint Shoaib to their staff. Shoaib says that he was unaware of all this at the time *but naturally, and with some regret I would, of course, have refused.*

Had she known, it would have added to Musarrat's disappointment. More than ever she wanted to stay in England; she had sold the land she had inherited from her grandfather, had five thousand pounds in the bank and dearly wanted to buy a house she had seen. And then in that slightly over-hot living room at Heather Walk, her eyes had flashed, her back had straightened and there was a glimpse of a younger, fiery Musarrat, *but he refused* she said, angry still, *I cried bitterly all the way to the airport but I had a four-month-old baby so what could I do? I went back to Pakistan with great regret.*

In England the fourth and perhaps most favoured daughter, Shelley, had arrived, favoured because she at least could claim British citizenship. Musarrat loves her youngest daughter dearly, but nevertheless was as unforgiving and direct as always. *Yes,* she said and then thought for a moment as if wondering whether to go on, *if I had not had a baby I might have decided to stay.* Pakistan was failing her; in comparison England was a peaceful haven of freedom and democracy. *Of course it has all changed now, it is all spoiled, but you know every country has downgraded.*

In all this there was never a question of her leaving Shoaib. When Musarrat said 'I might have stayed' what she meant was that she would change the family's base from Pakistan to England. It was an idea this tenacious woman would not relinquish for as Roohi said, once my mother has made up her mind that is that and there is no going back.

Shoaib, of course, had refused to remain in England because the subcontinent was his life and the academy awaited. Thoughtless perhaps as all men are, he was never unkind. He knew Musarrat had been happy at the academy and perhaps hoped that her reawakened obsession with England would fade again and after all, as he wryly said, *I had specialized in the art of training in London.* He felt he had already been away too long and was bursting to put his newfound skills to work. However, he had forgotten the whimsical ways of the civil service bureaucracy. Less than a year after returning from London new orders arrived. He was posted out.

Shoaib admits being shocked. *I was looking forward to a long stay at the academy and suddenly it was all over.* He may also have wondered how he would explain it all to Musarrat. Temperamental at best, part of the deal for quitting England had been the surety of life at the academy and the proximity of Pakistan's one city of culture, Lahore. He knew also that officers were seldom posted to the academy for more than a few years. But there are always exceptions and he had hoped to be one. His hopes dashed, his orders were to proceed to Azad Kashmir and assume the post of chief secretary. It was not a promotion except, as Shoaib explained, *there would be more facilities,* meaning a bigger house and more staff, but the main town, Muzaffarabad, was a sleepy backwater with little to commend it as far as culture was concerned. Azad Kashmir was also the western sliver of a larger disputed territory, and the proximity of a heavily armed line of control and a military presence on constant standby dominated civilian affairs. It was not a posting for a man of peace or a woman who loved art and culture.

Wasting no time, Shoaib went directly to his director, *a very nice man*, and told him that he was simply not prepared to go to Muzaffarabad and that he had no desire at all for such a position. I imagine the director did not quite know what to do. His position was a sinecure and he would not want to rock the boat. Shoaib must have been a pain and in fact he agreed with a smile that he may have been, *yes, I suppose I was a very prickly customer in those days.* Realizing that the director might sympathise but that was about all, Shoaib hastened off to the Establishment Division. He can be very convincing, and with Musarrat no doubt working behind the scenes, the move to Azad Kashmir was cancelled. But, as Shoaib said with resignation, *they were still bent on posting me out.*

Could it have been Musarrat's salons; was it something Shoaib had said; had there been secret reports? As Shoaib now says, *I was not aware at that time as I am aware now, that the intelligence services are basically keeping an eye on everything.* Did someone want Shoaib placed in a position where he could do less harm and be kept under closer scrutiny? There are no answers to this question but we do know the outcome of Shoaib's protests. While Shoaib had been safely tucked away in the academy, a witch-hunt was underway, a weeding out of allegedly corrupt civil service officers. A review committee had been established under a High Court judge and Shoaib was to be his secretary.

Shoaib reported for duty but to his chagrin was told by the judge's private secretary to report back to the Establishment Division. A sensible man, the judge did not want to place Shoaib in the position of having to be party to judgements concerning the conduct of his own peers and colleagues. Today, a rather shame-faced Shoaib admits *that in my heart of hearts I was most grateful to the judge for this solicitude.* However it was a blow to his pride to be sent back *hat in hand.* And not only that, his ability to be impartial had been questioned—that most insidious of feelings, humiliation, had raised its head. Shoaib shook his head at the foolish pride of his younger self. *You know*, he said, *I was simply not going to take this aspersion on my character lying down,* so he wrote a stiffly formal letter of protest requesting no less than an enquiry into the matter in order that he could verify his bona fides. Luckily, and although he would not admit it at the time, to his relief, the establishment secretary happened to be a very experienced ex-ICS officer who had dealt with his fair share of young officers whose pride had been wounded. He shrugged off the whole affair and allocated Shoaib the position of officer pending posting. *Now for the next storm in a tea kettle,* Shoaib laughed.

It all started when Shoaib was posted to another committee, *but you know,* he said, laughing even harder, *I simply refused to take notice of these orders.* The establishment secretary no doubt had sighed but did not step in to enforce the posting. He must have been a very patient and forgiving man because as

Shoaib said, *I was certainly making a nuisance of myself,* or perhaps he just realized Shoaib's potential. Then, to complicate matters, a good friend, the late Nasrum Minallah, who was Secretary to the Governor of West Pakistan, entered the scene arranging an appointment as DC to Lyallpur, a town now known as Faisalabad. The DC's compound was huge, more than eight acres and the incumbent customarily pocketed the income, said to be upwards of thirty thousand rupees a month, from the sale of fodder and other produce; almost ten times his monthly salary. It was a small fortune; Lyallpur was regarded as a plum posting. However, Shoaib's friend had overlooked one vital factor in the equation. Musarrat!

She threw one of her legendary tantrums. How dare he arrange such a posting without first consulting her? All she could remember of Lyallpur was that it was full of buffaloes. No way was she about to be packed off to the cultural wilderness of rural Punjab. When their friend had hurried over to tell them the good news *Musarrat just blew up again,* said Shoaib, his smile an apology still, *the poor chap was totally flabbergasted. I was very embarrassed and felt quite bad that someone who thought he had done us a great favour in securing us such a plum post was instead subjected to one of Musarrat's incandescent tantrums.* A gentleman, the friend had backtracked, and fast, as most men did when confronted by Musarrat in the full flow of her fiery feudal fury. *I don't know why,* Shoaib said, *but he went back to the governor and begged him to cancel the posting.* I think I do. Men tended to run around as if stung by a swarm of bees when Musarrat became truly angry.

The governor acceded and undaunted by Musarrat's anger, or perhaps because of it, the friend arranged a posting that Shoaib was actually too junior to have attained, as Secretary to the Services Department of the Government of West Pakistan. It was a humdrum and unexciting job but as it included responsibility for the allocation of housing, Shoaib saw to it that a mollified Musarrat was able to move into a new if unfurnished house just across the canal from the academy. Not only was Musarrat happy again, so also were those junior to Shoaib. His unexpected promotion meant that they, too, were moved up the ladder. It was 1969, said Shoaib, and this is how I moved out of the academy.

He was not to be bored for long.

In June of 1970, the government of West Pakistan was abolished, provinces were proclaimed, and the state government of Punjab took over in Lahore. To his satisfaction Shoaib was posted back to the field, back to the North West Frontier Province as DC Peshawar but before that there was the curious affair of Colonel Qayyum and the list known as three-naught-three.

It is 27 May 2009, and every international news agency files this report: 'at 9.30 am a car bomb sheared the walls off buildings at the Capital City Police Office in Lahore's Mall Road, 500 metres from the High Court. The huge blast destroyed surrounding cars and buildings over a wide perimeter. The complex housed the police rescue service and the provincial headquarters of Pakistan's premier spy organisation, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. More than 23 people are reported killed and at least 200 injured. Police and rescue workers were pulling bodies out of the rubble last night as troops locked down the centre of the city'.

Forty years earlier, not only was such an attack an unthinkable event, civil servants such as Shoaib had not yet realised the growing power and influence of the country's intelligence agencies. *I simply had no idea* Shoaib said, and then laughed as he often did, *I had no idea at all that even what was going on in Kohat was being watched by all of them.* Then, one day, the military adviser to the governor, a certain Colonel Qayyum, *walked into my office at the West Pakistan Secretariat.*

What the colonel had to say left Shoaib amazed and aghast.

Relaxed in one of the secretariat's chairs as only a man who is sure of his power can be, the colonel coolly told Shoaib that he had been keen to meet him ever since he read the intelligence reports on the various happenings in Kohat during the last elections, *happenings* as Shoaib said *in which I had figured prominently.* Qayyum though simply wanted to see what an honest man looked like. For Shoaib the meeting was an eye-opener. It is quite something to be told by a complete stranger, a spy no less, that he feels he knows you very well. Was Musarrat on file too? Were there files on some of his friends and colleagues? Indeed there were. Shoaib was shocked.

Whether the colonel wanted to obtain the views of an officer whose integrity he trusted or whether it was simply to reassure Shoaib that he at least was in the clear, Qayyum produced a list of allegedly corrupt officers, three hundred and three of them, who were about to be summarily retired without recourse to normal disciplinary procedures. Most were people Shoaib did not know but some were friends and colleagues. Appalled, *I of course vouchsafed for the integrity of those I knew personally and demanded to know the source of the information* said Shoaib. The colonel had demurred on the basis of confidentiality although I would like to think he simply did not want to further shatter an honest man's illusions. But Shoaib would not give up, and so it was that the colonel quietly told a shocked Shoaib that the informants were his own service colleagues. *I simply could not believe it* Shoaib later wrote.

Shoaib and a few friends talked of a pen down strike in protest at the impending arbitrary retirements, but most unaffected officers backed away from

the idea—they were anxiously watching their own backs—so the whole thing fizzled out. Every officer named on the infamous '303' list was ignominiously retired. The civil service would never be the same again. *Of course we could have protested* said Shoaib, *but really it was futile. Under martial law the government could more or less do exactly what it liked.*

The story does not finish here for as so often happened with those who came to know Shoaib, Qayyum became a friend. Ejaz Rahim knew Colonel Qayyum well—he was in fact his brother-in-law. Ejaz says this fact makes no difference to his assessment of Qayyum, says the colonel, who rose to the rank of brigadier, had the potential to make his mark in the military but *doffed his uniform on a matter of principle.* This is no small matter given the power and influence of the military in Pakistan but was far from the end for Qayyum who went on to become a well respected Senator of the Punjab Assembly. In a personal note, Ejaz wrote that throughout his life, *Qayyum respected Shoaib not only as a friend but because of his* (Shoaib's) *innate qualities...that a sense of fairness and a high regard for ethics was a common thread between them...*and whenever Shoaib's name was mentioned Qayyum would simply say *he is a very good man.* And Qayyum of all people would have known.

And although he may not have realised it at the time, in treating Qayyum with civility and respect, Shoaib gained a friend whose views carried weight in the secret corridors of power. *Yes,* said Shoaib, *till his last days he was a good and sincere friend and tolerated almost all of my later indiscretions.*

These indiscretions as Shoaib called them included, to Qayyum's supposed intense annoyance, once stage-managing the arrest of a lawyer Qayyum wanted silenced in a way *that the arrest order was promptly thrown out of court next day.* In fact I doubt a man like the colonel was furious at all but he did, however, have, in Ejaz's words, *an inherent antipathy towards the Red Shirt movement and the leadership of the National Awami Party. He was totally and absolutely a Jinnah-Iqbal devotee.* The colonel would act as he considered necessary. He would find a way.

Qayyum's friendship and high regard for Shoaib never wavered. Unlike many other fair-weather colleagues who were quick to distance themselves from him when, some years later, Shoaib was falsely and perhaps inevitably accused of subversive activities, Qayyum did not abandon him. He could easily have done so and no one would have been the wiser. Instead he went straight to General Jilani of the all-powerful Inter-Services Intelligence agency and obtained assurances of an impartial and factual investigation. Qayyum knew Shoaib well. No way was this sometimes foolish and idealistic friend of his a subversive.

When he died in later years, Qayyum was mourned by many for his compassion, particularly the poor, the 'underdogs' as Ejaz described them. Qayyum was also hated by some. And of course he would be. As Ejaz wrote, there will always be those who have cause to hate *powerful men who are also passionately principled.* He also knew just a little too much about those who would have preferred he didn't.

Yes, he was a controversial figure in the eyes of many people, said a thoughtful Shoaib, *but I always found him a sincere and genuine friend.* In Ejaz's words Qayyum the military man; Qayyum the politician; Shoaib's friend and admirer Qayyum was someone *sui generis*, a man 'unique in his own characteristics'.

The term could well apply to Shoaib. Perhaps that is why the two became friends.

Afridi Khan's list

In December 2007, Ejaz Rahim had come out of retirement to serve as a minister in the caretaker government appointed to hold office in the period leading up to the proposed elections. We had waded through the throng of supplicants who sat or stood in the corridor outside Ejaz's ministerial office, for as was to so often happen, whether in Pakistan or India, and with busy people who held high public or private office, the needs of others had been immediately given second place when we sought an interview to speak of Shoaib Sahib. His name was an 'open sesame', and time was always found in overcrowded diaries.

A portly older orderly bustled us though the outer office. His crisp and smartly sashed uniform appeared to have been recently resurrected from some trunk where it had been reverently folded. It smelt faintly of mothballs. The orderly beamed, salaamed deeply and left us seated on the ministerial sofa; he was enjoying every minute of his and his master's brief reprieve from the relative obscurity of retirement. Ejaz is a mannered man who had moved back into the corridors of power with the consummate ease of someone who had been there before. Well spoken, he was one of those who took care to phrase his answers so the meaning would be unmistakable. I imagine it was a prerequisite of his previous life. For all his care he had not hesitated for a second when we moved on to Shoaib. Ejaz was an admirer and his regard for Shoaib's integrity was absolute. His memory was also sharp and he was a story teller. Enjoying himself as a raconteur does when his audience is hanging on his every word, Ejaz had settled back into his chair and begun to talk. And these are the tales he told.

But first a word of explanation. One of the curious phenomena of the subcontinent is that there are some positions that seem to attract a certain breed of free-thinking men who might otherwise become rogues and rebels. Many such men hailed from the tribal areas of the frontier. Once such a position might have been that of senior orderly, a man who rode with his Khan or his Sahib and made things happen, sometimes with the flat of his sword, however, with the introduction of the mysteries of the combustion engine, more often than not such men gravitated to the position of driver. In the days when vehicles were rare, a driver had status and in fact it is still a job that commands respect. All this is to explain why the opinion of such a man, a driver, is of significance.

Now to Ejaz's stories.

When Shoaib was Deputy Commissioner Peshawar he had a famous driver. Afridi Khan was his name and he was a Frontier legend. I had been a young Assistant Commissioner under Shoaib and some years later had the good fortune to return to Peshawar as Deputy Commissioner, the same position Shoaib had held. I was driving with Afridi Khan who by this time had become an institution as he always told the truth to anyone, no matter who you were. One day we drove out the gate of my office into the lane and as we passed another compound a guard who was completely unknown to me had stiffened and saluted smartly. Afridi Khan had grinned, the smile of a free man certain of himself and had asked me whom I thought the guard was saluting. I replied that of course the man was saluting me, the DC. Afridi Khan's smile had broadened and he said in his simple straightforward way, 'Well, if you think that sit in the car by yourself one day and see who salutes you'.

Well, that certainly put me in my place. Afridi Khan was a very, very straightforward man chuckled Ejaz, *he had the innate wisdom and honesty that the British so admired in the Frontier tribesmen, yes, he was a wonderful character. If you ever happen to meet him and ask about Shoaib Sultan Khan his eyes will twinkle. Anyway, I am telling you all this because Afridi Khan had a list and he used to rank DC's. He would tell me, 'Yes, you are quite good, but Shoaib Sahib was far, far better; he was somebody; he was the best'. As far as I know,* Ejaz said, finishing his story, *Shoaib was never displaced. And that is how he will always be known in that part of the Frontier; as top of Afridi Khan's list.*

Intrigued by Afridi Khan's opinion of Shoaib, Ejaz said he decided to probe further. So he asked Afridi Khan what in his opinion are the qualities of a good DC. In his subsequent note, Ejaz wrote that Afridi Khan answered without pause. *Sahib*, said Afridi, *a good DC should be like Skylab. In those days* Ejaz explained, *a lot of people used to scan the skies at night trying to spot Skylab. How is this relevant? I asked the illiterate wise man.* Afridi's answer was simple. He told Ejaz that a DC must be 'visible from everywhere and to

everyone; he must set a shining example and his light must be available to anyone who seeks it. Was that all? No, there was more. These days, Afridi had said dismissively, DC's are not Skylabs but Shoaib very definitely was.

And then, continued Ejaz, *there was a famous incident when the Commissioner, who was in fact a friend of Shoaib's, went with Shoaib to get a first hand view of the law and order situation. Well*, said Ejaz enjoying himself thoroughly, *they went to a place where there was a lot of hullabaloo. The women were rioting and making a lot of noise and this in particular upset the commissioner's sense of dignity, so much so that he started to shout orders to the police*, and here Ejaz had adopted the voice of affronted authority, *'sort them out immediately, discipline them, eject them'.*

Now said Ejaz again, *rebuking a senior officer was virtually unheard of, even if a junior officer was in the right, but this did not deter Shoaib for one second. He was always very aware of his position and responsibilities; you could even say he was fairly prickly. Anyway, before anything could happen Shoaib had quickly intervened saying, 'well, I thought I was the district magistrate here and if I am then I make all the decisions about what needs sorting out and how it is to be done'.*

Ejaz had sat back then, his story nearly done, the punch line to come, *what he did that day was exceptional in our country. Almost everyone in the CSP, or for that matter any government bureaucracy, is absolutely craven in the face of higher authority. If a superior officer says something you automatically say, 'OK sir, we will manage it as you say', but not Shoaib'*. And in the way of so many in the subcontinent who use the language of an era lost, Ejaz said with satisfaction, *well, I think these incidents will give you a peep at the essential character of the man that I saw.*

Far better than a peep, Ejaz and Afridi Khan together have given us a world view.

Musarrat had been drawn to Lahore like a moth to a flame but if Shoaib dragged his feet a bit when leaving this city, it was not only because of Musarrat's reluctance—it was the dreary thought that desks and dusty files awaited because Shoaib had been posted as Secretary of the Health, Education, and Social Welfare Department. Shoaib was a field man first and foremost. Luckily, the Frontier's new chief secretary-designate agreed, and offered Shoaib the post of DC Peshawar. Shoaib accepted with alacrity in part because his good friend Ijlal was Commissioner Peshawar which was a bonus. He might not have been so eager had he known what lay ahead: as DC Peshawar, he stepped right into a hornet's nest.

It was, as Ejaz Rahim had explained, an era when the PPP and the charismatic but dangerously self-assured son of a rich feudal Sindhi family, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, first emerged as potential powers in the land. *In those days* Ejaz had explained *the establishment was very definitely not pro-PPP. A DC had to walk a very difficult line to retain his impartiality.* There was also increasing tension between the Bengalis who had numerical superiority in any national election and the elite in Western Pakistan, particularly the military, who saw themselves as Pakistan's natural rulers. On top of all this, in Peshawar there was, in Ejaz's words, *the tremendous strife that was taking place between the landlords and their tenants on the fertile plains of Charsaddah.*

The situation was highly volatile. The tenants were mainly Mohmand while the landlords were Mohammadzai. Not only was a class war looming, there was an underlying and extremely fraught tribal element to it all. Shoaib loved it; from day one he was in his element, managing the situation as Ejaz said, *in a fearless and even-handed manner, and believe me* said the man who was this day a government minister, *my eyes were those of an impressionable young assistant commissioner, and despite the rumours that he favoured this group or that, there was no substance to it all. He really did have the reputation of being the most fair individual in whom most parties in the dispute had total faith.*

Shoaib shrugged, smiled, and said that handling the dispute was just part of the business of being a DC. However, Ejaz was not quite so sanguine. *Make no mistake*, he said quietly, *it was very tense at times. There were bloody clashes and tenants were killed when evictions were attempted.* The dispute was one of those occasional social outbursts that could have so easily become a class war. It was as Ejaz said, significant because it dominated the times—it was an important chapter in the brief history of Pakistan.

The flashpoint of the landlord-tenant wars was an area known as Hashtnagar. To the annoyance of some of the landlords, Shoaib had promised the tenants advocate, Afzal Bangash, that he would guarantee the legal rights of tenants provided that Afzal did not revert to unlawful behaviour. Ejaz, who at the end of his career no longer cared if he trod on political toes or not, said of this distant event, that unused to being thwarted or prosecuted in a court of law, the landlords accused Shoaib of being pro-tenant. Well, of course they would, and Musarrat's and her outspoken family's socialist views and assumed influence added grist to their mill. Shoaib continued to be totally impartial and even-handed in his approach to the disputes but there were dark mutterings and suspicions amongst the landlords and their senior governmental friends. Although the gentlemanly Ejaz had not said as much, Musarrat was very definitely not an asset.

Ejaz describes Shoaib as being bold and calm, and rather than avoiding this extremely difficult situation which if it went badly wrong could have very negative effects on an officer's career, *he stepped in and assumed personal charge of the dispute.* Shoaib's attitude and actions were an eye-opener for the young Ejaz. He describes standing by awed and amazed as Shoaib quietly drew a 'line in the sand', told the powerful landlord group that if they wanted an eviction then they had to go to a court of law and seek legal permission and that if they took the law into their own hands and carried out an eviction that was not legally sanctioned he would come down very, very hard on them. They could hardly believe their ears.

In several cases Shoaib even managed to get evictions reversed, which as Ejaz said with a smile, was normally a very difficult thing to do because as you may know the power of the gun is very important in such areas, but somehow he managed to do this, and stay alive himself. Indeed, said Ejaz as if staying alive was an accomplishment, the view of the common people was that he was an entirely fair man and also very strong. Grudgingly perhaps, the landlords had agreed.

He remembers Shoaib saying time and again, *look Ejaz; people will fight over land, over status, over many things. Our job is not to take sides but to uphold the law and apply it equally to everyone, but as is the way of life, you will find that we mainly have to help the poor because they have no other influence and no other recourse to justice but us.* And this notion of being duty bound to help the poor, a notion inherited from his grandfather, a notion constantly aided and abetted behind the scenes by Musarrat, was to become the central pillar of his life.

Ejaz remembers asking Shoaib if he thought the 'war' was a clash of ideologies, a matter of class versus class, but Shoaib had said no. Ejaz remembers Shoaib taking his time to think before saying yes, he understood the question very well and why it had been asked and that his junior officer must have been indeed confused having to prosecute his own class of people but it was Shoaib's intention to uphold the letter of the law unbendingly and if this meant prosecuting landlords as well as tenants he would do so. To Ejaz's surprise, because in those days when the Cold War and talk of the threat of international communism so dominated and divided the world, and many officials and influential people thought the whole thing was indeed a clash of ideologies and Ejaz would have heard the talk, Shoaib was emphatic that the landlord-tenant war was nothing of the sort. No, he had said, it was institutional. The only difference between the landlords and the tenants was their relative positions on what he called the ladder of life. Independent, individualistic and strongly profit oriented, Shoaib held that both groups shared the capitalist ideal; they just occupied different positions on the same ladder. He was totally convinced that ideology was not an issue and that the situation could be resolved if the right institutions were put in place.

Shoaib set out to do just this. His solution to this life-and-death problem which Ejaz called 'immense' was to get the two parties talking. To achieve this Shoaib set up landlord-tenant *jirgas* or committees. In what was to become the hallmark of everything he was to do in future years, Shoaib adopted a very hands-on approach. Ejaz leant forward in his chair, his body language signalling that what he was about to say was important, *now*, he said, *in my experience, most DC's would have found direct involvement in such meetings a bit demeaning and would have given the job to a sub-divisional chap, but not Shoaib. He did it himself.* A vivid memory still, Ejaz described Shoaib calmly sitting on a *charpoy* (string bed), which, smiled Ejaz, *was also something that no CSP officer would ever dream of doing* in a village where an hour ago there might have been a death or a murder so that the air crackled with tension, and chatting away as if it was just another day, just a normal visit. *Within a short time somehow he would manage to diffuse a dangerously explosive situation, and if you happen to go to Charsaddah today, you will find that the landlord-tenant issue is a minor concern.* It could instead have led to a bloody confrontation that may have dragged on for years; that it gradually fizzled out is in Ejaz' view, entirely due to Shoaib's firm, totally fair and law-based approach.

Shoaib was not quite so positive. He believes that in some places the *jirga* system worked quite well but *that there was so much misunderstanding and mistrust of each other that a very long time was needed to build real bridges and unfortunately I had to leave the district too soon.* Whatever the case, in the young Ejaz's view, it had been a rare honour to serve under this very decent, very compassionate DC who applied the letter of the law entirely even-handed no matter how important a person was. *You could also bank on his consistency,* said Ejaz, *and where most people vary in their behaviour depending on the situation, Shoaib will always be the same, and,* added Ejaz, *unlike many others with whom I later came into contact, you could not make him say what was not true, he just would not, but at the same time he was never rude, he was always polite and well mannered.*

It was here in Peshawar that Shoaib was to cross paths once again with the mysterious Colonel Qayyum whom we have already encountered. Known as the 'red colonel' because of his supposed pro-tenant views, Qayyum was chief adviser to the governor and in Ejaz's view, a close associate of Shoaib's. *It was,* said Ejaz, *an unlikely association but their common link was sympathy for the underdog and a well developed sense of fairness.* There was a constant stream of complaints concerning Shoaib's clever way of interpreting government's instructions, many of which were biased in favour of various influential

landlords, *in the fairest of ways and always within the law*. Ejaz describes situations where the governor *would explode and shout 'he simply can't do that'*. The colonel would then be instructed to summon Shoaib who would calmly explain his actions in a way that meant there was nothing that anyone could do about them, except to fume with anger. Ejaz is certain that there were *some at the top*, landlords and government officials both, who took extreme and long-lasting umbrage at Shoaib's evenhandedness *and that hidden enmities began that smouldered on until one day*, and here Ejaz stopped himself and smiled apologetically, *well, that is another story.*

And so it is. In certain circles lips would curl for years to come should Shoaib's name be mentioned and one day they would have their revenge.

As Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar, Shoaib came into close contact with most of the Frontier's politicians. Now, one of Shoaib's enduring characteristics is that he always chooses to see the best in everyone. Although regarded by some of his closest supporters as dangerously naïve, this consistent belief in the basic goodness of most people sometimes has surprising results. In Peshawar, Shoaib believes to this day that almost every politician who crossed his path was cooperative and helpful and although this may surprise some of them, he believes that *above all they were thorough gentlemen.* Maybe some were and maybe some weren't but as Ejaz said, *some people have acted well and honestly simply because Shoaib Sahib expected them to behave in this way.*

The exception in Shoaib's view, and I suppose there will always be an exception, was a political figure whose name was Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan, a kingpin in the Muslim League. Perhaps there is an element of guilt involved in Shoaib's naming this man's behaviour as being less than gentlemanly, for to his chagrin Shoaib had allowed himself to be browbeaten by this kingpin into refusing permission for the National Awami Party to hold a Pakistan Day procession. There were in fact reasonable grounds for the refusal. As had been the case in a similar situation in East Pakistan where Shoaib had sought to keep the peace, the Muslim League had been first to announce their intention to hold a procession, and there was a very good chance that violence would ensue if the worst-case scenario eventuated and the two processions chanced to come face to face. To add to Shoaib's unease and discomfort at, in his view having given in to the Muslim League, some of the National Awami Party's leaders had of course shouted foul.

Not all had shouted so.

One of the principals, in fact, was amusingly philosophical about it all, telling Shoaib the decision was not all bad news. The Muslim League, the leader said, was always trying to prove that the National Awami Party was anti-Pakistan, and

contrary to anything he may have thought, Shoaib's refusal was of great propaganda value, showing the depth of trickery the Muslim League would resort to in order to score political points. It was all a bit too politically tortuous for Shoaib, who continued to try and walk his trade-mark impartial line which invariably earned him respect and friendship across the political spectrum.

It was not always an easy line to walk. There were always invitations—to spend weekends at Shahibagh by the legendary Khan Abdul Wali Khan 'to get away from the pressures of Peshawar', or to lunch with the governor, Fida Mohammad, 'to discuss this or that', invitations that Shoaib nevertheless took care to graciously decline. *I had very smooth sailing with Frontier politicians*, Shoaib said, *and regardless of party affiliations they were and still are my very good friends.*

Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan was not one of them.

The man who had blustered Shoaib into a decision over the procession, was defeated at the polls by the dynamically attractive young Hayat Sherpao in the 1970 elections. *He really let loose his anger at me*, but Shoaib remained phlegmatically calm despite fiery speeches *being made at Chowk Yadgar* alleging that the DC had rigged the voting system in favour of his friend Sherpao. *Of course*, Shoaib had shrugged, *it was all nonsense. An Awami-PPP alliance was virtually unbeatable. I was proud, perhaps even too proud that Peshawar was one of the few areas where almost everyone agreed that the elections were as fair and honest as they could be.*

Shoaib's angry kingpin politician was not the only one to fall; many others fell with him. Yes, Shoaib had smiled and then thrown up his hands as if saying 'what else would you expect', *all those people were defeated and although they put the blame on me as DC, the fact was all I did was to try and ensure there was no bogus polling of votes, or intimidation of voters particularly at the women's polling booths.* And then, as if he thought he had made it sound all too serious, he had laughed *so I suppose yes, you could say it was my fault.*

Back to Peshawar in 1970. If dealing with the dangerously volatile landlord-tenant wars and trying to maintain a modicum of honesty and decency in an electoral process when politicians of every stripe seemed bent on twisting things to favour their particular credo was not difficult enough, Shoaib decided to do something about the ownership of firearms. It was a task that few civil servants would care to undertake. There were just too many potential pitfalls.

To most men on the Frontier, a firearm of some sort is as much a part of their wardrobe as a good walking stick is to an English country gentleman. An ancient muzzle-loading jezail was the least that any man expected to own and was carried as casually and with as little thought as you and I might carry an

umbrella on a rainy day. The problem, as Shoaib saw it, was that most crimes committed in his district involved the use of unlicensed firearms. If he were to issue licenses to everyone who wanted one and who seemed decent enough he reasoned that there would be a better chance of tracking down the perpetrators, and if a situation ever became volatile, as it had between the landlords and tenants of Hashtnagar, a DC would have a better idea of whom to temporarily relieve of their weapons.

The normal procedure was for a firearm application to be marked to the police because a successful applicant also needed to have his good character vouchsafed. Shoaib knew very well that if the police were involved bribes would be demanded. Those who paid *would get a good report and so receive a permit while those who did not would not be cleared.* To get around this, Shoaib came up with a novel solution: he decreed that any government department, from the airlines to customs, could verify the good character of an employee and issue a firearms license. *They were all very happy except perhaps the police,* Shoaib had laughed, *suddenly some clerk was an important man; he was a government licensing officer.* The important issue as far as Shoaib was concerned was that he had delegated responsibility, and this had to be taken seriously. *Yes,* he said, *it was up to them to say that a certain person was a responsible employee and it would look bad for them if later it was shown that he was not.* At the DC's office, on the twice weekly *mulaqat* or 'open days', there was a flood of other applicants. The memory amused him still, *you know I ordered two hundred extra chairs for the lawns of my office but these were simply not enough and a queue would form and stretch right up to the governor's residence three hundred yards away.* The governor, a military general, was apparently phlegmatic about it all. His secretary once telephoned to say the governor wondered why there was such a long queue, *but that was all, they did not interfere* said Shoaib. Perhaps they didn't but when over ten thousand licenses were issued in less than a year a whispering campaign began that Shoaib was building a private army. Shoaib had raised his eyebrows as if to say 'what a ridiculous idea'. However, it was just one more nail that his enemies would eventually use to hammer down the lid on his career.

Afridi Khan had his own view of it all, Ejaz later wrote. *In contrast to Shoaib Sultan Khan, I was quite strict on the matter of firearms licenses.* Afridi Khan advised otherwise, to act like Shoaib Sultan. When Ejaz replied that times had changed, Afridi Khan disagreed. *'Sahiba'* Afridi had patiently said, *'Shoaib Sultan used to look at a man. If he trusted him he would issue a license without further ado. This is Pukhtun society. If you trust them they consider themselves honoured. You earn the goodwill of the public. In this way they become more responsible. Otherwise everybody has arms in these parts, license or no license'.* The point of Afridi Khan's story as Ejaz said, is not really about issuing firearms licenses or not, but to illustrate one of Shoaib's most important traits: his innate trust in the people. *Shoaib was known as a district magistrate who would trust the people.* At the time however, the rumour was indeed cleverly malicious and only a man entirely sure of his personal integrity, only an innocent would just shrug off the private army rumours and forget about them.

There was however something that Shoaib had not forgotten, and after the absorbing and exhilarating years at the academy, the study tour in England and all the other highly eventful matters that now filled Shoaib's life, he could have been excused if he had done. What Shoaib had not forgotten was a subject many of his fellow officers saw as a boringly dead-end career interest; rural development. For after all, who really cared about the poor; an officer could do his best of course but it was not the poor who determined a promotion. However, like a reluctant bride, government was moving slowly down the road of accepting responsibility for the miserable lot of most farm families, of doing something about rural poverty; integrated rural development seemed to be the answer.

There had been a lot of talk and a lot of self-promotion by a number of self-titled 'development gurus' some of whom seemed to have quite good ideas. Chief among these at the time was a certain Colonel Sadiq Malik who happened to have started a programme not far from Peshawar and was busy presenting this as the answer to rural poverty. However, the only real working experiment was taking place under the aging intellectual ascetic Khan Sahib at Comilla in East Pakistan. Back in Western Pakistan, government's answer to all the various claims and counter-claims was inevitable; they commissioned a report which advocated integrated rural development, and then set up a committee and gave it the task of working with the Peshawar based Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARD). Together the committee and PARD were to come up with a definitive answer to rural poverty.

As Comilla was the only place where the concepts of integrated rural development were being tested in the field, accompanied by the Director of the Peshawar Academy and a few other officers, Shoaib made his second visit. It was, as has already been described, a visit that would change his life. Khan Sahib had resigned as director, but was still actively involved as an adviser and as vice chairman of the Comilla Academy's Board of Directors. Everything that Shoaib saw or heard as he travelled around a transformed Brahmanbaria, his old subdivision, including Khan Sahib's idea that he should use the 'thana' as the working unit for development, convinced him that this was the way to go.

Bursting with enthusiasm, Shoaib returned to Peshawar. His notes record his convictions in absolute terms, *this is what I wanted the academy to start* he wrote. It was, however, to be a few more years before it all came to pass for although he may not have known it at the time, Shoaib was about to move on.

An unfortunate axiom of our less than perfect world is that an honest and straightforward man makes more enemies than one who is cunning or dishonest. Shoaib's brief year and a half in Peshawar verified this principle in spades. He had upset important politicians, angered powerful landlords, denied income earning opportunities to the police, and had given his enemies a wonderfully malicious rumour to circulate, and he wanted the Academy for Rural Development to test new and dangerously provocative leftist-seeming ideas that might well upset the status quo, might give the rural poor real power. Was there anything else he could do?

Well yes, there was.

Deputy Commissioner Peshawar was a high-pressure post. Shoaib had taken it on only because his friend Ijlal was commissioner. *Yes*, Shoaib had said as if what he was about to say would have been self-evident to anyone, *I had a perfect working relationship with Ijlal which I knew would not be possible with any other person.* And Shoaib was not a fool. He knew that without the absolute and unwavering support of his superior he would simply not be able to survive unless he gave ground and compromised his integrity, and this he was not about to do, *so*, said Shoaib, *when Ijlal was posted away I went to the chief secretary who kindly accommodated me.*

Ironically, Shoaib was posted to the desk he had avoided in 1970, Secretary Health and Education. But he was still prickly, still stubbornly conscious of what his grandfather might have termed 'the right way to go about things'. Instead of simply walking into his new office and taking up the reins, he waited to be asked. As he was to later explain, *I was rather stuffy in those days and my sense of the ethical way to proceed required that I wait until asked.* In the civil service, things were not always as they appeared on the surface; behind the scenes it could be a very different story indeed. Sometimes, to avoid embarrassing confrontations, it was better to wait, and Shoaib knew this very well. But this time he was wrong. As Shoaib admits today, he had still a lot to learn about humility. Puzzled, Shoaib's cousin Humayan, who was then Secretary to the Frontier Government, telephoned to find out why Shoaib had not assumed charge of his new post; he would not have waited to be asked.

Unfortunately for Shoaib, the officer who took over as Commissioner Peshawar was ungenerously ambitious and already carried a secret grudge: the very Bandial whom either Shoaib or Musarrat had unknowingly offended in Kohat. Perhaps Shoaib had not wanted to raise long buried issues, perhaps it was just his usual kindness, because for once he had not named names, simply saying *now the person who succeeded Ijlal thought I had given up being DC because of him, but it was no such thing.* And then he had stopped, realizing perhaps that what he had said was not quite true. And so, as painfully honest as

ever he had added that perhaps there was some truth to Bandial's belief that Shoaib did not want to serve under him because as Shoaib admitted, the words coming slowly as if he did not really want to say them, *yes, in the back of my mind what he imagined was probably true; I would not have been totally comfortable with him. He was a friend of course* (when we know he was nothing of the kind), *but he was also one of those whom Colonel Qayyum had identified as someone who had informed on other officers.* It had left a bad taste in Shoaib's mouth at the time although the world-weary colonel had just shrugged dismissively. No man of honour would be an informer. Shoaib knew he would be unable to hide his distaste if he had to work with Bandial and perhaps felt slightly ashamed.

Perhaps a slight lingering guilt was one reason why he always took such pains to help Bandial and his family whenever he could, making sure Bandial's father received special care from his older brother, the wonderfully serene Captain Sohail, captain of the ship the old man took to make the Haj. Then again, this was something that Shoaib would have done willingly for any colleague. Later, Bandial's father had written a letter saying that Shoaib had done more than his son had ever done for him because Sohail had taken such good care of him; of course adding fuel to Bandial's growing resentment. Either way, Shoaib just could not win.

However, the issue of Bandial's wounded pride was soon overtaken by events that would make even the landlord-tenants' wars take a distant back seat, events that would shake Pakistan to the core. In December 1970, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League Party swept to power in Pakistan's general elections. In Rawalpindi, the generals simply would not have it; they would not be ruled by a party based in the more populous and ethnically very different East. With the tacit support of many of West Pakistan's defeated politicians, the generals decided not to honour the elections. East Pakistan was thrown into turmoil.

A shaken Shoaib described the situation of the entire country being on tenterhooks on the day the national assembly was to be convened when a curious event ensued. President (General) Yahya Khan was scheduled to make a special announcement when a message arrived in Peshawar that the president was on his way to the city. The rumour mills went into overdrive and the bazaars hummed with speculation: why would the president choose to visit Peshawar on such a fateful day? Shoaib tells of an official reception party being hurriedly assembled and that to his surprise, when the president and his entourage arrived, one of those who disembarked was the managing director of Standard Bank. Then all was revealed: the country may have been teetering on the edge of disaster, but the president's main concern was to inspect the progress of the

house he was building in the Cantonment area. The Emperor Nero was not the last man to play his fiddle while Rome burned!

Desperate times require desperate measures, so thought the mandarins of Islamabad as they muddled on seeking to defuse the impending madness. Their solution was to send back to the East Wing all those who could speak the language, any one at all in fact who had served there. The rationale behind this decision, explained a dismayed Shoaib, was that *they hoped that such officers would be able to get along with the people there and help pacify and control them.* It was a hopeless gesture, the situation was too far-gone for such measures and most of those packed off to do their reluctant duty were either killed or were to languish for years in an Indian gaol.

Able to speak Bengali and with prior experience, Shoaib was an obvious choice. The prospect appalled him. He thought the whole situation was totally wrong: the last thing he wanted to do was to go back to East Pakistan as a representative of a government he considered to be unlawfully repressive. Musarrat was even more vehement. If Shoaib was forced to go it would be over her dead body. *You know and love the people there* she had told Shoaib, *you cannot go back as an oppressor.* Shoaib and Musarrat both were reluctant to say more about this parlous time, *well, there was really nothing more to say,* he murmured. Roohi, their eldest daughter, however, clearly remembers that Shoaib's adamant refusal to consider such a posting was a family decision and was happy to talk. *We were totally united on this* she said. *It was entirely a matter of principle. My father did not fear for his life or refuse to go because he believed the situation would result in personal disaster, he just thought it was totally wrong. Daddy just did not want to go and Ami* (mother) *was as fierce as only she could be that he should not go. It was all so dramatic* she laughed *and Ami, who was always a drama queen, was at the centre of it all.*

Shoaib laughed, said *it wasn't dramatic at all, or not as much as Roohi believes. I quietly sat down and thought about it.* It is easy to imagine him sitting there in an easy chair, drinking cup after cup of tea, thinking deep into the night, what was he going to do? The answer was obvious and Shoaib already knew it, but it was very, very hard. He would give up his dreams of a civil service career; he would pre-empt the very real possibility of orders to proceed to the East by resigning then and there. If he waited until the orders arrived a refusal to obey would not be countenanced, could in fact be regarded as treason, which under martial law was a hanging offence.

Shoaib took himself immediately to the Chief Secretary Ejaz Naik and handed in his resignation explaining that he had enjoyed some of his happiest moments in East Pakistan and could not imagine himself being part of a repressive regime. A gentleman of the old school, Naik's reply was a surprise.

Shoaib was well thought of in many circles he said, and yes, he would regretfully accept Shoaib's resignation but he would put it in a drawer and not act on it unless the transfer orders came. In the meantime he would do what he could to make sure they didn't. Touched and humbled Shoaib remembers mumbling a reply of thanks only to be cut short by a gruff Naik who said that there was nothing personal in his response, he just did not like the thought of the service losing such a good officer for such a stupid reason.

Shoaib knew, however, that Naik could easily be overruled as did Naik; bigger guns were needed. So Naik called in a personal favour and went to the governor, General K.M. Azhar and asked if he would intervene to have Shoaib's orders changed. Azhar tried, telephoning a fellow general in Islamabad, a General Peerzada, personal staff officer to the president. The response was frosty. Azhar was told *in no uncertain terms* that it was none of the provincial government's business. There was nothing more the governor or Naik could do. Afshan remembers the family rushing off to Islamabad to enlist the help of another close friend, the former Commissioner of Peshawar Ijlal Haider Zaidi. Despite Ijlal's assurances that everything would turn out well, Shoaib and Musarrat readied the family for flight. *Oh yes,* Shoaib admitted, *we were ready for me to quit at any moment, ready to up stakes and go* and painfully honest as always had added *but you know it was not just me; if my family had not supported me, if Musarrat had not been so unequivocal, I might have wavered.*

Roohi remembers clearly how she and Afshan were sat down by a serious mother and father. The two girls had exchanged apprehensive looks. Had they finally exhausted their parent's patience? It was Musarrat who worried them most because *it was Ami who meted out punishment; Daddy was too soft-hearted.* But no, they were not at fault, not this time anyway. Instead, their parents told them gravely *girls, we want to tell you that something really serious has happened and your father may lose his job.* Afshan remembers being *terribly excited* when told they might have to quickly pack and drive to Kabul and then fly on to London. *Great,* she remembers thinking, *Kabul and London, wonderful.* Roohi said they were both just relieved that it was nothing they had done. Our reaction was, *why all the drama, let us go and live with grandfather until something happens. He has plenty of rooms.* At this Shoaib had laughed happily, tension draining, while we said, *OK, what's next. Then Daddy told us everything,* said Roohi, *and we told him not to worry, that we could not care less about coming down a notch or whatever, and that anyway our grandfather's house was much nicer than this government house. So we had our food and went to bed. We thought then that money and all that does not matter—but* and then she smiled and gazed around her airy Bangkok apartment, *it really does a bit.*

One problem was that it was one of those times when Musarrat's parents were not speaking to each other. This would have made staying there quite difficult, so, and here Roohi had grinned her wild smile *it was Kabul or nothing which was quite exciting for us, a great time with Afshan and me acting as go-betweens with the family and getting all sorts of good things from papaji.* Then Roohi became quite serious; she knows now it was in fact a very dangerous period and not the school-girl adventure she and her sister had believed it to be at the time. *It was the only time Ami was really afraid for Shoaib's life, the only time,* she said quite seriously.

Today though, Roohi believes Shoaib is bulletproof. *Oh yes, he is one of the few in Pakistan who does not have to worry about attacks on his life.* Is she entirely sure that this is true? No, she is not. *Daddy* she sighs *has* (unwittingly) *made enemies of some powerful political figures, people who are still very dangerous, people who never forget.* But when I mentioned Roohi's worries to Shoaib he just laughed them off.

It was an anxious time for Shoaib and Musarrat, full of uncertainty. And then, one day it was all over. A call came in from the other staff officer in the president's office, a General Bachu, who, to Shoaib's immense relief had said gruffly, *well, we have decided not to send you to the East.* Perhaps the president had enough on his plate without having to cope with the fallout from dealing with a rebellious senior civil servant. It would certainly not look good if an officer of Shoaib's stature were to flee to Kabul. *It was the end of all the worry for me* Shoaib said, and here sadness tinged his voice, *but not for all the people I had worked with in Brahmanbaria, and it was the start of a terrible time for Pakistan.* And then he stopped, and for a few minutes we sat in silence. Thoughts of the host of fellow officers who ended up in Indian prisons for two-and-half dreadful years, of all those caught up in this senseless war, would silence anyone. But for his own conscience and his stubborn insistence on always trying to do the right thing, and a family of strong independent women, he could so easily have been one of them.

Instead, Shoaib said, cheered at the thought after such sombre memories and their potentially dire consequences, there occurred one of those extraordinary reversals of fortune which marked his life, *within a couple of months of this whole sorry thing I got a plum posting. I was off to Karachi.* It was indeed a plum posting and indeed a considerable step up the ladder. Shoaib was posted as commissioner. It was perhaps one of the most important steps in the career of a CSP officer. The post of commissioner of a division in the field was equivalent to that of joint secretary to the federal government.

This amazing stroke of good fortune still amused Shoaib. Perhaps it also confounded his enemies. But whatever the case Shoaib insisted that he has not

the foggiest idea how the posting came about, *but you know, God has strange ways. Remember how I was thrown out of Kohat and ended up in Lahore and if you ask how it happened, well, nobody knows how it happened. Karachi was the same. I have no idea why I was suddenly promoted and sent to a place where very senior officers were normally sent. It was a very big step.* And if there were 'friends moving behind the scenes' and Shoaib knew nothing about it, well, it would not be the first or the last time this was to happen. But one thing did not change; as usual, the posting was to be eventful.

It was also relatively brief.

Shoaib describes his second stroke of luck as having his former probationer and family friend, Kunwar Idris as his deputy commissioner. In an emotional whisper Kunwar described the position of Commissioner Karachi as *the top CSP job in the country* with a palatial house, an office, a car and not a lot of work. There was also a huge amount of attached prestige and power with the commissioner *lording it over parties and functions.* The only other power of the time was either the military or the city government. Shoaib writes laconically about this period, for although he knew how ephemeral and essentially boring it all was, he could not help being mildly intoxicated with all the pomp and power. *Yes, Karachi was the most enjoyable post and there were many benefits* he said smiling all the while. These included immediate honorary membership of the exclusive Sindh Club, the golf club, Gymkhana, rifle clubs, *and so on.* Shoaib had laughed, *from thinking that at best we might have to go and live in humble obscurity and circumstances with my in-laws, there I was 'king of Karachi'.*

There was a police force of more than eight thousand under his direct command and two large Authorities—the Karachi and the Municipal Development Authorities—that between them employed fifty thousand people. It was a post with almost unlimited powers but, and again Shoaib smiled at the quirkiness of high office and as Kunwar had said, *apart from 'showing the flag', there was actually not a lot to do.* Showing the flag would soon become a very important task.

Hating the need to attend coffee mornings and elaborate parties Musarrat did not enjoy the pomp and power at all, although she did enjoy dressing up and she of course always took duties such as showing the flag quite seriously. But she was different and did not mind if everyone knew it. In her daring saris, flowers in her hair, floating in a shimmer of silk, a gracefully exotic butterfly, Musarrat stood out from most of the other matronly, more conventional and somewhat wary wives. So did her daughters. Musarrat was also convalescing. Packing up in Peshawar, she had suffered a heart attack. Shoaib had dashed down to Karachi to take up his post, as usual leaving Musarrat to organise the moving of the household. *Packing was part of our life and in those days there*

was no such thing as a packing firm. Whether it was a succession of childhood ailments, the cumulative strain of the last few years, or that her heart had been weakened by the poisoning in East Pakistan remains unknown. Shoaib was shocked to the core.

My mind was strong but from a child I was often not well Musarrat had said as we sat and talked into the night in London, but this event was just not a passing illness. On hearing the news, Shoaib had dropped everything and rushed to Peshawar. He need not have hurried; the situation was already in hand. One of his students from those rose-scented years in Swat, a boy called Bilal, was now a well regarded doctor. He had cancelled all other commitments and hurried to Musarrat's aid. In a remarkable show of affection and devotion, Bilal stayed by her side for some months, travelling with the couple by train to Karachi, flatly refusing to leave until he was sure Musarrat was well on the way to recovery. As Afshan said, *he loved my mother and father and would have done anything for them.* He was not alone. In the future there would be many others who unasked, would think nothing of dropping everything to help if this was needed.

There was to be no respite for as Shoaib noted *no sooner had we overcome that crisis and brought Musarrat to Karachi than the war between India and Pakistan broke out.* An add-on to the civil war in the East, the effect on Pakistan was disastrous.

In Karachi, the parties stopped and the city was bombed by the Indian Air Force. Afshan's memories are vivid. She recalls watching the blaze of burning oil storage tanks at the port from the commissioner's house, of fighter aircraft sometimes twisting and turning high in the sky in deadly dogfights, and of their nanny running screaming for them to hurry inside where they were made to huddle under the dining room table. Later a trench was dug. It was a poor copy of the famous Lahore trench and Afshan describes it as very damp; *whenever we got out we were completely drenched. The water level in Karachi was so high that the trench would fill up* despite the best efforts of the gardener to bail it out. *I was sure that if we didn't die from bombs we would certainly die of drowning.* Worse than the sodden trench was fear for their father. *When our father was out inspecting the bomb damage we used to worry whether he would come back home at all or be blown up.*

Kunwar said everyone was depressed, but of his friend Shoaib replying in an amused and languid voice if anyone asked him what was going on, *just ask Idris, he is the man on the spot and he is facing the bombing. I am resting.* This had, said Kunwar, a very calming effect. But far from resting, Shoaib spent his time in casual public appearances which was his way of showing how unworried he was, his way of keeping people calm. Kunwar had smiled again, *of course, not that I deserved such confidence; not that I should have been given such accolades but this does show you how generous he was and how he would promote his juniors in the eyes of the people. He was unique; few other commissioners would have done this, most are a mean lot.*

It was not only Kunwar who was brought to the fore, there were others. The twenty-seven elected members of the national and provincial assemblies had been, in Shoaib's words, *cooling their heels for over a year since the elections. Kunwar and I thought it only prudent to involve them in the war effort.* Delighted to emerge from ignominious obscurity the would-be politicians had greatly welcomed the initiative and proved to be a great source of strength to the Karachi administration in those difficult days. However, as is the way in the political world, once the war was over any lingering gratitude quickly evaporated.

There was also the matter of the fortress that was supposed to shield Karachi against attack. Shoaib described the bombing as intensive and of Karachi being so unprotected it was *totally at the mercy of the Indian bombers.* Panic and chaos ensued and all roads were clogged as people tried to flee the city. The restoration of public confidence was a priority so Shoaib asked the commander of the fortress to stage a show of force by marching his troops down the main street. 'Good idea' agreed the brigadier in command 'but unfortunately there are no troops, perhaps in a week'? Karachi was indeed exposed, but luckily the Indians did not come. They were intent instead on stage-managing Pakistan's humiliating defeat in the East.

With the defeat, the military in West Pakistan was in disgrace and President Yahya Khan, an army man who had seized power from the former dictator Ayub Khan, humbled and forced to make an ignominious exit. At last nothing stood to block Bhutto from taking power. A master of spellbinding rhetoric he swept into office and announced to a dazed nation *thank God Pakistan is safe.* Safe perhaps but not intact for as Afshan said in one of her more sanguine moments, *he overlooked the fact more than half the country had been lost and thousands of our people were in Indian prisons.* And there you go. Even for such an avowed political populist and universal sympathizer as Afshan, it was 'our people' who were in jail, the people of West Pakistan.

None of it was Bhutto's fault. After all, his party had joined hands with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League to defeat the Muslim League. Had this unlikely combination been allowed to take power and work together there may have been no civil war and the outcome may have been entirely different; but really, could these two brilliant but entirely egocentric men, the Sheikh and the feudal firebrand, have rubbed along, shared power? However, they did not have to. The generals made sure of that. Now, with the East gone and the country in shock, it was time for action.

But first there were matters that were to blight the political scene in Pakistan for years to come; there were scores to be settled. However, to the intense annoyance of the new political leaders, a few men stood slap-bang in their way and Shoaib was one of them: on matters of integrity and principle or requests to bend the law, he would simply refuse to budge.

For Shoaib, it all began at Karachi airport.

The governor of Karachi, a retired general, one Rahman Gul, had been summoned to Islamabad. Shoaib describes him as being *a very decent sort of man who had instructed that no protocol should be given when he left*. Realizing this was probably a last farewell, Shoaib and Kunwar had gone to see the old man off. At the airport a call came through for Shoaib. *I was very flattered*, Shoaib said, smiling as if he should have known better, *because the call was from the president's house and he had only been in power a very short time*. However, it was not the new president on the phone but a trusted lieutenant, a very senior lawyer. Ever the gentleman, Shoaib recalls offering congratulations for at last being able to assume office but of these words being brushed aside, *yes, yes*, the lawyer had apparently brusquely replied, *I am sure we will all work together and have a great time and achieve great things and so on, but first the president desires you to do one thing*. It was however, one thing that Shoaib would not do under any circumstances; arrest five prominent men for no apparent reason. *I was on first name terms with all of them*, a still bemused Shoaib said, *I clearly remember being shocked and asking 'what are you doing? You have fought for individual liberty and here you are asking me to arrest these five people for no reason at all. I cannot do that.*

Sudden silence at the other end of the line.

Known as a man with a very short fuse, no one wanted to face the new president's rage at being balked on any matter. Then the lawyer *had hummed and hawed* finishing weakly by pointing out that the president really wanted the arrests to go ahead and as a sweetener, that he was sure they could all achieve a lot of things together. Shoaib was unmoved; there was just no way he was about to issue legal orders of arrest for anyone without defendable charges. Said so; then added for good measure that in any case he had no powers to order an arrest; he would have to ask the district magistrate who would in turn demand reasonable grounds in order to be able to defend his orders in the superior courts. Shoaib knew he was on solid ground. The district magistrate was his friend and protégé Kunwar Idris. Shoaib was certain of his integrity. End of story. A brick wall was not what the lawyer had expected, but he tried one last gambit, murmured that anyway, just this once would Shoaib *please do something*. Then he hung up. Shoaib hoped that was to be the end of an uncomfortable conversation.

He was to be disappointed. And fairly soon.

At two in the morning the duty attendant routed a call through to the commissioner's house. It was the lawyer again. He wanted to know what had been done because the president would be very unhappy to hear that nothing had been done. Confounded and a little irritated, Shoaib admits he had almost run out of ideas. How could he get the message through to this man? And then he had *a bureaucratic brainwave. If the president wants the arrests to go ahead* he had said, trying to hide the glee in his voice, *then the sensible recourse is to get the Ministry of Interior and Home Affairs to do it*. Shoaib knew he was on firm ground. The ministry was all-powerful and could more or less do what it wanted to. *It was what they should have done from the first, because the ministry was not fettered as was the civil service, by a legal code of conduct*. The politicians simply wanted to hide behind the civil service, let them take the blame if things went pear-shaped. Again Shoaib hoped he was off the hook, but a bare two hours later, at 4 am he was roused again. This time it was the turn of the home secretary of the government of Sindh and this time there was *no mincing of words*: Shoaib was being very difficult and he should remember in future that if the president wants something done then it should be done. Shaken, Shoaib still stubbornly stood his ground, so the home secretary was obliged to issue the orders, and the arrests took place. *They had the powers*, explained Shoaib, *but they were just trying to hide behind someone else*. In a curious twist it was Kunwar as district magistrate who was obliged to execute the provincial government's orders. Whether it was the well regarded Kunwar or someone else with influence and sense who quietly told the government that the orders would not wash in the High Court, before the five had a chance to launch an appeal they were released. They had been imprisoned for about four hours, but perhaps as a frightener, four hours were good enough.

Kunwar says it was amusing in a way; unwittingly he had gained credit on all sides, from the Bhutto faction for ordering the arrests, and from those arrested who thought he had engineered their release. In contrast, Shoaib scored badly. His impartiality and his position which gave him the power to impose his views were beginning to be a major hindrance to the new leaders. Two days after this incident, in a move that was a carbon-copy of their military predecessors, the new government issued a martial law order. *And of course*, said Shoaib *we were restricted by that order*. But Shoaib had stood fast when it counted and as he later wrote, *throughout this episode I was reminded of Burgess' golden rules—it is only rarely that you will be put to the test and if you fail just once you will be lost.*

The next event in Shoaib's roller-coaster affair with the Bhutto government was to receive *a rather cloak and dagger call that I should meet the finance*

minister at the airport. The call was relayed by the Chief Secretary of the North West Frontier Province. Its origins were veiled. Shoaib was already on his way to meet his friend Sherpao who had been appointed governor of this province, so a clandestine meeting was easy to arrange. The reason for all the secrecy was not immediately clear; the minister simply wanted Shoaib to summon Karachi's leading industrialists without telling them the reason why. Shoaib was happy to comply, explaining, *well, as I also did not know the reason I said 'certainly, I will just ask my DC to notify these people that you want to meet them on Sunday'.* And so they gathered.

Shoaib probably had some idea what it was the minister wanted for he was not at all surprised when the industrialists were told of plans to nationalise their businesses. However, their reaction caught the minister completely by surprise, *to a man,* Shoaib had laughed, *the industrialists replied, 'well, for our country we can even give our lives, so by all means take our industries, it is of no matter to us'.*

It was not quite what the minister had expected. Had Shoaib set the industrialists up?

There must have been some who thought so because later that same day the still irritated visiting minister had, in confidence *let it be known that the commissioner was not going to last long.* The minister's comment was soon common knowledge. There were few secrets in Karachi. Then Shoaib was called in by Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, the governor, who as Zulfikar's cousin was powerful on both counts. To Shoaib's surprise Mumtaz wanted advice; how should he handle the growing friction between the Sindhis and the newcomers who had flocked to Karachi since Partition? Shoaib recommended the governor should borrow from his British predecessors and hold garden parties. Mumtaz's eyebrows must have raised; tea parties, what the devil do tea parties have in common with ethnic strife? Was Shoaib joking?

Undeterred, Shoaib had argued that there were some very good lessons to be learnt from the previous colonial administration. One of the ploys they commonly used was for the top man to hold garden parties and invite the elite from all walks of life. It may well have worked because in Karachi there was no other forum where the Sindhis and the newcomers could meet and mingle. Mumtaz thought it was a good idea but up in Islamabad his cousin dismissed it as nonsense. There was no problem, Zulfikar had insisted, so no solution was required, particularly one as facile as a garden party. Shoaib said Mumtaz had arrived back from the capital rather crestfallen and no doubt a little irritated with his commissioner.

Within three months, the first riots between the Sindhi speakers and the others, the vibrant mixture of newcomers, rocked Karachi. It was too late for garden parties.

Despite falling into political disfavour, as Commissioner Karachi, Shoaib remained a very powerful man. Without his agreement, politicians were simply unable to dispense the patronage of government jobs or the allotment of land. Shoaib was in the way, and *although my attitude towards politicians had matured somewhat and I had accepted that whatever I might have been prepared to do for a friend I should also do for a politician, dissatisfaction grew.* It wasn't enough; the favours he was prepared to grant were minor. Summoned one day by an angry Mumtaz Ali Bhutto to do something about a politician who had criticised the Bhutto regime in a speech in an outlying town, Shoaib had patiently explained that the politician had not made his speech in Karachi and the town where he made it was outside Shoaib's jurisdiction. Shoaib was not at all surprised when Mumtaz brusquely replied that the president thinks there is no loyalty in the Karachi administration. For Mumtaz the politician, Shoaib's legally justifiable refusal to yet again do something was the last straw. He would have to go.

Shoaib agreed; it was all too difficult. There was a problem however; Shoaib had given no cause for dismissal.

The government's response was simple. They abolished the post. If they thought Shoaib would be upset they were wrong. He was delighted; he was off the hook and with the glee of a naughty schoolboy he set to work devising a 'Gilbert and Sullivan' ending, something that would be remembered. As he so happily recounted, *one of the more dubious chairmanships I had was of the race course club.* To the intense annoyance of the political establishment he declared himself *functus officio* and became a regular race-goer. *So there I was,* and he laughed again, *enjoying myself at the races and the governor would telephone and start telling me about happenings not knowing that I was at the racetrack. I would simply reply, 'certainly sir, I will instruct the DC and he will attend to it'.* Finally, Shoaib was summoned by a furious chief secretary who demanded an explanation. He got one. In what was to be the beginning of the end of his real civil service career Shoaib is said to have replied, *well, you have issued a circular saying the post is to be shortly abolished so who is going to take me seriously now? And if no one will take me seriously why should I take myself seriously?* The secretary was left open mouthed and an unrepentant Shoaib sauntered jauntily out of his office. But having made his point Shoaib did resume his job as commissioner until it was abolished. Three years later the post was revived, but by then Shoaib was long gone.

Kunwar Idris, recalling all this with a grin, said that in fact the governor, Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, respected Shoaib and was as fair-handed as any politician could be. He asked Shoaib to choose an alternative posting, anything he wanted, perhaps membership of the provincial revenue board, a potentially lucrative post, anything in fact. Shoaib surprised Kunwar and everyone else by giving as his preference a position at the Rural Development Academy in Peshawar. Kunwar believes Shoaib could have asked for anything, including a much coveted posting to Lahore, but then he had smiled wryly and said *perhaps Shoaib's choice was far more long-sighted and clever than it appeared because it took him out of the limelight*, or so he thought, and it was far better than staying on in Karachi. *After Shoaib left we came under tremendous pressure from Bhutto's people who all wanted land and jobs and so on. I found it very depressing and oppressive although later when they were in trouble* after Bhutto's infamous hanging and *on the run, they lauded me as they thought I had once helped them. But I had not. I had just tried to follow Shoaib's example and be as fair as I could, but even I found them hard to get along with; sometimes they were just impossible.*

And although he may have projected the casual air of a man out to enjoy himself, Shoaib had not just sat around. Unknown by many in Karachi, Shoaib had already spoken to his friend Hayat Sherpao and asked for a post at the academy in Peshawar. Sherpao, of course, had wanted Shoaib as his chief secretary: it is an immense comfort to a politician to have at least one honest man at his side, but Shoaib had demurred. As a federal employee he would almost certainly be caught up in impossible and divisive situations; he could receive orders from the prime minister contrary to those of Sherpao. Shoaib valued their friendship too much. And of course it all came to pass as Shoaib had predicted; an increasingly autocratic prime minister later often issued orders *over Sherpao's head, left, right and centre whenever he wanted his own way* said Shoaib, shaking his own head at the willful foolishness of leaders who will not be thwarted. Unknown, however, perhaps even to himself, in seeking a position out of the political mainstream, out of the constant pressure to relax his integrity even if it was only to turn a blind eye, Shoaib had taken the first step in removing himself from the civil service.

Shoaib's decision was a surprise to everyone.

His friends thought he was consigning himself to a low-level backwater. Kunwar is not certain of the other reasons Shoaib wanted this move but believes that, *the passion that was boiling inside him was for the academy*, and that was enough. *Fed up to the back teeth* by the political pressures in Karachi, Kunwar also took himself out of the limelight. He returned to the mountains of Chitral.

And so, said Shoaib, *Kunwar went to Chitral and I landed up at the Rural Development Academy but funnily enough, all my friends were either shocked or angry. How could I choose such a post? And in a way they were right* Shoaib agreed with an almost sly smile, *it definitely was not an advancement in the normal sense, and yes, in railway vernacular it was indeed a 'khudda' line* (a side line). *Everyone thought I had made a major mistake.*

We have to also assume that Musarrat played a decisive part in Shoaib's choice. She wanted to get out of a social role she hated; she wanted Shoaib to be relieved of the mounting pressures to compromise his integrity; and she had a very good idea how influential both she and Shoaib could be in helping the rural poor of Pakistan. She was right behind his decision. Perhaps she would have been even more adamant if she had been able to foresee the future. For this decision, this move to the Rural Development Academy would be the first of the steps that would take Shoaib into a far wider arena where one day he would achieve the impossible dream: the alleviation of rural poverty.

But first there was the excitement of the Daudzai experiment and the depths of despair that followed. And having left the civil service as Shoaib eventually did, vowing never again to be put in a position where he would be pressured to do things he knew were wrong, does he still believe in his innermost self in the service? Ejaz Rahim for one thinks Shoaib does. *He may have achieved great things outside the civil service* he said, his voice serious and low, *but he still believes in the civil service and its role; he is one of us, and he was one of the best.*

Before we leave Shoaib cheerfully filling in his last weeks in Karachi with horse racing and dinners at the Sindh Club, or trying his best not to tread on too many political toes, one other actor from the future, a man of immense influence and importance, makes a fleeting appearance.

The busy Chitrali advocate Sahib Nadir who almost stutters as he speaks so eager is he to make his point, dined with Masood, Felicity and I one late autumn night in 2007 in Masoodul Mulk's wonderful bungalow above the village of Ayun. A natural raconteur, he told many stories, but one story, a brief vignette, is relevant to Shoaib's time in Karachi.

Sprawled and comfortable in an easy chair, warmed by a pleasant fire, Sahib Nadir told of the day His Highness the Aga Khan first met Shoaib in Karachi. *I was a boy at the time, studying to be a lawyer and our community wanted an allotment to build what was to become the famous Aga Khan hospital.* Shoaib later confirmed the story adding that for some reason the Aga Khan's plane had been delayed for some hours and he had gone to the airport to offer hospitality. Shoaib remembers talking for some time and then *forgetting about the whole thing*. Sahib Nadir leant forward eagerly, *but His Highness did not forget* he said, *he began to keep an eye on this interesting man.*

And so he may have done, but what Sahib Nadir did not know was that it was not the first time the two had met.

When Shoaib was DC Kohat there had been an invitation to a luncheon held in honour of His Highness. Musarrat had been seated next to the prince. When asked to name her favourite country she had replied that she thought Switzerland to be very beautiful; it had made her happy and happiness was very important to Musarrat. The prince had then replied that Switzerland could be found in her own country and when she had raised her eyebrows he had laughed and said she should go to Hunza, to Gilgit, to the Northern Areas and see for herself if he was right.

And one day of course, she would. The prince would see to that.

The DC's Daughters

There were four of them, four if you include Shelley, the baby of the family, four daughters; mavericks all said an amused Humayan, wild and willful agreed Roohi the eldest, but not in Musarrat's eyes. Others may have thought she let her daughters run wild but to her they were being taught to think for themselves rather than to blindly follow *stupid social rules. Oh yes*, Roohi said, laughing wickedly when we talked about the eccentricities of Musarrat's family, *in my family the women are all fairly outspoken and the men are often a bit timid, or at least that's the way I see it. And the women have all been tough on their husbands.* But no matter that they may have moved far from the stereotype of a submissive subcontinental woman, Shoaib has always had a deep and intense love for his daughters, all of them, Roohi, Afshan, Falaknaz, and Shelley. They have been and always will be an indivisible part of his life. But did Shoaib ever long for a son? Roohi thought for a minute, said *no, I am absolutely positive that he did not care; you know neither my mother nor my father made us feel any the less because there were no sons; it seemed to be no big deal for them.*

Across the entire Indian subcontinent, family is everything, more important than any other relationship or bond, more important perhaps than clan or country. This is true for landless labourers or landed nobility, for shopkeepers and politicians, for taxi drivers and army generals, everyone. We are told again and again that in Pakistan the interests and well being of family members comes before any other interest or responsibility. Nepotism, in all its forms, with its good points and its bad, is the rule rather than the exception.

If only this were entirely true, if only human behaviour was entirely predictable, life would be a lot easier than it is, because the notion of responsibility to an extended family in Pakistan exceeds by far any such notion in Western countries, almost inexplicably so. There is often no choice at all, and none for immediate family members; and the involvement can be at once

comforting and stifling and all-encompassing. Sometimes even strangers will be taken into a family and once in there is no escape. In London, Musarrat told us in a manner that brooked no rebuff, that Felicity and I were now part of the family. She expected to see us again, and soon, she said firmly adding, because perhaps as Westerners we may not have known, that we should consider any of the family's households as our own, that we should in fact think of the Shoaib Sultan family as our own. Does this mean we now have mutual obligations? Perhaps it does, but it also leaves us feeling loved.

But there are of course no absolutes. There are some exceptional people who do not conform, who, shocking as it may seem to others in their cultural milieu, subsume the interests of their family if it means breaching their personal notions of integrity and honour, or even more rarely, subsume family responsibility to a wider calling, a notion that mankind in its entirety is your family. To do this in any subcontinental culture, to place family interests almost, but of course not quite, in a separate compartment but to still cherish them as important, is very hard. Such a culturally unnatural dichotomy is not without cost, as to his anguish, Shoaib has found. And despite having made this division, despite trying never to compromise his integrity, or of spending so much of his care and concern on the interests and well being of the subcontinent's poor, the lives, loves and losses of Shoaib's four daughters, vital women all who have chosen their own directions, are so interwoven with his own that they cannot be overlooked, none more so perhaps than Falaknaz, known affectionately as Munchu to her family, who, with her two children, died in circumstances so personal, so futile and so tragic that the scars are still visible. As Rahat, Musarrat's sister, worn down by the hardships of her own life, as Rahat whispered in the cluttered shop front in Peshawar that has served as her office for forty years or more, *if only because of Munchu. Shoaib can never leave Pakistan* (for good). *He tries to visit her grave every day and the first thing he does when he gets back from any trip is to visit her grave, often straight from the plane or train.*

And if Shoaib can never leave Pakistan why is this important, why should Rahat make a point that he cannot leave? It is because none of the three surviving daughters, Roohi the practical, Afshan the artist, and Shelley the dreamer, live in Pakistan; Shelley is in Monaco and plans to move to France; Rooni, for the moment, is in Bangkok; and Afshan shuttles between London and Islamabad. For all three, a solid two-storey house at the end of Edgware Road in north London is the family home, not the house in Islamabad bought by Musarrat all those years ago with her inheritance, now called Falaknaz House.

Shoaib's daughters have shown an independence of spirit that most Pakistani women keep well hidden, and each one has reached for a future that they wish to craft for themselves.

How did this happen? How did they become women of the world? The answer is that it all started with Musarrat. Their old family friend Akram Zaki did not beat around the bush. *Shoaib and Musarrat's was a wonderful household* he said, *a place of free thinking and free living where real human values were cherished.* However, with Shoaib totally committed to his work as a civil servant and Musarrat vitally involved in politics, art, and the outside world, and in pushing Shoaib to do what she thought was right to the point where, as Roohi scoffed, *twittering wives at morning coffee gatherings* or bemused husbands at the club would murmur *why doesn't she leave the poor fellow alone*, there was, as Roohi explained, laughing, *little parenting from them.*

Musarrat's cousin Humayan paused for thought before saying *yes, Musarrat might have been unorthodox as a mother but she was clever and independent with money and buying houses where Shoaib was entirely uninterested. She was always very stubborn and determined and her four daughters developed into mavericks too, although Shelley was more down to earth.*

In London one night Musarrat had said rather wistfully of Shoaib, *despite everything he was a very good man with the children. He hardly ever got angry and we spent our lives as if we were all just friends together. Of course the children did not listen to us sometimes, and this could cause problems, but other times they did listen. You know I just wanted to protect my girls from life in Pakistan but other people saw it all differently. They thought we were just letting them run wild when we were teaching them to think for themselves and not just blindly follow stupid social rules.*

She and Shoaib had an agreement from the beginning, Musarrat said, that neither of them would ever countermand anything that the other might have said to the children, that they would always try and speak with one voice. Roohi, of course, has a slightly different view, *our parents were not that much older than we were* she said her eyes alight with memories. *We all grew up together in a way and it was beautiful. We learnt from them and they learnt from us.* Musarrat had more or less said the same thing, *the children became like my friends and would talk about anything, tell me everything. I called them my Lucy girls and they always told me what they were thinking, so I was always well informed.* Well, not always as Roohi tells, such as her escapade to Kabul; such as some of Afshan's wilder doings.

Close she may have been to her daughters, but Musarrat was also the parent who laid down the law. Roohi laughed about this and agreed that her long-suffering mother was occasionally driven to mete out just punishment, *yes,* said Musarrat quite briskly, *Shoaib never slapped our daughters but I did, and I still do if one of them comes with some rubbish things or disturbs me. You know I would never have allowed Shoaib to slap any woman, and I am sure he never*

wanted to. He was so soft with our daughters, even when they were so naughty. Without being asked, Roohi had agreed, laughing *oh yes, Ami was fiery but Daddy was just too soft, just too kind.* And then, as sometimes happens in an interview, there is a small, inadvertently revealing slip, a small regret. And so it was with Musarrat, *it was not always easy. It was even hard for me to have friends because my daughters would get jealous. They wanted all of my time, all of my attention and sometimes I was just tired.*

And just to make sure we did not get the wrong picture entirely, to make sure she had not been misunderstood, Musarrat looked directly at me, the shyness, the twinkling smile subdued in seriousness, *but do not think there were no rules. Of course there were rules but I made them slowly and I made them so that our daughters could still think for themselves. I wanted them to use their own minds, to grow in their own way.*

In that answer lay the difference between Musarrat and most other mothers of her era— she gave her daughters the freedom to make mistakes about things that did not matter, allowing them to make their own minds up about social niceties or behaviour. Rules that sank in and were considered inviolate, however, included treating servants as people, no drugs and no sex outside marriage, to never flirt with a visitor to the house or with a married man—the list is a long one. Everything else was negotiable except for one more extraordinary dictum: her daughters should never think of marrying a Pakistani.

Without any hesitation Musarrat sat up straight in her chair and agreed she had indeed admonished her daughters in this way, *yes,* she said emphatically, *I told my daughters again and again; do not marry a Pakistani man. I thought the dowry system was like buying a woman and I did not like the idea of totally arranged marriages. Yes,* she said again with emphasis, *I told my daughters I cannot give you a big dowry but I will give you something far more important, a good education and a good life, but no diamonds, no cars, no things like that.*

Musarrat nodded and laughed, a wavering, frail little laugh, *oh yes, they went here and there and I trusted them and they met boys and... although there was lots of gossip* that was all there ever was. *Yes of course,* said Roohi, *we treated all our young Pakistani men friends as brothers, but if we did like someone our mother did not get excited.* Some of the mothers did. Sometimes there were *quite shrill telephone calls from the boys' mothers'* said Roohi, *some were downright nasty, 'Musarrat should keep her daughters and their English ideas and freedoms away from their spoiled, precious sons'.* And here Roohi had tossed her head imperiously, *we of course had no interest at all in those silly boys who were tied to their mother's apron strings and bound by all their silly rules that said we could not just sit and talk with them. Their mothers said we were spoiling them by taking them to parties and staying out to outrageously*

late hours. It was all malicious nonsense of course. Roohi tossed her head again, *well, I for one was not going to marry a Pakistani boy with all those mothers waiting to boss me around.* And that last may well be the nub of it all.

It was not only Musarrat's views on marriage that became embedded in the minds of her daughters; it was also her sense of romance. Musarrat was a writer. One of the strangest minor oddities, of the older two girls at least, is a fascination with men who have 'piercing blue eyes'. It may all have started with Musarrat's fanciful Urdu language novel, a novel she entitled *A Country like a Desert*. Written, as Musarrat says, in despair at the direction her adopted country was moving, the novel's hero was a handsome blue-eyed Englishman who fell in love with an Anglo-Indian girl called Sylvia. Roohi was the first to find her 'Peter', *a man who had the bluest eyes you could imagine* laughs Roohi, but Afshan, of course went one better, for over time, she romanced, married, and divorced a trio of blue-eyed men.

One rainy January night at Heather Walk, waiting for Musarrat to come down from her wonderfully cluttered bedroom, as Sarah, Roohi's beguiling daughter talked animatedly about her mother, I sat and thought about the contradictions this young mother represented. No 'blue-eyed' hero for her, Sarah had fallen in love and married the son of a Pakistani businessman, the owner of The Muslim newspaper and a Shia religious leader and had willingly accepted the beliefs and customs that such a marriage demanded, the same customs that her own mother had sought to escape. Did she understand the paradox in what she said; did she understand Roohi's dismay that this lovely girl bubbling with life and with a voice that may well have taken her onto the stage now wore the hijab? Perhaps she did because, without any prompting she told this story. When my mother got the courage to do what she did, it was to escape from a future she did not want to contemplate, to escape from having to marry a Pakistani man, possibly a cousin, when she had dreamed all her life of a blue-eyed hero, the type of man who was the hero in her mother's book. For some reason my mother felt that she would not be compatible with a Pakistani husband, that it just would not work.

The idea perplexed Sarah; well, of course it would. She took a deep breath, her lovely voice carrying clearly at her age, she said, you learn from your family members and my mother just did not see her life in Pakistan, she did not want to be told what to do, she wanted to be free to do what she wanted and when she wanted. You know, my grandparents, but perhaps particularly my grandmother, brought them all up to be free-thinkers, to see themselves as individuals and not as subordinate playthings of men, women who should not follow the norm, women who would do what they thought was right for them, and this very definitely did not fit the mould of a 'good Pakistani girl'. Sarah took another deep, easy songster's breath and continued in that dreamy voice, the sort of voice that carries softly to the

farthest corners of a room, my mother was only eighteen but already chafing under the confining rules of living as a bureaucrat's daughter and she had seen the way her father had been treated. So when he left the service, both Musarrat and Roohi felt suddenly freed, they no longer had to try, they no longer had to behave with stifling decorum. The adventure, the romance of this appealed to Sarah, of Roohi bundling Musarrat and Shelley into a car, driving through the Khyber Pass to Kabul, then the Paris of Central Asia, where they bought cheap tickets on the dodgiest airline you can imagine, boarded the aircraft and after landing in London, went to stay with friends. They left, she said, a shell-shocked Shoaib with an ultimatum—they were off to the UK. It would be their new home, said Roohi defiantly, and I am going to buy a house and study there. And that is how it came about, the pure single-mindedness of my mother, said Sarah.

Yes, it was me, said Roohi, *I loved my father and although I knew it distressed him I still said to him I was not stepping into any Pakistani university, not ever. My father was in tears when we left and I felt very sorry for him, but really, he had no power over any of us. So we went and lived alone there. Also, after what happened to my father I knew we needed another base; we needed a safety net, somewhere other than Pakistan. I had a feeling that this family would be in trouble sometime.* And like Musarrat, Roohi said she loved the English people and her English school. *So although it was my mother's idea, it was me who got them all going.* So in a way England was a bolt hole. *Yes it was,* said Roohi, *it was a bolt hole but it was also more than that. We felt we were going home.*

If losing his family to England wasn't hard enough for Shoaib, the next blow was Roohi's marriage to her 'blue-eyed' Englishman. He was truly disappointed, not so much at Roohi's choice but because he was not there, not part of it all as a father should be. Was that all there was to it? Musarrat had shrugged and smiled, *who knows* she said. But, Roohi believes Shoaib quickly recovered his equanimity when he found she was happy. With marriage behind her, and the security of tenure that this bought, Roohi set about creating a hub, a safe haven for the family in London, for the then ill and anorexic Afshan, for the school-age Falaknaz and Shelley, and of course, for Musarrat and her dreams. In doing this, Roohi believes she helped give Shoaib the freedom and security to do what he had to do. But if Roohi had upset Shoaib by leaving Pakistan and then marrying as she did, she and her sisters were always fiercely protective of their father. Once the sisters put seven spoons of salt in some woman's tea, *a woman who had been making goo-goo eyes at Daddy although, as usual, he did not seem to notice* and, said Roohi with delight, *she drank it.* The girls need not have worried. Kunwar Idris, gracious as always said, *yes, he must have been lonely a lot, but I do not think he ever had any other romantic interest but his wife,* and then he chuckled mischievously, *unless you know of any.* Kunwar didn't.

Musarrat was his friend's life-long love, he said; there were no other women, and then he shook his head, never.

No one ever denied that Musarrat was often difficult, that she was a fiery and independent woman. Roohi laughed, *oh yes, I sometimes wondered when I was seven how the marriage was lasting. There were just so many fireworks. She just did not act like a normal Pakistani wife. But you know, I also have it in my mind* she added softly, *a faint memory from Bangladesh of a woman always singing and dancing, of musicians playing the tabla in the house, and of my mother being very, very beautiful.*

Roohi herself is not far behind. Attractive but also quietly strong, it is easy to imagine the fiery side as well; she can also be cool in a crisis as Afshan describes when the London police included the 'Shoaib' house in a multiple drug raid—after all it was a Pakistani household. Roohi appeared totally unruffled where others might have panicked, and of course, nothing was found. England was changing. And yet, despite all the projected strength and sense, there is still an easily wounded sensibility which adds to Roohi's attraction and softens her persona. She is obviously capable of making hard decisions, *like kicking Peter* (her husband) *out*, and has made mistakes in life—such as sending her children to Pakistan to comfort a grieving Shoaib and Musarrat and so traumatizing her son, *ruining his life* she now believes, tears welling in her eyes, but she is unafraid to admit she has made them. This and her quiet confidence make her very likeable. I can see though that she could be as fiery as her mother if roused, and she is unashamedly proud of being part of a diverse and amazingly eccentric and talented family of strong women. And when there is talk of who will succeed Shoaib, perhaps attention should be focused on this quietly accomplished woman.

Of all the people we talked with it was Roohi who impressed us, who we believe has the strength of will, the capability and commitment, and yes, the passion to create a long-lasting movement out of Shoaib's life-long journey of developing social mobilisation into something that will go on and on, a movement that will last. She has the background, experience, strength of will and capability to do this, and she is relatively free, and well positioned. However, as Roohi said, being a daughter is very humbling. She remembers her years in Pakistan after Falaknaz's death with pride, you realise you have a father who shines everywhere. But there was also a downside. Of course, as I was working in development most people thought 'oh yes, she is just there because of the Shoaib name and not because of her own abilities'. This was not easy nor the fact of being ignored by various ministerial secretaries when Roohi tried to operate using the name, 'Roohi Metcalfe'. Roohi rolled her eyes, they would just think, 'oh yes, another expatriate Pakistani, so what'. And we do not use the name 'Khan' so we had no class they could identify me with. Then,

fed up with this sort of thing, after six months I started to use the name Roohi Shoaib, and then doors began to magically open. It certainly was an advantage but I never let him down. In Pakistan, Roohi explained, people with well-known or influential fathers often behave badly but they would say to me in surprise, 'but you are not proud, just like Shoaib'. How could I be proud when I wanted to follow my father's example? Roohi; her father's daughter.

There are some children who are so different, unaccountably wayward, self-willed and capricious as to stretch their parent's patience to the limit. Afshan was one such child but luckily for everyone else, she was also extravagantly generous, very often amusingly contrite and very easily forgiven. Her loyalty to family and friends can also be extreme as can her anger for those she sees as enemies and in fact almost everything about Afshan can be described as extreme, including her naivety. If Shoaib and Musarrat's genetic make-up produced Afshan the child, Afshan the adult is by far the product of Musarrat's eccentricities.

If Roohi had been the easiest child in Musarrat's view, who then has been the most demanding?

Without hesitation but with a weary smile that was obviously no stranger Musarrat had sighed, *Afshan of course. She was a truly tiring child. She would shout, 'I am more than your daughter'*, and here Musarrat just shook her head, *she would say I loved our other daughters more* and not be convinced otherwise no matter what Musarrat said. *She was difficult for education, difficult for living, difficult for everything;* and she still is. Even now she can fly off the handle if she thinks either of her parents are treating her unfairly, or have given things to the other daughters and not to her, and she is still dependent.

Kunwar Idris, who knew Musarrat's family well and admired her father and described him as an icon of eccentricity in Peshawar, said that perhaps Afshan has taken the family's eccentric behaviour about as far as it could go without going right off the rails. Amazingly, where other people may be outraged, Idris chuckled as if it were all a great joke, about the teenage Afshan holding a party at his house in Karachi, and *she made a condition that I could not come down from the second floor while the party was on. It certainly was a rowdy party and the house was just ravished, furniture thrown out and you know what else. Of course, she apologized about it all later.*

Following her own childhood regimen, Musarrat required her daughters to study the Quran. They studied under a kindly religious scholar, a simple man whom they called Maulvi Sahib using *takhti* or wooden tablets and bamboo pens and ink. Roohi was a quick learner and raced through her lessons and when she completed reading the Quran she was given a pearl by Musarrat which as usual, aroused intense envy and resentment in Afshan. It did not make her any faster, *I lingered for years,*

were up to their necks in the wedding of their lives, Falaknaz's stupendous Pakistani wedding. It was to be a marriage with all the trimmings, one that would make up for Roohi's out-of-sight marriage to Peter in England, and Afshan's impulsive, and sometimes embarrassing marital escapades. Although she had stepped away from her mother's dictums, and although Shoaib was secretly delighted because it seemed that at least one of his daughters' would put down roots in a continent to which he himself had committed so much, Shelley firmly believes he also wanted Falaknaz to have a marriage where the couple would share their lives as equals. That they did is another story. They also took Shelley along with them on their honeymoon to Sri Lanka.

Shoaib had become internationally famous for his work there as a United Nations consultant, something we will hear more about later, and in order to be near her father, and to escape the London school she hated, Shelley opted to attend school in Sri Lanka. She was soon unhappy and moved back to London after a month. Shelley describes the next six years as difficult, being only one of two brown girls in a mainly white, Jewish school. This reference to being brown is one of the few that any of the daughters make about the difficulties of living in England. After Falaknaz's honeymoon in Murree her new husband Jamshed flew off to Paris where he had been posted, to find an apartment. All this shifting about of children is typical for an employee of any international agency, but can be difficult for children, even more so for those who come from an extended family background. However, if this was what she wanted, Musarrat had indeed succeeded in transferring her daughter's allegiance from Pakistan to London, or at least to Heather Walk.

Shelley was unequivocal and quietly emphatic about how difficult it has been to share her father with 'the world'. *At times I have even been very angry that he was not here for me, and knowing that this was selfish made it even worse. Sometimes I used to long to have a normal family, a father who came home after work instead of an occasional wonderful 'Father Christmas'.* But, suddenly smiling, she admits, *we are all so proud of him, really proud of him, and although we have suffered, we would not have it any other way. And you know something else. Well, it is said that the people who work for my father constantly seek his approval, and it is no different for his children— all of us, even Afshan, have spent our lives seeking his approval.*

This seeking approval has always puzzled Shoaib, who neither seeks nor encourages such ideas. The answer, however, is obvious. As Shelley said on the emotion charged morning in Monaco, *everything that I have done up to the time I married Tim, everything, was for my father. It was in my blood and I cannot imagine doing anything else. Yes,* she said crying, *I think it is time my father gave up on work and spent more of his time, more of his concern on his family.* As for Tim, a supremely self-assured and quietly confident young man, he has no problem living in Shoaib's

shadow, sharing Shelley. *He can deal with it,* laughs Shelley, *he has no choice.* He doesn't need one. Shelley believes Shoaib sees Tim as the son he never had.

Will Shoaib do what Shelley wants; will he give up his work and spend more time with his family? Shoaib sighed, *if I do I will die,* he smiled apologetically, *what else is there to do.* So, while he regularly takes time off to be with Musarrat, and his daughters and grandchildren, showering them with gifts, for them it is all too brief. And then it is back to the relentlessly demanding drug of work that has absorbed him almost totally.

There are those who suggest that Musarrat has not always followed Shoaib, for example when he worked in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, and earlier in Sri Lanka, but Shelley furiously refutes this. Musarrat herself admits the fact, sighing *I let him go,* in part because she knew she would not be able to match the pace physically, and in part to free him so he could come and go as he pleased. But she was always there to welcome him back and provide support. And having given up so much to free him, Musarrat does not want Shoaib to stop. *Why should he,* she asks?

And does he know his own limits; will he know when to stop? I somehow doubt it—men like Shoaib do not believe in limits. They have spent their lives telling people there are no limits, and that the human spirit is capable of extraordinary achievements. They have seen the transformations that occur when people start to believe this.

Shelley believes that Shoaib's visits to the UK are becoming increasingly essential as a chance to wind down, to make sure that all is well at Heather Walk, that Musarrat is as comfortable and as well looked after as possible, that his family is safe and well, and then he will leave again, always. He cannot resist the siren call.

Star-crossed, the lovely and much loved Falaknaz is dead.

Affectionately known as 'Munchu', she and her two children have been dead for more than twenty years but for Shoaib, for Musarrat, for their daughters and close family Munchu's haunting presence is everywhere, in the minds of every family member, tears spring at the mention of her name, she watches the world from countless photographs on the walls of Falaknaz House, Number 8 Aga Khan Road, there she is, vividly alive, self assured, in command of life, someone whom you would like to meet; how can such a woman die?

Of her sisters, it is Roohi who manages to talk most freely of Falaknaz, *she was also always different to us; she was not a wild child at all.* As a girl, Munchu had asked Shoaib to send her to the convent school at Murree, well away from Roohi and Afshan because she could not study. *We were always having parties with Imran and all the gang and she did not want this.*

Just as she had wanted to be a normal school girl, Munchu also wanted to have a normal marriage. *She was just so balanced,* sighed Roohi, and *when I suggested she meet Jamshed and took her to his house I warned her that his family was not very well off and their house was a bit rudimentary. But it did not matter; he was such a nice guy* and rising fast in the Pakistan Air Force which was an important plus. Roohi then said softly, *I really admired her marrying into a family with not much money.* And of course, the marriage certainly made Shoaib very happy, and not a little nervous. He was much affected, and as they waited for Falaknaz to arrive from London for the wedding, in Shelley's words, *Daddy pretended to be worried; was she on the plane or not? And the joke was that if Falaknaz did not come down the steps then I would have to dress up as the bride as it was just too late to stop the juggernaut of a full-blown Pakistani wedding.* Was it a joke? It was not impossible that one of his strong-minded daughters would change her mind. But not Falaknaz; and Shoaib knew this. So a gentle joke it was, something to relieve the tension, a funny side Shoaib rarely shows to any but family and close friends.

Musarrat believes she had visions of Munchu's death three months before when she was alone in the house. In a dream a voice commanded 'get up Musarrat, your daughter is dead'. She remembers being very upset but Jamshed's mother reassured her saying, *it was just a dream, nothing will happen.* Musarrat was not the only one to have had troubled dreams. Roohi tells how one morning a frightened Afshan described a dream where *one of us was dead in a coffin with two children.* They were all a little spooked by this and Munchu apparently checked the life-lines on her children's hands. They were fine. *Then* said Roohi, *she said the strangest thing, 'when I die', Munchu had said, 'I will tell you this, they are coming with me'*

As so often happens, the harrowing tragedy of Munchu's death was set in motion by a sequence of seemingly normal and mundane events. The Shoaib home in Islamabad was undergoing a programme of repair and restoration. Jamshed and Munchu had closed their own house prior to leaving for Paris where Jamshed had been posted, and Munchu and the two children were, therefore, staying with her parents. The night she died, Munchu had decided to change rooms, warnings from the builders of a possibly faulty gas heater in the upstairs room where she now slept with her two children fatally forgotten. And that was all it took. Smiling through her tears, Roohi said, *she died looking forward to life...she was so fun loving, in her own way she was a fireball, a real character.* And of course she would be. She was Musarrat's daughter.

Arriving numbed and shocked from London, Afshan remembers Shoaib with eyes *like dark pools of tragedy* but still with enough of him left to try and comfort her. In Pakistan when there is a death in a family, everyone, friends and family alike,

just drops everything. It is like some unstoppable force, some inner magnet that no one can resist. You just have to go. Afshan describes the crowd that spilled out of the house as coming from America, London, *and everywhere in Pakistan, and especially from Shoaib's beloved Gilgit and Chitral.* Covered in red roses, Munchu was carried to her grave, but in leaving as she did, she has never left.

Shoaib blamed himself. He was devastated and his way of dealing with the loss was to become totally involved in his work. Musarrat, her voice an emotional whisper, added this girl was his favourite. He loved her very much and she had given him a grandson who was his joy. And then she looked directly at me, I think he was happier with her than with me. You know, I stepped back from it all because I thought my son-in-law would not survive. After Falaknaz died, Musarrat said she became very ill and nearly went out of her mind I had no strength and was so depressed. It also nearly killed her. Hospitalised and hovering on the brink of sensibility, Musarrat was to spend the next few years as an invalid. She says she told Shoaib that she simply did not want to talk about work anymore and in many ways withdrew from life in Pakistan. Musarrat tried to find solace in religion, tried to find an answer to it all, said Shoaib, while I just buried myself in my work. It was the worst year of my life after she died, says Shelley.

Jamshed's life also changed forever, but he did remarry and start again and now lives in America. Musarrat is glad for him, and then tears glisten in her eyes as they eventually do for everyone and she shakes her head in disbelief and whispers, *I will never know why it all happened, it continues to break my heart.* Shelley believes that as a family *we have never dealt properly with Munchu's death.* She suggests they should have all gone into group therapy sessions as a family. And of all I was to discover about this amazing family, this was the only enigma. How to explain the excruciating level of sorrow that permeates the entire family; the museum of remembrance Falaknaz House has become; why Shoaib has to keep on saying sorry every day of his life, why twenty years later tears still well in his eyes when he talks of Munchu.

And why, in a world where death was not uncommon, where Shoaib and Musarrat had lived through war and many other crises, where only months before the awful accident, up in his beloved Gilgit, Shoaib had watched in horror as hundreds of innocent Shia villagers were massacred, why was Munchu's death so shattering for everyone? There is of course no simple answer; already we know how very different this family is, how eccentric and involved. So that is where I will leave the tragedy of Falaknaz; where it should be left—with Shoaib and his family.

Over the months it slowly dawned on us that there was a final curiosity about the Shoaib Sultan family, they were all 'room dwellers', people who only emerged from their rooms for special family occasions, to meet and greet guests,

or in Shoaib's case, to sit for days in the living room talking with us. Was this something new, something that followed on from Falaknaz's death or was it something that the family had always done?

At first, Roohi questioned my definition of the family as 'room dwellers' but then she laughed and agreed. I suppose we are, and she smiled, just a little embarrassed, but we mostly all got together at dinner time or when there was something political or of interest to argue about. And yes, it is a family that seems to thrive on argument, on spirited discussion. But said Roohi in defence of this quaint and harmless eccentricity, we never ever felt that anyone is separate or apart from anyone else, never lonely or left alone and excluded, it is just that we are a family of individuals. In Islamabad it was once different. There was one room with a gorgeous view of the Margalla hills where everyone would gather at about 4 o'clock, we would all come out and talk said Roohi, smiling at the memory, and perhaps have dinner. There was the view and it was so sunny and warm in winter.

Every family pays some price for the work their fathers, and sometimes mothers, do, but this has been at the high end of the range for Shoaib. Tim, Shelley's husband, agrees, *sacrifices have been made but the family is immensely proud of him and even though he has not been physically present all the time he nevertheless has provided a high level of love and support, yes, he has been immensely supportive. But yes, the family has paid a high price in order that millions of poor people can have a better life, and this knowledge has to help. In a word he has been inspirational.*

We live in an age where leaders are supposed to have perfect marriages and perfect children who say perfect things about their husband or father. We know this to be a lie, a fabrication but they all still do it. But Shoaib makes no such claim. There is no pretence of perfection; his family is what they are and he is immensely proud of them, proud of their differences and their willingness to stand up and be themselves. He loves them unashamedly and without question, he loves them all just the way they are.

And if Shoaib can love his family with all their idiosyncrasies and differences, if Shoaib can shoulder grief and carry on, maybe what he is saying to the world is so can you, everyone can love their family, can love their differences whatever they may be, everyone can even love their fellow man no matter the differences, no matter the eccentricities, no matter that they worry or anger you at times, you can love them.

And if this is the message of this chapter, if this is what it leaves you thinking, then it is more than enough.



With CSP batchmates (Sadique, Aslam Iqbal, Sk Mehmood, Humayun Khan, Mrs. Aslam, Mrs. Anis and Musarrat) in UK (1957)



Governor Zakir Hussain visiting Nishan-e-Haider Tufail Mehmorial Brahmanbaria (1959)



Touring by Boat in the then East Pakistan



Cavagnari House Kohat, Deputy Commissioner's Residence (1963)



With college students Union Kohat as Deputy Commissioner (1964)



Target shooting with Orakzai Tribesmen (1965)



With Shamsul Mulk & Commissioner Masrur at Tanda Dam (1964)



Receiving Field Marshal President Ayub Khan
and Nawab Kalabagh at Kohat (1964)



With Abbassi Chief Secretary West Pakistan
in Darra Admakhel Arms Factory (1965)



Farewell photograph as Deputy Commissioner Kohat (1965)



With Illahi Bux Soomro (DG KDA), Kunwar Idris (DC Karachi) and Abrar Hasan (Chairman KMC) as Commissioner Karachi (1972)



With APWA ladies as Commissioner Karachi (1972)



Farewelling His Highness the Aga Khan as Commissioner Karachi (1972)



With Governor Mumtaz Bhutto and Chief Secretary Roedad Khan as Commissioner Karachi (1972)

3

TIME OVER, TIME OUT

Yes, We Will Hang You

The story so far—Shoaib Sultan Khan, a man of honour and integrity, a quiet and unlikely hero, a man who in an increasingly politicized civil service has stubbornly refused to compromise his principles—yet he achieved the improbable; he scaled the bureaucratic heights and became a commissioner. The way is now open for him to climb even higher—he can even become a bureaucratic king. But will he grasp this opportunity? Not an easy decision because he knows that if he does he will have to walk a pathway strewn with cleverly concealed traps each one of which will sorely tempt his life-long ideals. What should he do, he wonders?

In some ways he was increasingly free—his family is determined to establish an alternative base in another country, a safe haven; whatever he chooses to do they should be safe. However they are still dependent, still need support and care so he will have to find a reasonably well paid job. What will he do? Will he opt to stay in the bureaucratic mainstream, rise to dangerously dizzy heights; will he move over to politics? No, he quickly decided, not politics. But is the civil service any better? No it isn't. He is beginning to feel as if he is in a slowly heating frying pan, and although he had so far managed to find cooler spots in the pan, they are becoming increasingly rare.

There was also the matter of what he really wanted to do with his life. As a senior administrator, a civil servant, will he really be able to bring the full weight of his convictions to bear, deploy the full power of the ideas he was beginning to understand, ideas that might well transform the lives of the rural poor? No, he finally decided, he would not.

So he decides to jump out of the frying pan. If he stays he is afraid he might become someone he would not want to know, someone his grandfather would

despise; someone Burgess would dismiss as an unconscionable man. So he jumps; he takes a post that is far 'off the main line', a post that cannot in any way be seen as a career advancement, a post that any ambitious, any sensible civil servant will avoid, that everyone will think is a major mistake—Shoaib becomes the new director of an academy for rural development.

'Good lord' said his friends, 'what a waste of a talented man'. And for them it was—rural development was a far from brilliant career option; in fact they saw it as a dead-end or found the subject a little dull, or were put off by the idea of having to deal directly with the 'carping of the poor'. But not this man. In taking such a job Shoaib felt he had at last come home. And so he had. However, what he did not realise at the time was that the revolutionary rural development ideas he would attempt to put into practice would frighten their socks off. And frightened men with power are very dangerous.

It is 1972. The Bhutto faction is becoming increasingly annoyed at their inability to control or co-opt the powerful Commissioner of Karachi to suit their various political agendas. Why can't they, they wonder? Someone suggests a solution—as they are now in control of the newly inducted Provincial Government of Sindh, if they cannot control the commissioner why not simply abolish the post. They do so. Shoaib however has the last laugh. Far from downcast, to the consternation of those who sought to oust him, he appears quite jubilant. Free at last of his responsibilities, relieved at no longer having to deal with the almost daily challenges to his principles, he cheerfully fills his last weeks in Karachi with social engagements— horse racing, dinners at the Sindh Club and all the other many pleasantries a man in his position can command. If anyone wants him, try the racing club he says, and when they call he refers them to his deputy. It is not what anyone expected. Shoaib still finds the whole thing vastly amusing, says, *well, they abolished the post so I thought I might as well enjoy myself.*

And then he surprises everyone again, friends and enemies alike; with almost any other post open to him provided he will leave Karachi and get out of the hair of the Bhutto faction, Shoaib asks for, and is granted, the directorship of the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development. This, despite offers for dizzyingly elevated positions from friends in high places such as the young and brilliant Hayat Sherpao, governor of NWFP.

Shoaib had another reason for leaving Karachi. Musarrat had reached the end of her tether. She was fed up with having to engage in a social scene she increasingly detested, and no longer relished the inherent instability and constant movement required of the wife of an upwardly mobile civil servant. She was also ailing. What he either did not know or had discounted was Musarrat's view of the future. It was time, she believed, to realize her long held dream—somehow she would establish a permanent residence in London, a refuge far out

of reach of her family's detractors, farther even than a backwater teaching position near Peshawar, one that most of Shoaib's friends thought to be indescribably dull.

So dull in fact that there were those who thought his move to the academy might be just a clever ruse, a cooling-off period out of the limelight from which he would emerge when the coast was clear. Shoaib had other ideas—and returning in triumph to the civil service mainstream was not one of them. Synchronicity, that elusive phenomenon which Shoaib believes has always influenced his life, was also at work—there was a new mood in government. If Pakistan was to avoid the dangers of social instability, ways must be found to improve the quality of life for the country's huge rural underclass.

Coincident with Shoaib taking over at the academy a governmental committee had revived the concept of integrated rural development. This recommendation was unsurprising. The intellectual doyen of rural development in the subcontinent, Akhter Hameed Khan, AHK or Khan Sahib to his friends and close associates, had moved to Pakistan from the erstwhile East Wing and had been appointed vice chairman of the committee. Having taken integrated rural development far along the road in Comilla until blocked by the tragedy of the 1971 war, he was ready to see it taken further.

The grand if crusty old man is no longer with us so a question that will remain forever unanswered is this: did he know that Shoaib had moved to the academy in Peshawar and had this influenced the outcome and decisions of the committee? Whatever the truth may be, with the keen support of another of Shoaib's admirers, the 'Lion of the Frontier', Hayat Sherpao, the government decided to initiate at least five pilot projects, one each to the main 'line departments' such as Agriculture, Forestry, Veterinary, Education, and Social Welfare. One project was even offered to the Home department. Each department was to go its own way with the idea of seeing who came up with the best option.

Then there was the 'main game'. The Rural Development Academy in Peshawar had national responsibilities for training, research and experimentation and for developing viable models of rural development for replication throughout the country. Also, no one in their right minds really thought any of the technical departments would be able to escape the straitjacket of their technical mindsets and do something truly innovative, so the committee decided the 'mother' project should be developed by the academy. Shoaib jumped at the chance. AHK must have smiled to himself. His 'pupil' was back on track. And although Shoaib contends the development of the Daudzai concept was a team effort and involved the academy's research staff, the development 'prescription' Shoaib put to work in Daudzai had already been written and tested in— they were in fact pure AHK; Shoaib had heard them all before and made sure everyone knew this. The academy's staff could not

have cared less whose ideas they were. They were grateful to have a dynamic director who seemed to know where he was going. With hardly a backward glance, they cheerfully set to work.

Excited still by memories of the enormous challenges he had faced, warmed by the gas fire on a chill December morning in Islamabad, Shoaib had leant forward in his chair, placed his bowl of soup carefully on the table, *yes*, he had said with quiet emphasis, *of course I jumped at the opportunity. For me it was the chance of a lifetime. As director, I at last had the chance to put into practice all that I had seen Dr Akhter Hameed Khan achieve in Comilla, all that we had discussed. I immediately consulted my faculty and we decided to select the Thana of Daudzai.*

It was a name that was to become embedded in the development lexicon of the nation, both for its promise and as an example of how a conservative 'establishment' combined with bureaucratic jealousies and political pique can bury an inspired but socially challenging idea. In 1972, after nearly twenty-five years of independence, the pattern of administration in Pakistan was still a carbon copy of the system developed by the British Raj. The system reached right down to the village level and had only two aims—to maintain law and order and collect revenue. The main interaction of villagers with the government was through local police and revenue officials. Following independence, there had been an exponential expansion at the higher administrative levels of central and provincial governments and a highly sophisticated planning apparatus had been developed. However, this did not penetrate beyond the subdivision or *tehsil* level and even there development planning and administration had a minimal footprint. As Shoaib explained, *Peshawar subdivision had an area well in excess of thirteen hundred square kilometres and a population in excess of half a million. This was a totally unmanageable unit for the provision of services to villagers or the integration of development departments with local councils. It was also hopelessly unwieldy for upgrading the skills of farmers.*

At the academy, Shoaib took his staff step by step through the Comilla rationale starting with the first principle that development responsibilities needed to be devolved and that the existing jurisdiction of the police stations, the *thanas*, were the obvious best-fit option: an effective and viable unit for administering development activities. Such jurisdictions were not only compact and manageable—in establishing their boundaries the Raj had made only one stipulation: an officer on horseback must be able to reach any village and return again in an easy day's ride. In addition, if any infrastructure existed at all such as rudimentary health dispensaries, veterinary clinics, schools, or even road access, then this was centred on the police station. In 1972, when Shoaib was explaining these new, simple but nevertheless radical principles of development

to his staff at the Rural Development Academy, there were over one hundred police station jurisdictions in the Frontier Province, each with an average area of three hundred and sixty square kilometres and a population of fifty thousand. Daudzai Thana was slightly smaller in size than the average at two hundred square kilometres. It was also more densely populated with over ninety-six thousand people, but in common with almost every other thana, no village was more than a day's return journey from the police station.

By selecting a pre-existing unit of administration for the pilot project Shoaib hoped to reduce the political squabbling and bureaucratic high-handedness that inevitably accompanied any new initiative, aspects that Shoaib as a senior administrator had already experienced when attempting to initiate or encourage development efforts. He rarely made the same mistake twice. However, to convert a police jurisdiction which had stood as a punitive law-and-order symbol for over one hundred years into a people-friendly centre of development was a tall order.

Name changes sometimes help, so to signal a new start, he decided to name the development centre the *markaz*. It was the *markaz* and not the police station that would become the administrative centre and base of operations for this first experimental Integrated Rural Development Project in the Thana of Daudzai. The police station would be just one more office serving the thana.

As a pilot, Daudzai was a good choice. Although the thana was not more than twenty-five kilometres from Peshawar it was solidly rural. However, despite its seeming proximity, many villages were relatively isolated. Five or six rivers had to be forded and the more distant villages took eight hours to reach by jeep. Of course, it would have been far quicker on a horse but if Shoaib was an accomplished horseman, few of his staff knew one end of a horse from another. Apart from a police station and a revenue office, a lone agricultural assistant had the near impossible task of providing services and advice to the nineteen thousand landowners whose smallholdings extended nearly fourteen thousand hectares. And that was it—this was the base material Shoaib had to work with. It did not stay that way for very long. Shoaib and his men set out to persuade other departments to come to the party. With the big political 'guns' in support and starting with agriculture who upped their staffing level to eight assistants, the other departments gradually weighed in. At Shoaib's urging, the department of local government provided a project manager and this cleverly avoided the need to create a separate department of Integrated Rural Development.

There was to be more, a lot more for as Shoaib wrote in one of his many notes on the subject, *the history of rural development in Pakistan is replete with instances in which many a good programme has been sacrificed on the altar of departmental jealousies.* In almost every instance where an overall project

manager was appointed and charged with the responsibilities of administering the activities of the various 'cooperating' departments for whom he was the supposed official conduit, the situation broke down. Shoaib summarized the attitudes of the departments very succinctly: *having been entrenched for the last one hundred years or so, the departments felt threatened. They were not about to give up one inch of their technical 'territory'. Without any compunction at all, they would set out to undermine and destroy integrated rural development which they regarded as a 'monster', before it could destroy them.* To overcome the inevitably defensive 'knee jerk' reaction by the technically all-important departments such as health and education, forestry, agriculture and irrigation, Shoaib and his mentor AHK gave no such powers to their coordinating project manager. Departmental field representatives were left under the control of their respective departments. With nothing to oppose, departmental officers were allowed by their bemused superiors to get on with the job.

Shoaib laughed when he remembered all this, everybody was happy, he said, *but we still needed to make sure the local departmental representatives worked in the direction we wanted.* To achieve this, Shoaib and his mentor devised a brilliantly simple tactic. They allocated a lot of funds to training, placed the funds under the direct control of their project manager, and introduced a system where training allowances were paid to those technical experts who held training courses for the villagers. *Through this simple system* said Shoaib smiling still at his clever stratagem, *the wholehearted cooperation of local departmental staff was guaranteed.* Simply put, if they did not cooperate they would forego a substantial additional payment. No junior departmental staff member in his right mind was about to do that, *so,* said Shoaib, *the system worked very well. We decided what training was required, the technical staff carried it out, and everyone was happy.*

For Shoaib it was all go and he revelled in it. He also had a little help. Shoaib's old friend and life-long supporter Ejaz Naik happened to be chief secretary. He was also chairman of the academy's board of directors and quickly agreed to become the patron of the Daudzai project. *He became our guardian angel,* Shoaib smiled. It was well that he did because the project would need all the guarding it could get. And then of course there was Dr Akhter Hameed Khan.

But wait. We have jumped ahead. AHK might have headed up the advisory committee but by the time Shoaib took up his post as Director, in one of his famous vanishing acts, he had quietly slipped away. Then, as Shoaib was settling on Daudzai as the viable unit for his pilot project he received a call from one of his closest friends, Tariq Siddiqi. At the time, Tariq was Secretary to the Government of Punjab and he had telephoned Shoaib to let him know that the ever irascible AHK had reappeared, in fact was right then in Lahore and seemed to be at a bit of a loose

end. Shoaib laughs, says he asked Tariq to *dangle some bait, pique the old man's curiosity*. Tariq must have done a good job because in no time at all AHK arrived in Peshawar curious to see just what Shoaib was up to.

Shoaib wasted no time, took him straight out to Daudzai and what AHK saw instantly excited him. It was Comilla all over again, but this time in West Pakistan. A man carefully sparing with his words and already a fierce and acerbic critic of government, AHK had an interesting penchant—an unlikely poet, he was often colourfully emotional on paper. He was this time, writing to Shoaib *you picked me up from the dustbin of despair...and when I look at Daudzai I see an island of sincerity in a sea of hypocrisy*.... He used to lament that, like an architect's plan, he had presented the concept of integrated rural development to Pakistan's leaders, but instead of implementing the entire design, the government, in this case the various departments that had been asked to develop an integrated rural development project, *had decided to just build the dome without the foundation or walls*, and this would simply not lead to anything.

Shoaib was delighted. Everything seemed to be falling into place. Perhaps most importantly, his mentor approved of his plans although he believed the chances of success were slim and was realistically gloomy about the future. *He was convinced even then*, said Shoaib, *that government's policy makers would not understand what I was trying to do*. In an attempt to cheer AHK, Shoaib took him to see the governor. Shoaib needn't have bothered. Arbab Sikandar Khalil, who happened to hold the post at that moment, was a famously popular Pashtun leader and as Shoaib said *another of my great friends*. A cabinet meeting happened to be in process led by the chief minister of the day, a man known as Mufti Mahmood. *He was a very academic and religious man, and very honest*, Shoaib had laughed, *unlike his son* (a no-holds-barred businessman) *who was known around town as 'Maulana diesel'*. Shoaib remembers an increasingly crusty AHK explaining the whole concept to an increasingly sceptical Mufti Mahmood. When he was done the old maulana had apparently shaken his head and said gravely, *ah, but this is just not possible. You are thinking that people will get organised and do this and that, but you know, our society is different*.

This was the view of most of those in power at the time, a view that never failed to get under Akhter Hameed's skin, the view that people of the Frontier were just too fiercely proud and independent to work together. Shoaib clearly remembers Akhter Hameed's mounting irritation and his erudite reply, *that is all well and good maulana, but if I remember rightly it was the British politician Harold Laski who said that the only alternative to the counting of heads is the cutting of heads. If you do not do this, sooner or later you will have trouble, heads will be cut*. And by not doing 'this' AHK meant not allowing the people to have a 'voice' in the shape and form of rural development.

Shoaib says he could have kicked himself. Far from cheering AHK up, Shoaib had achieved the opposite *he came away from the meeting quite depressed*. Before he left for his home in Karachi he took Shoaib aside and said, *look, these people are just not going to understand, so go ahead and try it but when you do they will be just like absentee landlords. They will expect a report every year. They will comment on the reports and just so long as there is no trouble they will leave you to get on. But they will not be of much help*. In his own sometimes circular way, what the old man had said was this: if there was trouble, Shoaib would be on his own.

Well, not quite on his own—despite his glum caveats the Daudzai project proved to be an irresistible lure. When Shoaib invited AHK to participate in a seminar he replied in his typically direct way that he considered coming for just a few hours a total waste of time and money but if Shoaib would have him as a permanent adviser he would come. He made one condition. He had been offered a position at the University of Balochistan by his friend Karrar Hussein who happened to be the new vice chancellor and if Shoaib would match the salary offer of 1500 rupees per month and not a rupee more, he would come to Peshawar. This was typical of AHK and Shoaib was ready for it. Shoaib certainly wanted his mentor on hand as an adviser but insisted he accept a salary of 2100 rupees because that was his own salary. No way could he offer the great man less than this. *I told him*, he said laughing again, *I have a wife and family to support and unlike you I cannot lead such a frugal life and so grudgingly he agreed. But he was like this all his life; he did not value the material things of life*.

The intellectual support provided by the old man was a tremendous boost to the ever practical Shoaib. *As soon as he came*, Shoaib said, *Daudzai went from strength to strength and was greeted with great acclaim*. And so it was, at least in the field, but for those who lived in the darker byways of the corridors of power it was another story. Daudzai's success served to firm their resolve to 'put Shoaib in his place' once and for all.

The former senior diplomat Humayan no longer really cares whose toes he treads on. The country and the service are no longer full of the bright promise and liberalism he knew and loved when he was young. It was no surprise when he cut right to the core. *The really curious thing about Daudzai was that it did not get very much interest at all within Pakistan and the civil service. Rural development was regarded as a thankless, dull, dead-end career option and the establishment's main interest in the rural poor was to keep them safely in their place. It was the foreigners who were interested. The project certainly captured their attention*.

And so it did. Delegations of foreign aid and embassy notables scrambled to obtain an official invitation to tour the project and afterwards, as Humayan said, *they wrote of it in glowing terms*. Shoaib himself talked freely of how Daudzai *received international acclaim* and of a senior USAID administrator, David Owen, writing *'how do we persuade prime ministers and presidents to make Daudzai the basis of development...the day we can do that then we will all be very happy', and all that kind of thing* said Shoaib dismissively, just a little embarrassed still after all the years.

And not only did they write, led by the Americans, many agencies and governments were only too anxious to reach for their cheque books. *And so naturally* said the ever practical Humayan, *jealousies developed or were fed by those who were eager to believe anything of Shoaib, that he was in the pay of this spy agency or that*, particularly the CIA. Flush with funds at the time, the American government's main aid agency USAID led the charge. And, as if to prove how stupidly contradictory human nature can be, at the same time as the rumour mills buzzed with malicious whispers of Shoaib cosying up to America's secret agents, other rumours said he was of course in bed with the 'Reds', India's ally, the dreaded Russian Bear.

January 2007. A wintry evening in London.

We had strolled along the curving thoroughfare of an Edgware Road thronged with exotic shops and eateries, light spilling warm rectangles across the rain dampened pavement, a curious combination of English stolidity and Asian exotica. The door at Heather Walk had been flung open by the cheerfully rotund Gilgiti housekeeper, Farzana. We were hugged, told to come in out of the cold, fussed over; we could have been back in the Northern Areas. After the hugs and laughter, after we had shed our coats and mufflers we were ushered into the warmth of the living room, and in time, and after a story of crocodiles and jungle animals and when Sarah's two small and exhaustingly exuberant daughters had succumbed to sleep, a tiny, fragile Musarrat slipped into the room and tucked herself into a corner of a large overstuffed couch. She smiled a welcome, made sure we were comfortable; made sure we had been fed and watered. It was, of course, the first thing Farzana had done. *What shall we talk about* Musarrat asked. *Daudzai* I replied, *can we talk about Daudzai?*

Voice so small we could have been conspirators Musarrat said, *yes, people said I was communist and that was one reason they opposed Shoaib's programme. In the culture of the day*, she said, *people preferred to believe women were feeble-minded and influenced by their husbands* and then she had smiled and shrugged, leaving me to join the dots; *but of course I was not communist*, she said shaking her head, *and Shoaib wasn't either. How could they think such a thing; how? I just wanted to help the poor. They called me a*

communist because I was more interested in making poor people richer than going to their silly coffee parties or boring dinners where people just gossiped about each other. What a waste of time. Musarrat, eyes flashing, anger rekindled that 'those people' refused to see the difference between communism and socialism. *Yes*, she said, *I was a socialist like many people in Britain where socialism was tolerated. But you cannot change people unless you change the culture. Akhter Hameed Khan saw what I really was. He admired and supported my views. But Shoaib* and she laughed again, *poor Shoaib just tried to stay away from any politics.*

However, out of favour with the establishment, Akhter Hameed's opinions would have been no help at all. Nor were the clandestine manoeuvrings of the new 'Great Game' being played out in Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan in the 1960s and '70s between Russia and the Western powers. The clear distinction between socialism and communism mattered little to the players in this game, not in Pakistan anyway, a country the West regarded as one of the bulwarks against the spread of Russian-driven influence, a time when India had gone its own non-aligned way, snubbing the West and dallying with Russia.

Then Musarrat's mind suddenly slid away on one of those out-of-the-blue tangents that we were becoming accustomed to, tangents that sometimes unearthed a real gem. *I do not blame Bhutto for believing Shoaib Sultan was starting a new mini-Pakistan.* Shoaib, she said, had found a way to help the poor that Bhutto himself had not thought of or did not want to follow as it might mean a loss of privileges for Bhutto's feudal friends, *or something like that*, she had said with an impatient toss of her head, because, as it sometimes did, her command of English had hit a brick wall. And from that time onwards, despite the Bhutto's saying they had formed a 'party of the poor' Musarrat believes they became and remained enemies of Shoaib and by extension of Daudzai, protective of their sole right to help the poor, and intensely suspicious, even jealous, of anything anyone else espoused. *What a mess*, Musarrat said, *what a mess it all became.*

And so while the matrons tut-tutted, and their husbands glanced over their shoulders and held tight-lipped 'chin-wags' in the corridors of power, while jealousies grew and festered, Shoaib worked on his days full to overflowing and Daudzai prospered. *You see*, Shoaib had said, the enthusiasm for it all still burning brightly, *Daudzai was almost an exact replica of Comilla; the ideas and the actors were all the same*, and even better, *the chief secretary was our patron and made sure that all the resources and full backing of the provincial government were behind us.*

With this level of support, it was relatively easy to bring the eight major line departments to the table, and to exact agreement that they would post staff at the

thana level. Easy interaction of villagers with technical staff was all part of the 'master plan'. And so it all began— Shoaib arranged for his entire faculty to get together for a planning meeting. It was a different sort of meeting to those held in the past—this time the staff met not at the academy but as Shoaib said, *in Daudzai in the new* chopal (shed) *we had put up in the markaz office.* There was much talk and discussion but eventually a plan was drawn up. *We all agreed,* said Shoaib, smiling with some embarrassment because he was in for a rude awakening, *on the various things that we thought people needed, and feeling quite satisfied with ourselves we said 'this is our plan and this is what we are going to implement'.*

Then, in a move that raised some official eyebrows, Shoaib introduced a new and startling concept, 'social mobilisation', encouraging villagers to get together and then giving them the responsibility of making their own development decisions. This may not sound like a big deal today but it was heady stuff in the 1970s and to some, it was even dangerously revolutionary. *A cooperative department already existed,* Shoaib explained *but field activities tended to be regulatory rather than advisory and there was no concept at all of social mobilisation.*

Shoaib next began to recruit the first of those whose task it was to bridge the gap between the markaz and the people, a cadre or group of dedicated people who would take the message to the villagers and who would become the hallmark of everything Shoaib was to do in future years. And although they were in truth social organisers, not wanting to create too many waves too soon, Shoaib called them cooperative officers. Government had to be taken slowly and carefully down the rural development path.

Almost every one of those early Daudzai recruits have remained unswervingly committed to the ideas and ideals of village organisation. Ten years later, men such as Feroz Shah and Mutahir Shah, the first two to be recruited for Daudzai answered Shoaib's call, and without hesitation set out to trudge the often dangerous tracks that led to the isolated villages of Gilgit and the Northern Areas, and are still, like Ikram Ullah Jan, now the number two in the Frontier Province's main rural support organisation, at work in various rural support organisations, all totally committed believers still, some ferociously so.

So out these new social organisers went with the master plan tucked under their arms while Shoaib and his staff, satisfied that they had devised a marvellous plan, waited for the villagers to applaud, roll up their sleeves and get to work. Each social organiser had been carefully trained and instructed to tell the villagers 'look, we are here to help you and this is what we have come to do', and then they were to produce the master plan.

How often have villagers the world over gathered politely, sitting in a semi-circle on the ground patiently listening while a bunch of earnest outsiders sat uneasily on a variety of hastily assembled chairs and explained the details of some plan designed to improve the lives of those who sat and listened; how often must those same villagers have weighed up what was on offer, compared it with what they really needed, and quickly realised yet again how futile it would all be—but what the heck, why look a gift horse in the mouth if nothing else was on offer. Why was it that none of the visiting experts over the years had thought to ask the villagers themselves what it was they believed they needed and in what order? Why? Well, it was just one of those things. Villagers were assumed to be simple people who needed to be told what to do by trained and well educated experts.

But in Daudzai something very special was about to happen.

Firstly, the social organisers were totally confident that Shoaib would listen to what they had to report even if it was entirely negative so they told the truth—not one person in any of the many villages where they had sat and talked showed any interest or enthusiasm for Shoaib's master plan. But then something quite remarkable happened; to their surprise, the social organisers discovered that most village people already had their own very well formed ideas about what was needed, about what would work and what would not; and even more, each village had a different story. And even more, the social organisers were unafraid to report this radical finding because they knew Shoaib would listen.

There was no question at all, he had laughed, *this news was a bombshell. I found that this plan which we had all been very happy with,* and here he shrugged with uncharacteristic exasperation because the continued insistence of those in power, the insistence of nearly every major aid agency or development academic of the essential nature of development blue-prints has now dogged him for years, *I found that this 'blue-print' was not worth very much at all. It was in fact hardly worth the paper on which it had been written and was not in any way relevant to the villages of Daudzai or the needs of the people. We would have to go back to square one.* This was an extraordinary admission, an extraordinary position to take, one that few men in Shoaib's position would have willingly accepted. Elsewhere, invariably, if lower level field officers had reported in this manner they had been dismissed 'out of hand' by those in charge as talking utter nonsense. How could ignorant villagers know better than highly trained national experts or those from world class agencies and banks? So time and again, projects were designed and implemented with little recourse to local knowledge and local priorities, and so of course, again and again such projects failed.

Astoundingly, this still happens. It certainly happened during the 1980s, when Shoaib was embarking on a development programme in the Northern Areas of

Pakistan. He would meet with the development commissioner or experts from international agencies, *and of course* he said, *each one would be generous in his or her advice and one would say, 'Shoaib, what these people need are schools and education', while another wanted to build fruit processing factories; everyone had a hobby horse, everyone had something to say.* But when Shoaib went to the villages and encouraged them to say what it was they wanted it was always a very different story, *and if one of those 'experts' or development people happened to be with me I would ask them, 'alright, whom should I believe, you or the villagers?'* And of course, there was only one answer.

And yes, Shoaib said, as if it was a given, *once you reach a certain stage then outside technology can be very useful. AHK had a word for it,* he continued, *he said you should graft outside technologies onto existing skills or requirements. If you see people digging canals and prising out rocks with Ibex horns then you might introduce drilling machines, but if they have their own methods of determining levels then let them get on with it.* And then Shoaib laughed as he so often did at the predictable nature of mankind, *but what can I do, I think it is written somewhere in the Bible that it is not that they do not see, but that they do not want to see.*

But in the Thana of Daudzai the villagers were lucky. Shoaib was a man who was ready to see, a man who was ready to listen. Today there are others, many others, and some of them can be found in surprising places.

Jahangir Khan Tareen is the scion of the Nazim to the former Nawab of Bahawalpur; his family commands a fortune in rich irrigated lands in the Punjab and has business interests in sugar and other commodities. Outside his superbly appointed office sits the latest Range Rover sports model, he flies his own aircraft, and as the only man in his family with university training, had been unwillingly 'dragooned' he explained, smiling his handsome smile, into the then provisional federal government. Obviously busy, like so many others we were to meet in our travels Jahangir had immediately agreed to see us. He also gave us the courtesy of refusing all phone calls while we talked. There was one exception, a call from his son in London. He had smiled apologetically when his secretary had bustled in with a mobile phone, shrugging his elegantly jacketed shoulders and saying that family came before all else.

Why, you may ask, were we clutching fine bone china cups of tea in the beautifully appointed office of an obviously wealthy man whose family had its roots in the proud and ancient nobility of Punjab? There was a very simple answer. For all his wealth, for all the privileges of a boyhood wanting nothing, Jahangir actually cared for the people of Punjab. And even more importantly, he was a convert. It all began he said, when he happened to be Minister for Agriculture in the Punjab Provincial Government. *I wanted to get things done and of course I thought I knew how to do it.* Looking for sources of credit for poor farmers, one of Jahangir's acquaintances told him about a highly successful if unorthodox rural support programme and the rather unique individual whose ideas were behind it. Not a man to waste time, Jahangir had immediately arranged a meeting. *So I walked into his office* and here Jahangir had chuckled, *and I had no idea who he was and he had no idea who I was.* They hit it off straight away, the man of the people and this young and wealthy landed gentleman. Jahangir thought he knew what he wanted but Shoaib had gently pulled him up short, *before anything else,* Shoaib had said, *you must learn about social mobilisation.*

So I did, said Jahangir, *we talked and I read but it was not enough.* A man who liked to get things done, Jahangir needed to see it all in action. *So he invited me to come and see him talk to poor villagers, to hold what he called dialogues. It was an absolute eye-opener, one of the most important points in my life.* The descendant of generations of farmers and land-owners, he believed he had a liberal outlook and unquestionably understood the problems of the rural poor. *That was my self-impression,* said Jahangir, *but what I realised that day was that poor people simply do not talk to 'us'* (upper class landowners) *no matter how liberal or understanding, and they don't talk to rich foreigners either, no they don't. They are in fact very clever people with centuries of experience behind them, and when 'we' rich outsiders say we are going to help them or introduce this programme or that they look at us intently, judge us, figure out what it is we wish to hear, and then they say it.*

But it was different with Shoaib.

There was just something about him, said Jahangir, *because in just a very short time, these people whom I thought I knew well would start talking and tell him things I had never heard before. And you know,* admitted this ultra-suave and very surprising man, *I was shocked by this revelation, realizing that for decades we had failed. It changed the way I looked at such things forever; it changed the way I approached things, in fact it changed a hell of a lot of things in my life. The ideas I picked up from Shoaib Sahib have been a huge learning process for someone like me, a huge asset and this has been the genius of Shoaib, showing people like me that you have to sit down with people and really discuss what they really want, and it cannot be the old fashioned 'command' dialogue. There have been too many of these where we go out with good intentions of course and tell them what we think and they say, 'yes of course sir', all the while racking their brains as to how they can get something out of this useless offer. And this,* as Jahangir added, *leads to a spiral of distrust because we start to think these poor guys are not really sincere, they are not honest, they are tricky, and they start to resent being told what to do, but they are not being tricky, they are just trying to make the best out of a bad situation.*

What Jahangir was really saying was that it takes a very special sort of man to do this, to convince villagers to tell the truth and not just what they think they are expected to say; to sit down with the people so that they feel comfortable, to sit patiently while they slowly work around to the point where they willingly air their views without fear of being ridiculed or disregarded; and it takes a very special sort of man to trust in the innate sense of people the establishment so casually discounts as simple villagers, to jettison a carefully prepared blue-print, accept their ideas and allow the villagers to determine their own development priorities. It also takes a very special sort of man to be able to 'sell' all this to his own staff and supporters and to select and train social organisers who themselves will be trusted by village people. Luckily for Daudzai and for so many places in the subcontinent in the years to come this man was there.

Perhaps Shoaib was also lucky to start working with such independent, forthright and straight-speaking people as the Pashtun tribesmen of Daudzai. However, as Jahangir had found to his immense surprise, even in the Punjab where village people tend to be not so plain-spoken, once they believe you are really there to listen and not just 'command', farmers will not stay politely silent but will burst out into spontaneous laughter when asked an obviously stupid question.

Yes they did said Jahangir, *I once asked them if they would pay for medicines if I helped them to establish a clinic. They all burst out laughing and said, 'what do you think we do now', and I was a big landlord in the area and so I was a bit taken aback to be laughed at but they were right and I did indeed feel a bit foolish.*

And this is a man who is born to command, who when asked if he would remember someone who crossed him had laughed and said, 'definitely'; but a man who is nevertheless absolutely emphatic that if you ever want to assist the rural poor they must be organised and feel free to speak out; they must have activist leaders who are given respect; and in turn, those in command must be prepared to sit and listen to what the villagers say they want, and act on it.

However, back in 1972 such ideas were all far too early for their time; the country's conservative 'establishment', were not ready to accept such ideas even if the farmers of Daudzai were.

Shoaib learned several crucial lessons in Daudzai, lessons he would carry with him for the rest of his life. The first was that village people know better than anyone else just what they need. In Pakistan, most rural families have lived in one location for generations: no one is more alive to their problems than they are. The solutions they propose at best only needed to be given technical shape by a locally involved technician. He also learned that unless you resolve the primary problems identified by villagers, they will simply lose interest and close up. They may go through the motions if you inist on doing things your way, but

they know it will all be a futile waste of time. The second lesson was that the needs of one village are likely to be totally different to the needs of another. The overall development plan cannot be just one big inflexible juggernaut, a useless master blue-print where one plan suits all, but must instead be a portfolio of a myriad of micro-plans— one for each village. But how could this be done?. For example, departments such as the irrigation branch of the public works department were unable to produce more than a couple of works plans a year when hundreds of mini-plans were required. Shoaib solved the problem in this way—he established what he called 'development units', in this case a few engineers who set up a 'production line' with the social organisers, preparing and costing simple plans to villagers' specifications. Where it had taken a government department a year to produce two such plans, using rule of thumb estimates and experience, Shoaib's development units produced nearly two hundred in less than nine months. A highly successful stratagem, Shoaib would employ it again and again in the years to come.

In Daudzai, said Shoaib smiling as he always did when recalling the joys and frustrations of the field *we learned the hard way that what people demanded was the right thing. In order to answer these demands we had to live like gypsies, constantly on the move.* It was the beginning. Slowly, inch by inch his family would begin to lose Shoaib to his work. Seven years later Akhter Hameed Khan would tell Musarrat she had to set Shoaib free, 'let him go' he said. And although she knew what it would cost her, she had.

In his own mind, Shoaib also put to rest the previously beguiling notion much loved by development academics, the notion of 'self help'. Everything Shoaib had seen and done led to only one conclusion, to sit back and expect development to take place on the basis of self help alone was in Shoaib's experience *nothing more than a pious hope and it would only add to the frustration and disappointments of the rural poor.* It was not that people would not work together for a common good, but that a catalyst was required. For Shoaib the catalyst was a combination of social mobilisation plus a few vital additions such as better tools or a small grant. With these ingredients, wonders could be worked.

We discovered something new in Daudzai, said Shoaib, and it was this, *how absolutely easy it was to organise people around the solutions they had identified as their principal problems*; and equally, how impossible it was to otherwise persuade them to organise. The first organisations to emerge were thus based on solving specific problems. Shoaib then went one step further. The widely read AHK had introduced Shoaib to the ideas and principles of cooperation of Raiffiessen, a remarkable nineteenth century German social activist and a man years ahead of his times. Shoaib added two of Raiffiessen's basic principles to the modus operandi of the fledgling village organisations—

one, a non-negotiable requirement for everyone to meet weekly, and two, each time they met, every member had to deposit a regular amount in a savings account, no matter how small.

These two simple principles were to serve as the foundation for Shoaib's spectacularly successful working life among the rural poor. Shoaib had laughed then, because there was also a brilliant if unexpected add-on benefit, *you know, as each organisation met as a general body every week, the defect which inevitably caused the downfall of traditional cooperatives in Pakistan, the dominance and divisive politics of an executive committee, a local oligarchy that met separately, was in one stroke done away with.* Yes, there was fierce argument and disagreement at times but this took place in an open forum and included everybody in the village. Because of this, because it was extremely difficult for any small clique or powerful individual to plot and scheme for their own benefit and get away with it, more often than not disputes were resolved and the group continued to work as one. Because they were unable to dominate an entire group, all but a few of the more altruistic or community-minded larger landowners or more influential men quickly lost interest.

An additional touch was for Shoaib's markaz to provide technical supervision if requested, but to leave the management of the payroll for the works programme to the Village Organisation (VO). Again this was a brilliant move; by eliminating contractors and middlemen, not only were there significant cost savings, the skills of villagers were upgraded, the quality of work was much higher as the workers had a vested interest in the results, and the finished works were regarded as the property and asset of the entire village. All this was little appreciated at the time but more than twenty years later Jahangir Khan described as simply fabulous the results of using the approach in an ambitious programme in the Punjab to line thousands of irrigation water-ways with bricks.

Jahangir laughed with the joy of a man who enjoys a battle when he spoke of having to fight tooth and nail with the bureaucrats who did not trust the people, did not want to budge an inch; whose objection was, as it may have been all those years ago with those who opposed Daudzai, you can't do this, they said, you can't give Village Organisations the money; the people will simply run away with it. But of course they hadn't, and as Jahangir said, if you trust the people, if you trust the water associations, unlike contractors they won't let you down or do a second-rate job and they will repay your trust and achieve wonders.

Although its life was short, for Shoaib, Daudzai was a crucial primer. It was in Daudzai where Shoaib tested and laid the groundwork for everything he was to achieve in later years. It was during those early years before the troubles began where Shoaib finally refined the concept of development as a partnership between people and government, and further, between people and a rural

support programme, an organisation entirely beholden to the people which in return demanded of villagers the fulfilment of certain obligations—to organise themselves, hold regular meetings, begin saving, work together to achieve an agreed goal, and accept technical advice in support of their own aims. Shoaib also began thinking about the notion of village activists, people from within a village who would 'activate', encourage and guide the village organisation.

At the same time, and in the spirit of the famous Chinese 'bare-foot doctor' programme, Shoaib introduced the concept of 'village specialists', villagers who would be trained to provide simple technical services such as spraying or basic veterinary treatments. Village specialists were not meant to replace government's technical officers. Rather, Shoaib set out to ensure village specialists would complement and support the services offered by government. As part-time technicians trained by government officers, they could provide services at a level and cost no department could ever hope to match. The concept of village activists and village specialists would in time become the key that would unlock the door to the future although surprisingly, there are still those, including some noted foreign development academics, who continue to refuse to accept their importance.

Reading University's Guy Hunter was an exception. One of many ardent outside admirers of Daudzai, in 1976 he published a widely read study in which he transposed the lessons of Daudzai into ten 'propositions'. With this publication, Shoaib and his mentor AHK were increasingly cited in other papers as demonstrating to the development world a way out of an increasingly frustrating impasse of failing projects—Daudzai was in fact being hailed as the model for the future. However, within Pakistan it was a very different story and there were many who held an entirely different view. They saw Daudzai as promoting dangerously revolutionary ideas. Alarm bells began to ring in the inner sanctum of the establishment. The status quo was threatened. And there was more—Shoaib himself was perceived as a threat. A man of the people, he was just too successful, too popular to be allowed to stay where he was. Was he building a platform that would launch him into a position of leadership contention? Even though Shoaib might deny this with vigour, the mere mention of the possibility was worrying enough, and sent shudders up some official backs. The man definitely had to be stopped.

And so the rumours began.

Meanwhile, Shoaib's key supporters continued to blithely promote the project. Surely they had some inkling of what was happening but perhaps they believed they could contain it. Shoaib remains emphatic that the chief secretary, his friend Ejaz Naik, was totally sold on the Daudzai concept and urged Shoaib

to write a proposal to extend the programme to all one hundred and ten thanas in the province. A dizzying half a billion rupees was allocated for this purpose.

As Shoaib said, it was all ready to go. Of course, Dr AHK worried that we were expanding too quickly, as he always did, but I used to argue that these opportunities are a rare thing and the window is only open for such a short while so you just have to jump in and do it. He thought they really were on their way to great things Shoaib said; enormous regret evident in his voice. Akhter Hameed Khan had put his heart into it all, and then there was a terrible tragedy, one that marked the beginning of the end of Daudzai. On 16th February 1975, the young Hayat Sherpao was assassinated in a bomb explosion at Peshawar University. His death was seen by many, of whom Shoaib and Musarrat are but two, as a national disaster and they regret it to this day. However, not only had the nation lost a potential leader and Shoaib a friend and supporter, not long after the tragedy, things started to fall rapidly apart for Daudzai and for Shoaib. It was then that the whisper campaigns began to grow in strength; rumours that not only rural development was afoot in Daudzai. It was alleged that Shoaib was a supporter of the National Awami League, of course, said Shoaib, there was nothing to the rumours, after all Daudzai was an Awami League area but you could hardly say I was a supporter just because the project was so successful. But it could be said, and it was. As for the Bhutto faction having any direct involvement in sinking Daudzai, Shoaib says no, not at all. Really, I don't think they knew me and although I had been a nuisance in Karachi (because) I was not prepared to accept some unreasonable demands, that was all I was, a nuisance.

After Sherpao was tragically assassinated, Musarrat grieved, and as Kunwar said shrugging, *Shoaib stayed out on the fringes of the mainstream of the civil service. Rural development was not favoured as a career.* But before things fell apart, and Shoaib was charged with serious if spurious offences and then set adrift in the bureaucratic wilderness there were three events each of which added fuel to the fire that was to consume Daudzai.

The first of these happened in 1973. Musarrat and an exhuberant Roohi left Pakistan for London. They left him standing at the door of their house in Peshawar in a state of confused disbelief. *Poor Daddy,* said Roohi with an impish smile, *he was in tears when we left.*

Shoaib had sighed when talking of this period in his life. It had all been beyond him, even if today he admits it was perhaps all for the best. *Who really knows about these things except God* he said, *I don't.*

He simply picked himself up as he was to do again and again in the future and got on with his work.

And while Musarrat arranged her house in London, left Shoaib to get on with it without any distractions, something quite special happened; the simple

villages of Daudzai became a star attraction. Not only did the project have the albeit cautious support of the provincial government, Daudzai also became the darling of foreign development agencies. Offers of real money and assistance were placed on the table. To the delight of his friends and the confusion of his enemies, Shoaib and his mentor had managed to parley a 'backwater' posting into a stellar attraction. Daudzai became in fact a seminal point in Shoaib's life. His reputation as an innovator and highly successful practitioner in the difficult area of rural development, already well established within national governmental circles, now moved out into the open. Shoaib was marked down as a man to watch by the various 'movers and shakers' in the whimsical world of international development.

The second was Shoaib's surprising decision to go to Birmingham on a four-month public administration course in 1974, leaving Daudzai to its own devices. It was a curious decision because the course had little to offer to someone whose future lay in rural development, and as Daudzai demanded constant attention, the project languished in his absence. Shoaib offered no explanation other than to say of Musarrat, *well, she was already there.* Perhaps he just wanted to be with his family for a while. Whatever the reason, AHK was justly furious. His requests for governmental support were met with a bored silence and there was constant sniping and thinly veiled attacks.

Miffed at being left holding the baby while Shoaib indulged himself in studies in the UK, AHK voiced his exasperation in no uncertain terms. *While you were away* he is said to have growled to a cheerful and newly returned Shoaib *I was hung out to dry.* This one pithy statement cut right to the heart of the matter, for AHK had indeed been hung out to dry. It also became patently clear that if Daudzai had a weakness it was that of being carried by one man, and when that man and his protective aura were absent the project was exposed and very vulnerable. Not only had the establishment demonstrated how easily AHK could be left out in the cold, it may also have given heart to those who wished to halt Daudzai in its tracks before the idea of the poor controlling their own destinies became unstoppable. As if a light had been switched on, they saw how easily the project would fade away if only Shoaib could be removed.

The final event in this mini-trilogy is equally curious and relates to Shoaib, Tariq Siddiqi, and Akram Zaki, all former deputy directors at the civil service academy and firm friends. In Zaki's words, *when we entered Mr. Bhutto's period and when he became a bit more authoritative, all three of us got into trouble.* Tariq was straight away dismissed without any formal enquiry which was an extraordinary measure for a federal civil servant and one that may not have been entirely legal; Shoaib was suspended and posted as 'officer on special duty' and placed under investigation for potentially serious offences; while Zaki

was simply posted, *which actually means* said Zaki, *power was taken away from you and you were given irrelevant and unimportant things to do.* In effect they were both isolated and rendered powerless. Zaki went on to describe Shoaib Sultan *fighting back* through various means and developing international contacts whereas his own contacts were developed internally *which I think marked my eventual move towards politics and his towards the international sphere.* Tariq Siddiqi just took leave and brooded, refusing on principle to deign to petition his persecutors for restitution.

When Bhutto's regime ended and Zia took over, said Zaki, shrugging as if the unexpected ups and downs of political life were just one of those things, *it seems all three of us were given a little bit of special treatment on the assumption by the new rulers that we were anti-Bhutto, although we were in fact not particularly anti-Bhutto, we had just been critical of certain aspects of his policies,* which as Zaki rather cautiously acknowledged, was something the mercurial Bhutto did not easily tolerate. However, Ziaul Haq's military regime which resurrected Shoaib's and Tariq's careers also led Pakistan into more trouble than anyone could ever have imagined. But that is another story.

The background to the Bhutto regime's distrust of Shoaib and his friends lies in the misinterpretation of an everyday phrase. While Shoaib was working his magic in Daudzai, Tariq had been education secretary in the Punjab government. He fell out of favour when, annoyed at the pestering of one of his directors who for his own political reasons wanted a college upgraded, although it did not meet the selection criteria, Tariq had snapped, '*goli maro*', referring to the director. This phrase, as Shoaib explained means 'stop it' in Urdu, in the nature of 'to hell with it', but it also means 'shoot him'. The latter interpretation was given to the phrase when it was reported to a minister whose enemy was the chief minister, Tariq's patron. Unfortunately, the minister had the ear of the President of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

It is improbable that a man of Bhutto's capabilities actually believed the allegation but nevertheless, politics being what it is a scapegoat was required. Tariq was summarily dismissed.

Where most civil servants would have run for cover, Shoaib of course did the opposite—he immediately invited Tariq to come and stay and accompany him on a trip he planned to take to the Northern Areas. The trip was eerily prescient. As Shoaib said, *on my return from this trip I sent a note to the Resident Commissioner recommending the implementation of a strategy for social mobilisation. I had not the faintest clue then that seven years later I would be back there doing just that.* They were like schoolboys set free at the end of term—Shoaib's account of their journey leaves little doubt that they revelled in their freedom and the challenge of the sometimes hazardous

conditions. There were so many new things to see and as had been ingrained in him by his grandfather and Burgess, Shoaib meticulously noted them all. In awe of the work ethic of the Chinese who were building a road Shoaib wrote of a lone man *working late into the night, labouring by the light of a pressure lantern to finish his assigned portion of the job.*

They slept on cots under the skies, ate at small wayside kiosks, and in the sheer-walled Hunza valley, crossed the cascading river at Gulmit on a swaying boat bridge as the new Friendship Bridge had been swept away by an avalanche. Sitting on the veranda of the Hunza rest house, Shoaib *felt as if we were perched on a cliff.* At Danyore on the outskirts of Gilgit they encountered people who dressed and acted like nothing they had seen before; *we realised* Shoaib later wrote *we were in the heart of Central Asia.* On they went, stunned by the soaring ice walls of Nanga Parbat ghostly in the moonlight, falling asleep on the terrace of a wayside hotel in the Pattan Valley, rock walls as black as pitch, the silver ribbon of the Indus River far below. Wherever he went he talked of the power of social mobilisation to anyone who would listen, a message that would become famous in years to come. He thought the various commissioners and local government people he met had been very receptive and that because nearly all farmed land was owned by smallholders, social mobilisation would fit the Northern Areas *like a glove.* Seven years later Shoaib's conclusions were validated; even more, the result would exceed his wildest fantasies.

Shoaib returned to Peshawar refreshed and triumphant. New avenues seemed to be opening up although AHK, whose feet were always firmly planted on the ground and who had a realistically pessimistic view of the future of Daudzai look-alikes and of government, was not so sanguine. And sure enough the sand in Daudzai's timer had run out. As AHK later wrote, *without any warning we were thrown out lock, stock and barrel.* Shoaib was relieved of his post as director and curtly requested to report to the establishment division.

He had not been sacked, not yet anyway; instead he was posted as 'officer on special duty'. Suddenly, Shoaib found himself in the grey world of official limbo, forbidden to pursue his work in Daudzai, prohibited in fact from doing anything. It was just where his enemies wished him to be, because, as his absence in Birmingham had so clearly shown, without Shoaib, Daudzai was dead in the water.

To this day, Musarrat holds that the reason Daudzai marked the end of Shoaib's civil service career was that he just could not bring himself to believe how much the establishment feared the social changes he seemed to be initiating. When finally he realised the truth, it shook him to the core. Musarrat was angered and disappointed by the intolerance and narrow-mindedness this signified. It was also one more reason why she decided to head for London

where malicious gossips and Shoaib's detractors could not affect or harm her family. In Pakistan it caused her to become increasingly reclusive. *I almost stopped inviting people to our house* she said, angry still at the injustice of it all, *so many were against us, so many said I was wrong. Some of the women would say of me, 'she is in it too you know, she is spoiling her servants and before you know it they will think they are better than they really are'.*

Musarrat's definition of 'almost stopping inviting people' has of course to be seen in the context of the culture and the times because there never was a time when the house could have been said to be empty of friends and relatives who continued to fill the gaps. Shoaib's summary dismissal from Daudzai also marked the time when Roohi began to realise *that Daddy's work was really quite revolutionary.* A dramatist, as are all of Shoaib's daughters, Roohi had spoken of the mysterious rumours at the time of the gruesome deaths of those who opposed Mr. Bhutto, *we all thought that Daddy would be hung.* Roohi said it was simply too much to just sit in London and worry *so we all rushed out to Pakistan. And then I talked with Daddy's friend Dr Khan and that is when I found out how awful things really were in the official circles of Pakistan with all the jealousies and intrigues.*

When we first began to talk about the events surrounding his ignominious dismissal from Daudzai and the subsequent attempts to deal with him once and for all, Shoaib was typically reticent. He tried his best to avoid naming names and to put a light spin on what had obviously been a harrowing and disheartening period. He knew that there were those who opposed what he was trying to do in Daudzai and also, although he will not directly admit this because he still finds it hard to understand, Shoaib also knew there were secret enemies who just wanted to bring him down. Over the years they had accumulated quite a lot of specious but very useable ammunition but what they needed was a trigger. This came, as these things sometimes do, from as unlikely a couple of sources as could be imagined: a very junior member of the department of health who found himself out on a limb, and one of Shoaib's own staff, a dysfunctional academic who became afraid. It would be hard to find a more dangerously inventive pair if you set out to do so.

In any academic group there is often one member who for a variety of reasons is a loner, who does not get on with any of the others, is quick to take offense, and is often full of fears and insecurities. There was one such staff member at the Rural Academy, *one day* said Shoaib *he came and complained to me that a participant in one of our training courses, a junior district official in the department of health, seemed to be bored and uninterested. He was also often absent and this was having a bad effect on the other participants.* Most other staff members would have dealt with this matter themselves, and in retrospect it seems possible that this was a set-up,

a trap into which Shoaib unknowingly walked. Shoaib intervened and when the participant could give no good reason for his disinterest or absences, Shoaib remembers saying to this man *well, why don't you just go, why do you want to waste your time and other people's time as well?* Chastened, because Shoaib's forthright approach was not commonplace in government service, the junior officer returned to his post earlier than expected. When asked for an explanation, to cover up his delinquency, the junior officer penned a report highly critical of the academy's training programme. However, when these criticisms were met with bureaucratic yawns he either panicked or was encouraged, because he then added a number of sensational allegations in the report. Among these was that the academy harboured the presence of a sinister person, no less a man than Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan, whom this imaginative junior official alleged openly advocated subversion and had incited the Sindhi participants by challenging them to establish 'Sindhudesh'. Now Khan Sahib was an unabashed critic of a succession of government regimes and made no secret of this fact, and it would be relatively easy to embellish and re-work some of his throw-away comments into near seditious phrases. The allegations of subversion of course were patently over the top and would normally have been 'laughed out of court' and the report itself thrown in some official dustbin. But this time there were those who would grasp at anything to settle things once and for all with Shoaib Sultan Khan.

And so the junior official's report sped from desk to desk until in fairly short order it fluttered into the chief secretary's in-tray; and stopped, for here was a man who according to Tariq Husain was still spitting mad ten years later, a pillar of the establishment, a defender of the status quo, a man who in Shoaib's words, did all the mischief as chief secretary and ex-officio chairman of the Academy's Board of Directors. It was his job to do something about the report, and this is what he did. He wrote to me asking for an explanation Shoaib said, so of course I wrote back explaining in some detail that the junior official was simply making up stories and maligning others to excuse his own behaviour. The truth of the matter, as Shoaib had written, was that the official had not taken any interest at all in the training course and so had been 'sent down'. This should have been the end of the story. However, Shoaib's enemies were not about to let the opportunity pass them by. Somehow, Shoaib said, shaking his head at the follies of man, somehow the staff member who had been in charge of the course became afraid. It does not really matter how he was frightened or where his information came from, what does is that this previously very private and reclusive man wrote an anonymous letter containing over twenty-two seriously seditious or criminal charges, from spying to smuggling, each allegation based on just enough truth to be vaguely plausible, each one requiring an insider's knowledge of Shoaib's past, incidents that seem to have been carefully catalogued and filed for future use, none of which the letter writer could have known himself.

At the time it was far from funny but Shoaib can laugh about it now, *yes*, he said, *can you believe it, I was supposed to be hobnobbing with the Americans and the Russians*, and as an echo from the gun licensing episode, *starting my own army and indulging in all sorts of amazing hijinks. I was even supposed to have smuggled a red Mercedes into the country and sold it on the black market.* In fact, the Mercedes belonged to Shoaib's friend who was a ninister at the Kabul embassy. The car needed servicing in Peshawar and Shoaib, having stopped off for a visit on his way back from London, had been given a lift! But these were details his detractors chose to ignore. They were out to throw as much dirt as they could in the hope that some might stick.

Now normally Shoaib had said shrugging his shoulders as he so often was to do when something was just beyond his comprehension, *in government, if you receive an anonymous letter of that sort it is simply thrown in the dustbin.* However, the letter landed on the desk of Vaqar Ahmed, the establishment secretary, and *I have no idea whom he consulted* said Shoaib, reluctant still to name names, *but in his wisdom he ordered an enquiry by the Federal Investigation Agency, and as a prelude to the enquiry further instructed that I should be relieved of my position as director of the academy, posted as officer on special duty and report immediately to the establishment division.*

Vaqar further instructed that the enquiry should be taken seriously.

No less than a deputy inspector general of police and four superintendents were assigned to investigate the allegations. To say Shoaib was both bewildered and devastated would have been an understatement. For a start, Shoaib was given the run-around. Arriving as ordered in Rawalpindi to report to the establishment division he was told by a junior official that he would be called when needed. Although dismissed so curtly, Shoaib did not admit defeat nor did he plead for leniency. At this point he had no idea why he had been so swiftly stood-down. The only thing he had in writing was a cryptic notification of his status and a statement commanding him to await further orders. However, Shoaib was not about to wait. He knew enough about how things worked in the bureaucracy. Only the weak or guilty waited about and he was absolutely certain he had done nothing wrong and although mild-mannered he was not a weak man at all.

Vaqar thought he held all the cards and simply refused to see him. Shoaib was in a quandary; as he said, *no one else would dare to tell me what was in the file on Vaqar's desk or the real reasons for my dismissal.* He believed there was only one way forward. He would confront the allegations head-on but to do this he needed help from his friends. He got it. The provincial Minister for Local Government Abdul Raziq was a frequent visitor and keen supporter of Daudzai. He brought the matter into the open with his own chief minister by bluntly

asking two simple questions, *why is such a good programme under attack, and why has Shoaib been sidelined?*

The chief minister of the day was what is euphemistically known as a 'character'. A rich but relatively uneducated man, he had been one of the biggest contractors in the Frontier Province. He boasted he had made all his money on the backs of donkeys. He wanted the world to know so he had built a large and ostentatious house near Nowshera in front of which in pride of place stood a life-size statue of a donkey. *He was also a 'kharkar'* explained Shoaib, *and very proud of it and was typically difficult and conscious of his position.* However, he was also not a man to beat around the bush so he sent for Shoaib, commanding him to present himself at the Pearl Continental Hotel in Rawalpindi.

Shoaib did so and remembers the chief minister, who always seemed to forget he was no longer shouting at a string of recalcitrant donkeys, saying, *right, I have spoken to the establishment secretary and my God, there are very serious charges against you so you had better go and see him.* This was exactly what Shoaib had wanted to do for some time but he quietly explained that his requests to do so had been ignored. *They won't now*, the chief minister shouted, *I have said he will see you so he will see you.* Not even clever bureaucrats like Vaqar could slip around the direct orders of a former donkey driver.

It must have been a strange meeting. There was the arch-bureaucrat Vaqar nursing his long-held grievances, primed by Bandial and with a wonderfully damning document in his hands, and there was the object of his grievances quietly challenging him to put up or shut up. Then ensued a curious interchange. Shoaib clearly recalls starting straight out by saying mildly, but in a rather haughty tone, *Sir, given the rather peremptory orders I have received I feel the government is very unhappy with me.* Shoaib remembers Vaqar replying *Oh yes, the government is indeed unhappy with you. That piqued me a bit*, said the usually calm Shoaib, a man who seldom admits to anger, *so I said, 'well, in that case, why don't they hang me?'* Obviously still very sure of himself, Vaqar had snapped a reply, *oh yes, we will hang you! Well*, laughed Shoaib, *whatever the case, I thought I might as well be hung for a pound than a penny so quite reasonably, I asked for an explanation.*

Vaqar apparently huffed and puffed a bit then, *but*, said Shoaib, *he had a big file or dossier in front of him on his desk and he started flicking through the pages. Then he began reading all these charges.* If he had not been so astonished at what he was hearing, Shoaib believes he might have burst out laughing. In reply, however, Shoaib slowly and calmly shredded each allegation. An increasingly uncomfortable Vaqar at last said as sternly as he could, *well, did Tariq Siddiqi come and stay with you and do you know what he has done?* Shoaib replied in the affirmative, saying they were firm friends as well as batch

mates, and assured Vaqar that although he thought Tariq had perhaps spoken rashly and his selection of words had perhaps been unwise, it was but a spur of the moment comment by a very bright man aimed at putting an end to a repetitive and rather stupid irritant. There was no doubt about it though, Tariq was decidedly out of favour with very important people and by association, so was Shoaib. Some years later, Shoaib inadvertently chanced upon the file relating to Tariq's summary dismissal. Scribbled on the margins of the file's summary was a note written in the hand of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, 'such persons have no place in the service of Pakistan'.

There was more of course. The file mentioned 'reports from abroad' that Shoaib had spoken against the government and indeed he remembers being critical one night in Musarrat's new London house, as a man is sometimes in his own house in the company of those he considers friends. It was however, *all very much a storm in a tea cup,* as Shoaib had said and as Vaqar well knew. As for Daudzai, it was alleged to be a hotbed of conspiracies against the government, and here Shoaib had shrugged *well of course it was against the government, as everyone knew, Daudzai happened to be a National Awami Party area.* By now, Vaqar must have begun to realise that he was skating on increasingly thin ice and that most of the charges were patently absurd. Could Shoaib be an agent of the American CIA and at the same time the Russian KGB; had the highly respected intellectual Dr Akhter Hameed Khan been inciting Sindhi trainees to form Sindhudesh; was Shoaib's daughter married to the son of the owner of the *Manchester Guardian*, a British newspaper noted for its criticism of the government of Pakistan; hadn't Shoaib smuggled a red Mercedes car into Peshawar and sold it on the black market?

And so the list went on, with Shoaib patiently explaining away the charges, until at last Vaqar faltered. There was really nothing more to say so muttering something to the effect that *alright, we will give you a posting* he closed the file and ended the interview.

Had the interview taken place in an earlier time, the establishment secretary would have scribbled a note to file, and perhaps a little later, Shoaib would be quietly and unofficially advised to be more circumspect in his dealings with his staff, and that would have been the end of it all. But those days were long gone and if Shoaib clearly remembers Vaqar Ahmad's grudging promise of a new posting which in Shoaib's view implied that the matter would go no further, in fact the etablishment secretary sat back and did nothing to stop the investigation. Why would he? He had nothing to lose if the investigation went ahead.

Why Vaqar Ahmad might have thought something would be uncovered beggars belief. However, it was not only the ludicrous personal allegations that were patently untrue; everyone knew that the academy had been set up with

American assistance so that the Director of USAID and the Representative of the Ford Foundation were frequent visitors so of course Shoaib 'was in frequent contact with foreigners'. They were also unfortunately lavish in their praise which did not please those who wished to bring Shoaib down, not one little bit. Frank Miller of the Ford Foundation had been particularly supportive and had taken the unusual step of writing a letter stating that the Ford Foundation was very unhappy about what had been done to Shoaib and considered his treatment unjust. *Of course,* said Shoaib, *the government's stock reply was 'no, no, you have got it all wrong, there is no punishment involved, it is just the standard transfer of a career officer' which was complete stuff and nonsense,* strong words indeed for Shoaib. As for the Russians, well, at Tariq's request, once for two weeks Shoaib had hosted a Russian girl at the academy who was studying at the University of Lahore. *She was quite a nice girl,* laughed Shoaib *and if she was a spy, I hope she took the lessons of Daudzai back with her to Russia.*

And so, for six long and dreary months, Shoaib languished in the do nothing say nothing limbo land of an officer on special duty.

The main losers were the people of Daudzai. *Meanwhile* wrote a despairing Shoaib *Daudzai withered away. I ran from pillar to post to enlist the support of powerful friends in government. They all showed their helplessness, only offering their support to me personally... which I always politely declined. Daudzai taught me how important champions are.* But Daudzai had lost them all, none more important than the brilliant young Hayat Sherpao. Of their own volition, twice, delegations of villagers from Daudzai travelled to Rawalpindi to petition the prime minister. But the majority in Daudzai had supported the wrong party and not only that; they were championing the wrong cause and the wrong man at the wrong time. As Shoaib said, *although I had nothing to do with any of it, they were met with deaf ears. It was all to no avail.*

Shoaib's remaining powerful civil service friends might be able to work towards saving him but they were men accustomed to the ordered existence of bureaucratic life, and they could not, or perhaps closer to the truth, would not save Daudzai. The project had become an unwinnable issue. Anyone who made a stand might find themselves without a career. Daudzai was simply not worth it.

There was an additional loser. Any Daudzai look-alike projects also went into the dustbin and here Ejaz Rahim reappears in our story—this time as Director General, Rural Development in which role he had championed a German funded project based on the Daudzai model. As a probationer, Ejaz recalls being taken many times by Shoaib to Daudzai *and you could see even then,* said Ejaz *that he loved Daudzai and loved talking to the community.* Shoaib now spoke relatively fluent Pushto which Ejaz described as *no mean feat,* adding how Shoaib *would sit happily for hours on a* charpoy *talking with*

the villagers. I think it was how he developed his ideas, how he was accepted by the people. Ejaz was not the only one to point out how talking with the villagers seemed to transform Shoaib. It was if he were recharging an internal battery worn down by the strictures and inhibitions of the bureaucracy. It certainly singled him out in the eyes of the villagers. *When he walked the village streets people would come up to him and you could see they loved him* said Ejaz, and surely this alone might cause Shoaib's enemies to grind their teeth, *and then he went out of the service.* Then the good civil servant that Ejaz had been took over and he paused before saying, *I do not know all the details but Mr. Bandial was involved. But you know,* he said smiling at the way the world works and back on safer territory again, *Shoaib went on to far greater things in rural development and I have no idea at all what happened to Mr. Bandial.*

As for Ejaz's project, it also died, just like that, he said, but before it did, and despite his own problems, Shoaib had heeded Ejaz's cry for help and come straight away to see if he could help. Of course he couldn't but nevertheless the two journeyed to the project and when Shoaib saw what had been achieved, Ejaz said you know there were tears in his eyes and I had never seen this before, never seen such a senior officer care so much. And then Ejaz had paused, making sure of Shoaib's exact words, he said 'look Ejaz, this is what they are destroying, where do you get this kind of community spirit, this kind of talk?' And then he left.

Powerless to stop the slow 'death by neglect' of Daudzai and all its fledgling carbon copies, his own career apparently in tatters, a lesser man might have thrown in the towel, apologised and petitioned to be let back into the hallowed ranks of the bureaucratic establishment.

But then ensued a strange twist in the plot, when, late one night the bell of Shoaib's house rang. There on the doorstep, cap in hand was an Assistant Director of the Federal Investigation Agency. Apologising for the late hour and for arriving unannounced he said it was because he had strict instructions not to make contact with Shoaib. But he also had another brief. Mohsin, the agency's director, had quietly given special instructions that no injustice should be done to Shoaib. As Shoaib said, as seemed to happen throughout my life, there were friends in high places moving behind the scenes. Ushered into the living room the man had sat on the edge of the chair. He was not entirely comfortable. Shoaib was intrigued. Rather than adopting a brusque and intimidating stance the assistant director had been hesitantly apologetic, and referred in glowing terms to the very high regard in which Shoaib was held by so many in the province and of the prestigious posts Shoaib had held. Perhaps he had been one of those who when Shoaib was Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, had apprehended a group of civil service trainees on tour who had been out buying goods smuggled in from Afghanistan. Shoaib could easily have intervened as the trainees thought he would, but to their discomfort Shoaib had just chuckled and said, well, the police are

just doing their duty and you did not tell me what you were up to, so you will just have to live with the consequences. Then he invited everyone back to his residence for tea. It was said Ejaz who had laughed as he told this tale, a lesson in impartiality for everyone, an example of how a deputy commissioner should act at all times.

Now whether the investigator was involved in this incident or not, this sort of story, of Shoaib's fairness and strict impartiality, was part of a growing legend, so the investigator was clearly sceptical of the charges as was his director. This was the reason he had come that night in order to settle matters once and for all, explaining, as Shoaib said, *although we are not supposed to talk to you, your reputation is so well known, I feel you are the best person to tell me what this is all about.*

This Shoaib commenced to do. One by one the investigator read out the charges, and one by one Shoaib explained them away. When all was finished it was very late, but refusing tea, the investigator had shaken Shoaib's hand and slipped into the night again as if he had never been.

Two months later all twenty-two charges were quietly dropped.

Almost immediately after the charges were dropped, Shoaib received an excited phone call from the number two in the establishment division offering him a posting as secretary to a committee charged with reviewing the activities of the country's research institutions. Shoaib was singularly unimpressed—he was still being kept out of the mainstream, firmly away from Daudzai, and out of the government's hair. *As it was* said Shoaib, *I still had my family to support so I went there in my own good time and then three months later they posted me as Joint Secretary to the Ministry of Local Government.* This was a senior posting but again one where Shoaib would be kept out of contact with the rural poor.

Life can be quirky and a bureaucrat's reluctance to destroy the holiest of holy, his files, can have unintended consequences.

While Shoaib had quietly languished as an officer on special duty the world around him was wracked by the increasing turmoil of the Bhutto era. This book is not intended to be a political commentary on the extraordinary events that took place in Pakistan in the 1970s and the egotistical men who strode the political stage. All that needs to be noted is Shoaib's inadvertent falling out with the Bhutto faction early in the piece, and the military takeover in 1977 which indirectly reversed his fortunes. As the ever pragmatic Akram Zaki said, those who for one reason or another had been sent to the political 'dog house' during the Bhutto regime were given special, if entirely unasked or unearned attention when General Zia ul Haq assumed power. Wrongs were redressed but not for the right reasons.

So by 1978, and to his bemusement, rescued from the wilderness by a new military regime of which he really did not approve, the way was clear for Shoaib's old friend and staunch supporter Ejaz Naik to ask Shoaib to serve under him in the Cabinet Division.

Shoaib accepted. He was in debt to his old friend and it was not a bad posting. There was also nothing else in sight. So he presented himself and, as is often the case when a 'new broom' arrives, found his friend clearing out and reorganising his new office. Greeting Shoaib with relief, Naik had taken himself off and left Shoaib to clear out a large almirah stuffed with files. Shoaib says he was intrigued because the almirah carried the label NGO which, as he was leaving, Naik said in an offhand manner stood for *Not to Go Out*. I cannot help wondering if Shoaib's old friend knew exactly what he was doing. Why else would he act in such an offhand manner with files regarded as sufficiently sensitive by previous incumbents to be kept in sight in their own office? Intrigued, Shoaib set to work to bring order to Naik's new office. Bureaucrats can rarely bring themselves to destroy files—even those containing damning secrets. Shoaib had no idea of the contents of the almirah but in order to determine the appropriate distribution of each file, he had to skim through each one. Most bureaucratic secrets tend to be disappointingly boring but in the way such things sometimes happen, of the several hundred files Shoaib removed from the almirah, two brought him up short because their contents were extremely disquieting: in dry as dust words, the files revealed to a shocked Shoaib how the civil service was now deeply penetrated by political intrigue, and how treacherous and unreliable even friends can be when bureaucratic skullduggery is afoot.

As we already know, the first file concerned his friend Tariq Siddiqi and Zulfiqar Bhutto's cryptic annotation which had sealed Tariq's fate, but for Shoaib the second was equally shocking. This second file contained all the papers relating to the committee of enquiry charged with investigating the allegations against Shoaib. And yes, it was true; he had eventually been entirely exonerated although dishearteningly, complete restitution was not recommended. Clearly the establishment had no wish for a resurgence of the rural poor under a Daudzai look-alike project. But even more disquieting, Shoaib found the door on his alleged misbehaviour had not been entirely closed. In a covering letter the Director General of the Federal Investigation Agency had written thus '*While serving as Inspector General of the Frontier Province's police, complaints had been made against the then Deputy Commissioner Shoaib Sultan for his supposed leftist leanings in the landlord-tenant dispute raging in Charsaddah at the time.* The letter further noted how the chief secretary, Mr. Bandial, frequently complained about Mrs. Shoaib being very vocal in her criticism of the government.

I doubt however if Musarrat would have been surprised at all.

I do not know what became of those particular files although knowing Shoaib, he would not have done as others might and quietly destroyed them. I suspect they can still be found, heaped with many others on some dusty shelf in an obscure civil service storeroom where they will sit until mould or insects have their way.

And if Shoaib had been effectively silenced, if Shoaib had been left out to languish in the cold, even more so had been his mentor Dr Akhter Hameed Khan. Always an irritant, unpredictable but virtually untouchable because of his fame and reputation, he had been beautifully sidelined. Disgusted at the lengths Shoaib's detractors would go to stop Daudzai, and with his increasingly pessimistic and critical views of government confirmed, he took himself back to his academic bolt-hole, Michigan State University. He would not return for many years and the country would be the poorer for it.

One morning in Islamabad, when we were basking in the gas-fired warmth of the sitting room of Falaknaz House, morning soup inevitably to hand and feeling warm and relaxed, Shoaib gazed into the fire deep in thought. After a time he began to quietly talk. He spoke of how during that time of relative exile from the civil service he had done a lot of thinking and how finally he accepted the truths he had been evading. *The closing down of Daudzai finally taught me* Shoaib said, and for once there was no humour in his voice, *that all those things we had stood for, the knowledge that our seniors would support us to the end... to the hilt... even if we made mistakes just so long as the mistakes had been made in good faith...* And then, hurting still at having to admit the bitter truth, Shoaib continued, *but even worse, the culture and values of the service now meant you could be hauled up for doing nothing wrong at all except to oppose a politician's corrupt or misguided wishes or if you aroused the jealousies of others both inside and outside the service.*

There was little point in going on he had concluded, if safety lay in doing nothing, just going with the flow, and that *if you attempted to do something, anything that was in any way out of the ordinary, you could be in trouble. I resolved then and there*, and here Shoaib paused because what he had to say next was as close as anything ever could be to his heart, *yes I resolved to never again put myself in a position, political or bureaucratic, where I was in the power of the Pakistan Government and could be dictated to or controlled by men I neither trusted or admired.*

This was a truly momentous decision, to walk away from his boyhood dream, the dream of following in the footsteps of his grandfather and of his

commitment to serve his country to the best of his abilities. It was a service Shoaib no longer trusted.

And although he walked firmly away from it all, it was not quite the end. It was not for another five years before Shoaib finally gave up on his dreams, or as he said, *burnt my boats and resigned from the civil service*. Until that day and to the irritation of his enemies, Shoaib managed the improbable: he kept his options open. Granted the 'not quite' status of an officer on deputation, he successfully converted a toehold in the sought after but curiously competitive and unreliable world of international development into a star-studded career.

Just why Shoaib chose to remain on deputation rather than simply resign immediately and take his pension was because as a family man, he had his commitments. He knew how capricious a consultant's life could be. Also, he had yet to entirely abandon his dream that things may change and a rejuvenated civil service would be reborn.

Today, as a hugely respected international figure, Shoaib does not need the permission of government to accept any post anywhere and he is buffered from the jealousies of functionaries because they can do little to affect his career. Furthermore, for his batch mates and the students he trained at the civil service academy, many of whom are in senior positions or retired, who once imbibed radical ideas and ideals in Musarrat's salon; to those who were taken by Tariq Siddiqi to visit Gilgit after he had been *suo moto* reinstated and become director of the Civil Service Academy, to all these men and women, Shoaib is a legend.

As one very senior civil servant said as we shook hands and took our leave, *Shoaib Sultan Khan is a legend, an inspiration to us all, an elder of the civil service, a man we will always admire, a man whose like we will not see again.*

Time out

From the fifteenth century onwards, as European powers gradually imposed their writ over vast tracts of land in Asia and Africa, and colonialism took hold, new rules of law were established and imposed by an over-class of men from one European country or another. Two successive World Wars, however, led to the collapse of colonialism and the emergence of sovereign nation-states leaving a vacuum that was filled by a new phenomenon: supra-national bureaucracies. These world bureaucracies began to proliferate from the 1950s onwards almost always under the flag of the United Nations. As each supra-national bureaucracy came into being they were staffed by men, most of whom simply traded their seat in one colonial agency or another for an equivalent if much more highly paid seat in one of the new international agencies. Accustomed to ruling

millions and thoroughly at home with the expatriate life, these men became the world's new over-class. The 'club's' membership more or less remained the same. It had merely moved its premises.

A new term, 'development' was coined as a cover-all for the activities of these supra-national agencies, and generically extended to describe those countries in need of the services of the agencies—'developing countries'.

The 'developed' world, on the other hand, was thought to be the unquestioned source of all the improvements the developing world needed such as assistance, ideas, and technical improvements. They needed to be taught how to do, and what to do—they needed experts from outside. Thus began the technical and social arrogance of the West, of the educated, on which development has foundered. It was essential that this view be accepted without question. Otherwise nations in the developed world ran the risk of losing both their status as preferred providers of goods and ideas, as well as preferred providers of manpower to staff these new agencies.

By the late 1970s, although the world had changed radically in many respects, the technical divisions of the all-powerful international banks and those of the most important international development agencies were still dominated by men who had cut their teeth in one colonial service or another. Their ranks were of course beginning to be infiltrated by younger men and women, a few of whom hailed from the developing world. However, these new additions presented no challenge to the club. The newcomer's attitudes had of course been pre-conditioned by an education in one of the great universities of the West. Denied the long-standing career outlet of service in a former colony, young graduates from the better universities increasingly regarded international agencies as a logical career alternative. It was a fairly exclusive club but if you happened to have the right background and the right connections, entrance was easy. If you didn't, then subtle barriers made access very difficult.

This then was the world into which Shoaib had so innocently wandered. And although he was gifted his first toehold in the civil service by a senior bureaucrat, he was now looking for a way out of the system because he felt betrayed and hurt.

As Shoaib himself wrote so poignantly of Daudzai and the sorry events that followed, *I was heartbroken and totally shaken. I had never imagined that I would ever be taken to task for doing the right thing. My faith in the service was snuffed out. I made up my mind to leave at the first available opportunity.* And so he did, but his purpose and ideals never wavered. In the years to come in the international world Shoaib was as unafraid to take a stand on principle as he had been in the civil service, he was equally unafraid to disregard the rules if he

thought them irrelevant; bring refreshingly new ideas into play; and thought nothing of shredding red tape if it tied up help for poor farmers. But he did all these things with a smile, with such gentlemanly finesse, such apologetic politeness that none but the most mean-minded were ever bothered. But inevitably, although he unwittingly won the admiration of many, the love of those he worked for, as in Daudzai, he also provoked the fury of his enemies.

Although Shoaib's choices were influenced by the need to pay for an increasingly expensive family, he also had altruistic reasons for what he did. He knew he had a powerful message that could transform the lives of the subcontinent's rural poor, but he had to wait till the Pakistan establishment was ready to listen to him. Meanwhile, he needed another stage.

During those long dreamlike Islamabad days with sunlight filtering through the haze of winter, days when we sat and sipped soup and talked, a reflective Shoaib had spoken of Musarrat's total and fierce support over his stand on Daudzai. And then he had sighed and in a voice tinged with resignation had admitted, *in any case, that was the time she had already decided that London was to be her real home, she had given up on Pakistan.* Shoaib was faced with a dilemma. Musarrat had not insisted Shoaib should also give up on Pakistan, but having lived in England at various times, he was under no illusion that a Pakistani salary would support a family there; he would have to see if he could break into the 'international world'. And of course he had. But almost as if he were explaining something to himself, Shoaib had added a wistful postscript, *yes,* he said, *I think she found London peaceful, it was a refuge and my international assignment eased things economically. And I suppose she and I must have unconsciously decided, 'well, you can't have everything', and so we lived with separation. But it was hard.* At times it was also very lonely.

Throughout his long ordeal in the bureaucratic wilderness, Shoaib was able to console himself with the thought that he had established *some kind of reputation in community development, an area rich in academic theory but starved of successful field practitioners.* Shoaib was absolutely right to think it should be relatively easy to parlay his experiences into an overseas assignment. And so it should have been except for one thing. Shoaib had not reckoned on the thwarted fury of the head of the establishment division. Unable to have Shoaib punished or dismissed, the secretary seemed determined to keep Shoaib locked away in a dead-end position. As Shoaib himself recalled, *my first shock was the establishment division's refusal to forward any of my applications for any foreign or even local post that I applied for. Oh yes,* Shoaib had said late one bright winter morning in Islamabad, a morning when we should have been out walking in the hills, *they went to great lengths to keep me sidelined and frustrated.* The establishment division had Shoaib right where they wanted—in a dead-end job—and they were determined to keep him there. To apply

for any post without their permission, Shoaib would first have to resign—he was stuck. *I simply could not afford to do this,* he said, shrugging his shoulders, *so what was I to do? Well, I just took six months leave and said to myself, right, I will go and enjoy myself with my family in the house Musarrat has bought in London, and yes, it was a joy to see them all again.*

Then, while Shoaib relaxed with his family and friends in London, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government was overthrown in a bloodless military coup. Those who had been out in the cold suddenly found themselves back in favour even if they personally disapproved of military coups and martial law. So it was, when Shoaib returned refreshed from London it was to find that the new military broom had been at work. Those who had allied themselves in any way with the Bhutto faction had been swept aside. Vaqar Ahmad, Bandial and many of those who had brought about Shoaib's downfall had gone, banished for a time Shoaib supposed, to the bureaucratic wastelands.

And there was more.

To his delight, when Shoaib walked into the newly established office of Establishment and Cabinet to petition for a reasonable posting, his old friend and long time supporter Ejaz Naik came from behind the desk and shook his hand.

Invited by Ejaz to be his Joint Secretary in the cabinet Shoaib was at first reluctant. Ejaz knew how badly Shoaib had been served, and although he was reluctant to lose one of his best men, he told Shoaib he would help him in whatever way he could to obtain an international assignment. In the meantime he counselled patience, and so Shoaib acceded. The months passed not entirely unpleasantly but as nothing much had happened to further his aim of breaking free of the civil service the normally patient and equable Shoaib began to fret. He knew only too well that the window of opportunity Ejaz Naik had opened could just as quickly be closed by someone else. *I was beginning to get pretty fed up* Shoaib confessed; *I just wanted to get out of it all and go abroad.* Then, as it always seemed to do when needed, Shoaib's 'old boy network' came into play.

Discussing old times with the governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, Dr. Ishrat Husain, who had been one of Shoaib's probationers, he mentioned what he really wanted to do was to start out anew in the world of international development. 'Well, why not' Ishrat had immediately replied, and suggested that Shoaib take up a consultancy available at Nagoya, Japan at the new United Nations Centre for Regional Development. And if it was a 'Volkswagen' of a job rather than a 'Mercedes', it was a start. Shoaib had laughed, *yes, it was a bit like a Volkswagen, it was a backroom job in a small international organisation, but I was in a professional cul-de-sac. I was ready to do anything that was reasonable in order to escape it. It seemed that what they wanted was for me to*

bring all my practical experience to bear on their research agenda and I was more than happy to do this for a while.

Ishrat had promptly written to the UNCRD Director, Dr Ralph Diaz, an academic who hailed from the Philippines. Unsurprisingly to perhaps all but Shoaib, an offer came by return mail. It was in truth a modest international posting but what no one really understood was that Shoaib was a prize catch. The consultancy was for an initial six months, however, under government rules individual civil servants were not supposed to receive or respond in person to such letters. All offers were to be routed through official channels and it was up to government departments to nominate a candidate of their choosing. Having made no secret of his ambitions and hoping for the best, Shoaib took the letter to Ejaz Naik. Such is the speed with which news travels on the bureaucratic grapevine, I doubt if his friend was caught by surprise. Graciously accepting the inevitable Naik took control of the situation, treated the letter as an offer to the Cabinet Division, and listed Shoaib as the division's nominee. *There may have been a few sniffs of disapproval in some quarters* Shoaib laughed, but indeed protocol had been satisfied. Shoaib was free at last.

August can be a torrid month in Pakistan.

The monsoon is in full swing and although temperatures have retreated from the scorching highs of June, the humidity, the heavy drenching rain, the water dribbling down the walls of the flat-roofed bungalows, the muddy streets and the constant rain-driven power cuts mean that life is not entirely comfortable. But in August of 1978 all thoughts of the weather faded into the background as Shoaib boarded the flight that would see him on his way to Japan. He had a lot on his mind, not only was he heading for unknown shores, as a signpost perhaps of the frantic travel schedule he would maintain later in his professional life, he would not travel directly to Japan. By the time Shoaib's Philippines Airlines DC8 landed at Narita he would have visited Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

And if Nagoya was a modest posting it was just fine with Shoaib. It would give him time to catch his breath, time to begin showing what he really could do. With luck and hard work, it might turn out to be a stepping stone to bigger and better things, and so it proved to be.

But if anyone thinks it was an easy road to travel then they should think again. It is a road fraught with obstacles for the unwary and although the journey is not without excitement it can also be very lonely. For a man such as Shoaib who had grown up in an extended family and whose life and household had always been full of people, friends, relatives or casual passers-by, many of whom Shoaib had been supporting, the solitary life of an international consultant would have been a painful

shock. *Yes, it was very tough* he agreed quietly one day, *harder than I ever could have imagined, because of course I would have rather been with my wife and my children* and then his voice quietened even further, *you know Noel, even now I don't like to think about it all, not very much at all,* but then he had brightened, *but anyway, I could always get in touch with them on the telephone,* or you could write, and Shoaib was a prolific letter writer.

Many of his early letters are messages of intense loneliness. Always an emotional man, Shoaib ached to fill the empty spaces in his life and to some extent his letters are cathartic. Not unsympathetic but ever practical and also busy, Musarrat's simply told Shoaib to stop bombarding her with so many long 'nonsense' letters and to get on with the job. That is what the family needed and that is what Shoaib should do.

Memory can be selective.

Musarrat laughed when I reminded her of what she had said. She shook her head, laughed again, said she could not recall ever saying such things although her eyes twinkled and she did admit to being a poor correspondent. She much preferred the telephone and still does. *Hah,* she said, laughing as she spoke, *he always wrote so much,* and then she softened, but of course he loved me so much. And in time, Shoaib listened to Musarrat's brisk counsel, as he always did, and slowly, very slowly began to adjust, became more self-sufficient, less reliant on his family. It took time, years in fact, but eventually he did, and when this happened Shoaib went all the way. He became the quintessential 'solitary male' Thus it was that although he still loved his wife, adored his daughters and his grandchildren, gradually he was able to create compartments in his mind. In one of them, perhaps the main one, he placed his work. A demanding mistress, his work slowly but surely absorbed his life, filling every interstice, every space in this main compartment until, like some dangerously addictive drug, he could not live without it. Work became his all.

In his new position as advisor, Shoaib quickly developed a friendship and mutual respect with Haru Nagamine, a cautiously conservative, studiously correct Japanese academic. Their friendship survived the passage of time. Fifteen years later, in 1993, when a doubly bereft Shoaib was casting around for new directions, Haru was to reach out and take him in as visiting professor at Nagoya University's new Centre for International Development. But right then Haru had given Shoaib breathing space. It was in many ways a life preserver.

The assignment at Nagoya was, however, something Shoaib's restless spirit could only tolerate for short periods. Although he enjoyed the challenge of an academic life, and being able to influence the ideas of others, he had never been a desk man who took great satisfaction in authoring reports or think-pieces,

especially those required to conform to the inspirationally crippling recipes demanded by the UN bureaucracy. And although he was a very good teacher indeed and a convincing speaker who frequently sparked a politically enviable level of emotional enthusiasm in his audience, I think Shoaib found the world of research and academic argument rather taxing. On the other hand, when Shoaib sat on the floor discussing issues, and ways and means with a group of villagers, there was sheer magic. For Shoaib was a man of action; and a desk was only a place to be occupied between field visits. His true home, the home of his heart, his preferred office if you like, was the village, any village. Not only could he hold his own in such an environment, there, to the annoyance of his critics and his enemies, he shone. He did not sit apart or above, he sat within, he became a villager, a respected super-elder, a magician.

They listened to him and magically, he seemed to change the way they thought.

And although he did read widely, although he was always open to new ideas, once he had made his mind up that a certain formula worked, although he might tinker with the formula, he would set about to apply it with an unvarying and unquestioning determination that was almost ruthless. A man of academic bent would never have had the intellectual courage, the singleness of mind, the surety of the rightness of his cause to be able to do what Shoaib was to do in later years. No, an academic would have prevaricated and demanded total surety and that was something Shoaib never did or demanded. Belief and practical results were enough.

If he ever did have any doubts about the way he took the theories of social mobilisation by the collar and shook and simplified them until they worked, and surely late at night he must have had a few, it never showed. Like the best of leaders, Shoaib never let anyone see that he had ever doubted, ever wavered, ever wondered. Nor did he ever prevaricated, balance what he believed was right with counter arguments that begin with 'on the other hand'. All anyone ever saw was his surety that the path they were taking, the path that he was leading them along, was the only path to take.

And as a result, those who followed him echoed his total confidence. It was a winning combination.

Three months into his consultancy found Shoaib presenting his Daudzai experiences to an audience of professionals who represented most of the countries in South Asia. What he had to say made most of them sit up in their seats and take notice. So compelling was his simple message that amongst those who joined the press of people wishing to talk further was an eminent Indian academic, one Dr. Misra, the director of the Institute of Social Studies of the University of Mysore. As Shoaib said, smiling at the memory of days past when

he was so new to it all, *the director, who later became a good friend of mine, said straight away that I should write all my ideas up as a book. I of course thought it was just the usual flattery.* Shoaib says he asked who on earth would bother to publish it, and was flabbergasted when the Indian academic immediately replied *I will!* Misra was as good as his word, publishing the Daudzai experience in book form when no one in Pakistan wanted anything at all to do with Shoaib or Daudzai, and the resultant possibility of *rousing and encouraging dangerous ideas amongst the rural poor. And that* said Shoaib with a laugh, *is how that first book of mine,[Rural Development in Pakistan] a book on experiences in Pakistan, came to be published in India of all places.* And why not. After all, like so many of his countrymen, Shoaib was a child of old India, a man of the subcontinent in its widest sense and his message has meaning beyond any borders that politics or religion may draw.

Shoaib also wrote something else. Trained to do so by his anglophile grandfather and of course by Burgess, in the manner of a Victorian gentleman-traveller, Shoaib invariably kept a detailed diary of his travels. These diaries were fun, personal, interesting, and always well worth reading. Recalling the urgings of friends who had read an earlier travelogue of his overland journey from London to Peshawar in 1977, and finding to his surprise that there were quite large chunks of the day when *time lay heavy on my hands*, three weeks into his time in Japan, Shoaib began to address his diary. As he wrote in his ubiquitous diary, *everyone I spoke to before going to Japan scared me out of my wits about the high cost of living, the total lack of communication because of the language, the 'weird' food such as raw fish and whatnot, and a hundred other discouraging and bewildering things.* However, ever the optimist and with his unique ability to reach out and empathise with almost anyone, Shoaib was able to scribble a postscript on the margins that the one silver lining was that the Japanese were a friendly people and that to his surprise he felt absolutely at home from the moment he landed at Narita.

Japanese women, too, were a new experience for Shoaib. Yet, he was then and perhaps still is romantically naïve, charmingly dated, noting with a touch of self-congratulatory chasteness and perhaps seeking to make sure that Musarrat and the fiery Roohi could see that his interest in the behaviour of Japanese women was entirely academic or to stretch a point platonic, *I am always very polite and nice to the fair sex to the annoyance of my wife, but I seldom find them magnetic unless they are strikingly beautiful, of course to my own standards. Thirty years ago, I found one such woman and married her at the young age of nineteen and in my eyes she had set too high a standard of beauty for me to go wayward.* It was not for lack of opportunity. Once seeking a cheaper haircut on a trip to Bangkok he was *rendered speechless* when he suddenly realized what else was on offer. Despite *protests from the girl*, Shoaib

writes of *wresting myself away*, fumbling out the eleven dollars his haircut had cost so far, and *making a rapid escape*. Haircuts might have been more expensive in Japan but they were certainly safer. He also noted that although it was common for Japanese women to work before marriage, in the 1970s most women dropped out of the workforce on marriage and lived lonely lives in cramped housing. As a result, many Japanese wives suffered from social and psychological problems. An interesting comment for a man to whom women have always been a mystery, a man unfailingly courteous to the opposite sex, a door opener, seat offerer, a 'last into the lifeboat' sort of man, but a man nevertheless who, until very recently, constantly admitted bewilderment over how or even whether to approach the role of women in social mobilisation as a special issue. Yet, the high costs and cramped conditions of Japanese housing stuck out like a sore thumb. Shoaib wrote of housing as *the Achilles heel of the Japanese, at once the most expensive and inadequate facility in the country.*

Shoaib also found the Japanese to be unfailingly polite and always helpful, noting in his diary, *I am quite thunderstruck at the law-abiding Japanese people—pedestrians will wait for a green signal before crossing even if there is not a vehicle in sight* and *even people in a demonstration*, this one a quite emotional one against US intervention in Vietnam, *observe traffic rules unlike our countries where demonstrations take precedence over all other traffic.* But perhaps the saddest, the most poignant note of all is one that Shoaib, one of the privileged few, the cream of the country, wrote of how he was received in Japan *to my surprise, I found that this is one country where Pakistanis are not looked down on.*

Despite the dire warnings of well meaning friends in Pakistan on the high costs and strangeness of Japanese food, Shoaib writes that he readily took to the food and was not at all dismayed by prices, except at some of the more expensive steak houses. The cost of everything was a constant source of worry to Shoaib intent on saving as much as he could to send back to his family—but at least he found Japanese food agreeable. He thought 'sushi' *quite nice*, and *was quite surprised to hear I had eaten raw fish.* A dinner of *shabu shabu* followed by melon and ice cream for *the princely amount of forty dollars* warranted a diary entry as did crab meat which he was surprised to find was *quite delicious.* Introduced to *sukiyaki*, he noted how innovative the Japanese are with food.

An honoured guest, Shoaib's cultural education would have been incomplete without a traditional tea ceremony. *You are supposed to sit in the same posture Muslims take while offering prayers*, Shoaib noted with interest, and although he was not totally impressed with the tea, a frothy green mix meant to be taken in three-and-a-half sips, which he described *as quite palatable*, the twelve hundred or so dollar price tag for each of the kimonos worn by the five or six ladies in attendance certainly caught his attention.

Now that was something to tell Musarrat.

Two long pipes with a tobacco container on the table apparently signified that the ceremony was informal. Shoaib could only imagine what a formal ceremony would be like. He described the experience as *one of the most exotic he had experienced, just like a dream.*

For Shoaib, life in Japan was also a bewildering technological adventure whether it was ATM's, telephone message banks or a communication system that magically and instantaneously connected him with his family in London, a far cry from the then super-slow Pakistani system. If he is fulsome in his comments, there is one dark spot. Unable to imagine in his wildest nightmares that some of his own countrymen would one day use suicide as a weapon, he admits to being puzzled and discomfited by the Japanese people's upsetting habit of resorting to suicide to cope with failure or indebtedness.

Thrift also ranked highly in his mind. During this early period of his international life when he knew his comparatively high honorarium may well have been a one-off ephemeral affair, saving money was an important consideration. Many of his Pakistani friends shared his money concerns and his thrift but each one without exception also displayed that unaccountable touch of amazing personal generosity that can so flabbergast a foreigner. Shoaib writes for example of a friend, Dr Dilawar Khan, bringing winter clothes for Shoaib, *at some inconvenience to himself.* (The good doctor had to leave his own suitcase behind). Shoaib does not say what the poor fellow did himself, briefly noting *without these clothes I would have really shivered*, adding with his now customarily frugal outlook, *purchasing clothes in Japan was simply out of the question because they are so expensive.*

Of course, as with acts of personal generosity, or personal frugality, buying presents for his family was another thing entirely.

Shoaib had carefully hoarded his leave entitlements and in December, with two weeks up his sleeve, hunted out a cheap return ticket to London. Then, casting his customary caution to one side, he joyfully emptied his normally close-kept wallet on a shopping spree. Pink pearls for Musarrat, white pearls for his three elder daughters, and to happily spoil Shelley the baby and his two grandchildren, new Seiko watches, and then in a moment of enthusiasm, something for everyone. *I got carried away*, Shoaib cheerfully admitted, *and simply could not resist the latest thing, a tray of beautiful and cute ring-watches.* And in the way of these things there was a last minute panic when the Nagoya voucher for the cheap ticket was refused by the Tokyo airlines office. But the old boy network sprang into action once again, and the ticket was swiftly put to rights once the embassy intervened. En route to London the flat dirty white

vastness of a frozen China unrolled beneath. It seemed to Shoaib as if the entire country had been cemented.

And then at last, laughing all the while, he vanishes into the bosom of his family in London. He finds everyone content and totally at home, even that essentially Indian woman, Musarrat, while he, the eternal anglophile and lover of English literature, itches to return to the subcontinent and put his ideas into practice. England has changed. There are strikes and social disruption. It is not entirely peaceful. He presents his diaries to the family and is teased by Musarrat about some of his entries. Of his head-strong eldest daughter all those years ago, with her pragmatism and her job in the British civil service Shoaib could only write, *I have no son but I have absolutely no doubt that if I had one he could not have been half as good as Roohi.* Of Munchu, who liked his diary *very much*, Shoaib wrote of being *as usual the most amiable and loveable and very steady in her studies for a business diploma*, and perhaps with the rose-tinted glasses of a distant father home on a fleeting visit, is even hopeful that his wild-child Afshan has found her niche in life, writing, as any happily biased father might that *her exhibits showed talent and a high degree of professionalism of which any father would be proud.* And of course there was Shelley. Shoaib could write of this daughter with far more surety than the unpredictable Afshan, the *darling of her daddy, so very happy to see me. How could he bear to leave*, he wondered? How could he not with all those women so dependent on his income, so dependent on his being the superman they believed him to be. So off again he went.

Back in Nagoya, there was a happy reunion with his older brother Sohail, in Japan to buy more boats to cope with the fast growing numbers of Haj pilgrims travelling to Saudi Arabia, and of meeting a bevy of *world renowned experts* all touching down at Nagoya courtesy of the UN gravy train. There were also former probationers and batch mates now spreading out in the diplomatic or international world, all *met with the greatest of pleasure.* At a reception he writes that he was startled by the vehemence of the former Afghan ambassador, *who loudly maintained the Russians had literally taken over his country*, and of the former ambassador's wife, *casting murderous looks at the jovial Russian counsellor all night.* It was an augury of a future that would indirectly help Shoaib achieve success beyond his wildest dreams. Then there is his astonishment to find only one crop per year was grown despite good rainfall and fertile soils, noting for future reference that *the Japanese, although buoyed by sky high artificially maintained prices, would rather earn money from industry* and were also *stifled by having to market through cooperatives.* He was amused by his friend, the English academic Guy Hunter, who replied to Shoaib's question about how he found the countryside, *I have yet to find it* said Hunter, and confides his despair that while the Japanese government is perhaps a bit over the top in its support of its farmers, the *markaz federation* in Pakistan is

still being opposed *tooth and nail by the cooperative department who do not want to give up even an ounce of power to the people. When will we learn and from whom* Shoaib writes, his heart in Daudzai still, *or are we never going to learn those things that will enable poor farmers to get out of poverty.* It was almost as if Shoaib was starting to talk himself into going back to Pakistan because the answers to his questions were becoming obvious. He would have to be the message bringer. There was no one else.

And as he approaches the end of his six months in Japan, Shoaib addresses his diary in the time-honoured practice of all thinking men who have dwelt for a time in a foreign country: he tries to explain the natives to the world. *On the whole*, he writes, resorting to generalities, *the Japanese are the most organised, civic-minded law abiding and courteous people I have ever seen in the world.* Yet he does repeatedly note how slow, how difficult it seems to be to win over the confidence of a Japanese person. He wonders why he sometimes seems to meet a brick wall, and how suspicious and nervous of foreigners the Japanese can be, but unable to think of anything else, Shoaib ascribes this to their being conditioned to homogeneity. If he ever wondered if his acceptance and understanding was at all hobbled because he was a non-drinking man in a drinking culture he does not confide these thoughts to his diary.

And then he decides to finish his lengthy conjectures on a positive note. *No Japanese*, he concludes, *would ever set out to make you feel uncomfortable or be discourteous and that once won over, he is totally on your side and nothing will shake his confidence in you.*

If nothing else, Shoaib's diary shows one thing. Japan was very much a whistle-stop in the journey of his life. He knew he was not really cut out to be an academic, a back-room thinker. Shoaib craved action, variety, and most of all he craved the roiling, boiling hills and plains of his own great subcontinent. Nagoya simply could not hold him. He was surprised to find that the Japanese thought otherwise. Just how the change from desk-man to field officer came about is a bit blurred.

Shoaib had shrugged and laughed when I tried to press him on this as he always did when he sought to avoid the embarrassing fact that yes indeed, he had at times been ambitious, if quietly so, and yes indeed, he did look for situations where he could put his and his much admired mentor's revolutionary ideas into practice. And yes, at that time both he and his mentor were locked away in the ivory towers of academia, one in Japan the other America, and both, although grateful, were more than a little frustrated, more so perhaps for Shoaib who only really felt alive when in the field and moving, always moving.

A bolt from the blue. Shoaib says he was caught totally by surprise when while attending a seminar in Bangkok a UNICEF staff member whom he had

known in his previous life cheerily said, *well, I hear you are going to Sri Lanka.* He was? *Well, this was the first time I had heard anything about it* Shoaib said laughing, *and I told my friend he must be mistaken.* But no, the friend replied he was sure that Shoaib had been selected for a year's consultancy. *Of course* said Shoaib, as is the way of things, *I was the last to know.* He probably was. After failing to place Shoaib in Indonesia, there were some well placed people within UNICEF who kept his curriculum vitae well in view in their in-trays. And when the question began to circulate within the agency, what could be done about an increasingly problematic high profile project in Sri Lanka, a project in which both the Sri Lankan government and agencies such as the World Bank had invested heavily, Shoaib's name bobbed to the surface.

Arriving back in Nagoya, sure enough there was a telex asking if Shoaib would be interested in flying over to Sri Lanka for an interview. With the bait of a field job dangling in front of him, Shoaib leapt at it, hook, line and sinker. To his surprise Haru Nagamine was not pleased. Perhaps the Japanese academic just did not like sudden change, maybe he had longer term plans for Shoaib—whatever the case Shoaib says Haru's reaction was a surprise and clearly remembers him grumbling, *no, no, why should you go? You are not in a buyer's market and you have got to wait your turn.* And maybe that was the nub of it all. As in a complicated game of snakes and ladders, Shoaib seemed to be taking a rapid short-cut, swiftly climbing a ladder rather than trudging slowly along carefully avoiding the snakes. He was not waiting his turn. *Perhaps I wasn't* said Shoaib one day, *but God knows I am not a saint. I am just an ordinary man who happens to have been very lucky.*

So was UNICEF, and whether Shoaib knew it or not, they were very keen to have him. Deal done, Shoaib countered Haru's morose objections with a welter of cheerful reasons, and anyway, he would more than fulfil the terms of his contract. There was nothing that Haru could do but grumble, and with just a touch of bad grace, give in.

Shoaib flew to Colombo and was immediately befriended by the UNICEF representative Paul Ignatieff. A Canadian of Russian descent, Ignatieff knew a good man when he saw one. With his Japanese assistant, Paul took Shoaib straight away to the Mahaweli Valley Authority officials. Desperate to have someone who could untangle the social traffic jam that had stalled their five-star project, the Sri Lankans welcomed Shoaib with open arms. *And that was it.* laughed Shoaib, amazed still at his luck. It was a good start and it needed to be because it would not be a trouble-free run. Shoaib would have to deal with many major potholes, diversions, stop signs as he slowly built an engineering success into a human one—a place where people, worried and disoriented settlers from different geographic areas, from disparate social and cultural backgrounds,

could bond as working communities, learn new techniques, make a living as farmers, live their new lives. And although he may not have known it at the time, the Mahaweli Ganga project would launch him skywards. The world would hear about him.

He would become *a man called Khan.*

Japan again, fourteen years later; Shoaib is a changed man, a shadow of his former self. His achievements are remarkable, bordering on the wondrous; he has changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of poverty- stricken mountain farmers in Pakistan's far north, made, in their words, *the impossible possible*; he has flown so high, been so amazingly successful that he has become a legend in his time, invoking an intensity of admiration and love that is inspirational.

Life should have been wonderful. It wasn't. Once again, lesser men have conspired to oust him. The way they have done this appals him. It is Daudzai all over again. And it is not only his professional life that has hit the rocks. He begins to count heads and finds that those of many friends are missing. Gone are Mohammad Ahmad and Tariq Jaffrey who urged him to keep a diary fourteen years ago, gone also are many others, among them his beloved Munchu and her two children. Gone also is Musarrat's spirit, the keystone of his life. He wonders if he can go on.

And then, as he had done so long ago, Haru Nagamine throws a life belt. Shoaib grabs it. As he travels to Nagoya in December of 1992, Shoaib reopens his diary. His first entry begins; *I was just too busy in Gilgit to find time to keep a personal account, although my Notes for the Record provide some continuity.*

Almost five years have passed since Munchu's death shattered the equilibrium of his family forever. Almost desperately he seeks to share the few shards of light he can see in the darkness that descended on him after her death. *I now see this world in a different light*, he writes.

Had he been humble enough, he wondered? But of course he had, there is simply no doubt about this at all. He will however forever be tormented by the most damaging two words of all—*if only*. And so this most human man scribbles on, his pen-strokes still firm, words well formed as he writes of the priceless gift left by his dead daughter, *worldly worries pale into insignificance in the backdrop of what has happened to my family. There is no pain and nothing in this world worth striving for, except, perhaps making this world a little more happy and comfortable for others.*

Yes, he writes emphatically, he can go on, quoting Keats, *at the capacity of the human heart to suffer misery*, concluding of Munchu's death, *if my heart could bear this loss, what is there to worry about?* Easy to write, hard to do, he

cannot bear to let the subject go, let Munchu go, writing of how thoughts of God are confusing, and in the way of all truly good men who have suffered senseless loss, almost a cry, *I can't believe that God can be that cruel.* But still he will not deny God, writing *my God is a kind and benign entity.... I can't begin to blame God for an act which was cruel, senseless and uncalled for.* But if Shoaib cannot blame his God, who does he blame? Does he blame himself? He does, and this time Nagoya is not an escape hatch from the establishment in Pakistan, a stepping stone to the future; it is a refuge from the pain of loss.

In some ways Munchu's loss has not weakened him; in fact it has done the opposite. It has made him impregnable to attack, immune to the loss of all but the very few things in life that are of value. Thus, he faces other onslaughts of life with courage and equanimity—issues concerned with his professional career, with envious competitors who seek to pull him down, as so many years before, but he is not afraid. He stands firm and goes on working.

Meanwhile, Haru Nagamine has been climbing the academic ladder. He is now a full professor and heads his own development institute. This small, steady man also has a long memory and a debt to pay to one who once helped him climb a rung or two. So he sends a letter, throws Shoaib a lifeline, offers a refuge; but the offered year, at first exciting, suddenly becomes impossibly long, and Shoaib only agrees to a three month stint.

The new Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, is urging this desperately weary man to bring the ideas that remade the Northern Areas to the wider world of Pakistan. Shoaib feels he ought to do this thing, that in a way he owes it to his dead daughter. She had chosen Pakistan as her home. She would want him to try. If he cannot give her life he will give her this.

And there was Musarrat, who although initially jumping at the idea soon had second thoughts, deciding that really she was just too ill to cope with a new and very foreign country. The effort to adjust to anything but Pakistan or England was simply too much. And he agrees; a year away and on his own would be way too long. Haru Nagamine would have to be satisfied with three months.

So Shoaib heads once more to Nagoya, back to the future. Haru meets a changed man; Shoaib finds a changed country. After a decade or more at the top of the international pay scale, Shoaib is no longer as concerned with such things as making small economies or impressed with the cost of kimonos. He is however sad to see the new Japan, writing that the country *no longer exudes that confidence and panache that was so visible last time...one can see the same signs of decadence that one sees in Western societies.* Most distressing of all for Shoaib was the changed attitude of the people. He comments sadly that *they seemed not so outwardly welcoming.* No longer was he greeted with *an enthusiastic 'hie'*, as he made his way through the streets, and *Western dress now predominates.* But, to his relief, he notes some *basic characteristics of the people remain unchanged.* Most Japanese people are still helpful to strangers, and perhaps unable to escape his frugal nature, notes with relief that still *no tipping is required.* On a personal level, all of Haru's children have turned out well, even Afshan's alter ego, the would-be hard core film critic—you can almost hear Shoaib thinking, *well done!*

And although this second time around Shoaib is a world traveller and equally at home in a simple village or a top hotel or airport lounge, he can still be impressed by the comparative luxury of Japanese planes or that a delicious cup of hot soup, always a favourite, was served instead of sticky-sweet cold drinks or tea or coffee. Flattered to be granted the status of professor, Shoaib seems even more impressed when he discovers that using a telephone from Japan is now very easy and comparatively cheap. He promptly calls a very surprised Musarrat and burbles on about how well he was doing, how he had 'fortified himself' to face up to the chores of cooking, cleaning and doing his own laundry, marvelling, like any man who knows it is all but a temporary thing, at his own proficiency in completing these tasks with swift competence. *The secrets of the washing machine were revealed to me by a Goanese Indian* he writes with some satisfaction, *laundry had been a big worry but really it is child's play. I can't understand why we make so much fuss of it back home.* Does he mean Islamabad where the dhobiwallah slaps the dirty linen on a concrete slab, or London where everyone is busy?

With the status of professor, required to give only one lecture a week and with the rest of his time to be given over to study and writing, Shoaib imagined he was free to keep his own hours. But no, Shoaib found he was expected to sign a register on the dot at 0830 every morning, and to stay working in his assigned room until signing out again at 1700. He felt like a factory worker, not an academic guest so he politely refused to sign the register although he did in fact work to the expected hours. There was an additional downside, *with that kind of regimentation* he wrote, *I got hardly any time in the weekdays for walks.*

But walk he did, mainly during the weekends and although initially apprehensive of lonely places, he consoled himself with the belief that Japanese youth are usually extremely well behaved; *you don't see the kind of rowdyism you find in the West* he informed his diary. Even in the early 1990s, an aging Pakistani had to be careful where he chose to walk in the outer fringes of London.

One drawback was having no phone in his apartment. Discovering that late-night calls are considerably cheaper he would go *down to the foyer late at night in the freezing wind only to find someone had got there before you.* Then, after a lot of dogged back and forth negotiation he managed to activate the private

phone in his room; it looked like a toy, and astonishingly was inscribed with the words 'kiss phone' and '007', which probably made him smile.

He wrote with obvious relief, *once it was activated, Islamabad and London were only seconds away*. Shoaib can still remember the dialling codes and numbers. Of the toy telephone, he added, *it has almost made it possible for me to feel that I am not at all so far away from my loved ones*. It will help him to survive because after the incredible pace and the jam-packed days of the last fourteen years, Nagoya once again is a very lonely place.

His day begins with a solitary breakfast, and then a walk to his room at the university to write, never a favoured occupation, then lunch, sometimes with Haru, sometimes with a casual drop-in. Otherwise he is left largely alone in his room, not even the telephone rings and when it does it is a surprise. It is as chalk and cheese compared to Gilgit. He protests he is happy and notes in his diary *one is completely at peace with oneself*. There is *one dark cloud on the horizon*. Shoaib hears news that his beloved AHK is being hounded by the trumped up but nevertheless extremely serious charge of blasphemy. Filed in the ancient town of Multan, the charges are entirely spurious of course. Akhter Hameed will shrug them off but will never be rid of them. Not even the intervention of a prime minister can cause the charges to be withdrawn.

Then a lighter note. Shoaib's long hand is swift and sure but he is a bumbling tyro with computers. Laptops are a mystery but he struggles on manfully, pecking out his sentences, until one fatal day he succeeds in wiping everything he has written. The surly machine refuses to be revived and with only two weeks remaining, disaster looms. But then Shoaib remembers he has followed Rauf's instructions and backed his work up. There are reserve floppies. He soldiers on with borrowed equipment. Then his three months are completed and so is his contractually obligatory thirty-page paper. He gives it an excruciatingly academic title— 'The Theoretical Framework and Operational Principles of Rural Development'. Few will read the paper but the Japanese love it. He has also reviewed a couple of Masters Thesis, given the odd tutorial and squeezed in a brief trip to Karachi to put in an appearance at a meeting in the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme's boardroom.

During the weeks we sat and talked together in Islamabad, Shoaib spoke only briefly of this time in Nagoya except to say that he used it to write a great deal. *Almost everything you now see*, he said one day before moving on to matters closer to his heart, *almost everything that I have written, my life history, the Japan diary, my Sri Lanka notes, all the old stuff, all of it, I just wrote down, no editing, no rewriting, it was written just as it came to me.*

With his paper completed and before he leaves, Shoaib sets off to see some of the social engineering experiments that are taking place in Japan. He is fascinated to visit a village trying to *cure the sickness of urban life by devising a new way of communal living and sharing* and is impressed by the self-confidence and general demeanour of the young who entirely lack aggression. A quintessential believer in the family, Shoaib quotes a famous Chinese Nobel laureate, who after living for fifteen years in America believed that American society had been destroyed because the family had also been destroyed. Shoaib cannot avoid extending this to Japan and writes that he believes the challenge that confronts the Japanese is how to preserve the family without denying equal rights and privileges to women, and notes, somewhat obtusely that, *even Tolstoy and Gandhi were afraid that if the village adopted modern methods it would lose its innocence and purity*.

Introduced to traditional Japanese baths he writes of sleeping happily and soundly on the floor but not before making a final note in his diary. *There is simply no short cut to development; there is no way to circumvent the process of social mobilisation*. He will carry this belief back to the subcontinent and in just a very few years, while the amazing changes wrought in the Northern Areas of Pakistan slip into hibernation, in a renewed and perhaps penultimate burst of energy, and at an age when most men have long retired, he will put these ideas to work in perhaps the greatest triumph of his life, in India, in the sprawling state of Andhra Pradesh.

But all that is far in the future.

February 1979. Spirit refreshed, wounds healed in the quiet academic isolation of Nagoya, Shoaib plunges back into the social turmoil of the field, into a troubled jungle paradise on the island of Sri Lanka.

The Garden of Eden

It is the fifth century AD. On the emerald island of Sri Lanka, King Dhathusena, the fifth of nine great royal tank builders of the ancient Lankan kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, orders the damming of the Kala Oya River. It is an ambitious and far-seeing move. Located in the 'dry' zone of the central lowlands, rain falls only during a five to six month monsoon season, and intensely in only three; as much as seventy-five inches buckets down. But at least six months are dry, three of them bone dry. Not a drop of moisture. Nothing grows. People are hungry. Dhathusena decides to harness the monsoon rains.

His engineers and artisans set to work. When they have finished the king gazes out over a gigantic twenty-six square kilometre rainwater reservoir or 'inland ocean'. Even he is impressed.

Named the Kalawewa Tank, it is a body of water Shoaib would describe in awe fifteen hundred years later as large as the sea. To provide water to a distant capital and to service new paddy fields, the king also caused the construction of a remarkable 'one-bank' ninety kilometre long canal, the Jaya Ganga. Its subtle gradient of twenty centimetres per kilometre was a marvellous feat of engineering. When the Kalawewa tank and its distributary canals were completed, others set to work. Dense jungle was replaced by thriving farming communities and terraced paddy fields bordered by forest framed distant hills, hazy blue in the humidity.

By the end of the reign of the last great royal builder of tanks, King Parakrambahu, an immense irrigation system had been created. At the core of this system were nine huge inland oceans. These enormous bodies of water were supported by more than two hundred other large subsidiary tanks or reservoirs and a network of ten thousand minor reservoirs, all of which impounded more than one thousand two hundred and fifty square kilometres of water. The system captured and stored wet season run-off and peak stream flow and so allowed year-round crop production. The skill of the Lankan engineers and artisans was legendary; the island became known as the rice granary of the Orient.

In the thirteenth century there was a sudden cataclysmic change of the course of the Mahaweli Ganga whose dams and canals were the key to the entire ancient hydraulic Lankan civilization. Many tanks and dams became stranded and canal and irrigation systems slowly fell out of use. Famine and disease outbreaks followed, the lowlands were progressively abandoned and people moved south to the Wet and Intermediate Zones.

And then, in 1505, Portuguese trading *caravels* made landfall on the Sri Lankan coast, usurping the Omani Arabs whose dhows had traded along the western coastline since the eighth century AD and who had brought Islam with them. A hundred years or so later the Dutch replaced the Portuguese and although traders first and foremost, added Christianity to the religious mix. Through all this, Sri Lanka remained a vital centre of Buddhism. Uninterested in the humid interior, these master mariners and traders, Portuguese and Dutch alike, were content to establish coastal market towns where they could exchange the manufactured goods of Europe for the priceless spices for which the island became famous. Huge profits were realised by the newcomers and their descendants, profits that spilled over into the hands of Sri Lankan merchant middlemen.

As the towns grew and prospered, more and more people abandoned the declining irrigation systems of the northern lowlands and migrated to the coastal

towns lured by the chance to make their fortunes, and as a side issue, to escape the bondage of their kings. In the northern lowlands there were of course pockets of settlement where stubborn stay-at-homes eked out a living as fishermen, cultivators and hunters. Elsewhere the jungle slowly reclaimed the land. Giant teak trees now grew down to the water's edge and while the retaining walls of some of the great tanks crumbled many remained largely intact, a testament to the skill of their builders, their water supporting fisher families or herds of elephant and other animals; for all of these the jungle was home.

The British finally arrived and ousted the Dutch in 1769. Not content with coastal enclaves, they took over the entire island, and called it Ceylon. They brought with them a comprehensive law and order administrative system, introduced schools and taxes, and beginning with coffee and then moving on to the far more profitable rubber and tea, created great cash-crop estates in the humid highlands, their demand for labour changing Lankan demographics once again. The British would, however, largely ignore the 'dry zone' and rice production. There the long abandoned tanks sat slowly crumbling, canals eroded or overgrown. Much of the countryside became malarial swampland and jungle continued to reclaim the land. It was a land of giant teak trees, where wild elephants trumpeted at sunset as they sucked up water from one of the great glistening lakes, a land of jungle people and isolated pockets of hardy villagers. But the tanks were still there, or at least some of them—waiting.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, two enlightened British administrators focused attention on the importance of a long neglected aspect, smallholder irrigation, and the increasingly dire situation of food production on the island. As a result, the restoration of some of the ancient irrigation systems was initiated. This included in 1887, the giant Kalawewa rainwater reservoir. Further works were carried out in 1939.

And then in 1948, quite suddenly the British left.

The new national government embarked on a series of development projects in an attempt to jump-start a stable but relatively conservative economy heavily weighted to benefit the elite. Rice had become one of Sri Lanka's main imports. Several things were in their favour. The new government inherited a highly literate population which was a decided plus, and if some of the river systems of the north had supported highly productive irrigated farming communities in the past, there was no reason to think they could not do so once again. The Sri Lankan government set out to do just this and aimed, over a steady thirty year period, to revive and expand the ancient tank-based irrigation civilisation of the Mahaweli Ganga system and its five major associated river basins.

The 335 km river was the country's longest, covering almost one fifth of the total area of the island. An ambitious project called for the damming of the river at multiple locations, many of whose sites replicated the dams and weirs built fifteen hundred years before. Some of the great tanks were to be repaired and rehabilitated and a system of delivery canals built anew or superimposed on systems of the past. Not only would the Mahaweli Ganga dams produce vast amounts of electricity, the planners also envisioned clearing huge areas of one-thousand-year-old jungle regrowth so bringing 360,000 irrigated hectares under cultivation. The total area under paddy rice in the country would thus be increased by more than a third.

The massive Kalawewa tank sprawls across the upper reaches of the Kala Oya, one of the five associated river basins in the Mahaweli Development Project. Under the project, the Dambula Oya, a main headwater tributary of the Kala Oya was to direct water to the tank so enhancing the irrigation command area.

What happened next, said Shoaib, as he relived the four vital years he had spent in the humid lowlands of north-western Sri Lanka, *was that they took an express canal from the tank and then divided it into secondary canals and again into distributory canals. Each of these had a number of turnout gates designed to irrigate up to twenty hectares of land. This meant that each turnout gate provided water for between twelve to twenty families.* And then he had laughed, *at this point,* Shoaib said shaking his head, *the authorities thought they had done their job and that there could be nothing better than this. There was enough land and water to settle over twenty-seven thousand families.*

The system of delivery to the turnout gates was, in Shoaib's words, first class. There was however a major environmental downside. Much of the twenty-four thousand hectares of land commanded by the Kalawewa tank was a dense jungle of massive teak trees and other increasingly rare rain forest species. The jungle also *teemed with wildlife including a herd of at least five hundred wild elephants.* As their habitat succumbed to the relentless attack of chainsaws and tractors, the elephants in particular would have to be relocated or killed. Many other plant and animal species would simply vanish. However, as environmental considerations had yet to assume the importance they now have, the project was promoted as the opportunity of a lifetime for thousands of poor landless farmers. Without hesitation, Western donor agencies agreed.

Always a 'people's man', Shoaib the hunter was nevertheless saddened by the loss of so much wild and natural habitat. *Only a few years ago,* he wrote in one of his initial cascade of letters to Musarrat, *the area was all a beautiful teak forest and the abode of wild elephant.... no wonder there is an uproar from the conservationists who ask what is going to happen to the five hundred elephants who live there when the Mahaweli project is completed.* He cared less for the

cobras *which teemed in the jungle.* Bad luck for the animals—always for Shoaib, people must come first. The elephants would just have to make do.

Shoaib was assigned to the wonderfully scenic area commanded by the Kalawewa tank described in no-nonsense terms as System H. He would have preferred something more romantically poetic, a name in kinship with the ancient history of the area. *But you know how it is,* he had smiled and shrugged, *foreigners always look to their own convenience in projects of this nature and so in the Mahaweli project all the old romantic names had been changed and each of the eleven irrigation and settler systems had been allocated a letter from the English alphabet.* However, in Sri Lanka foreign donors had a point. How could they fund a project, or locate a specific area, when they could not pronounce its name?

Despite engineering works Shoaib described as *the best he had ever seen* (in this he had the marvellously executed works of the Indus valley as a yardstick) and despite an apparently well planned, well trained and well staffed administrative infrastructure and an extension centre for every one thousand settlers System H of the Mahaweli project was in trouble.

With everything seemingly in place including some fifteen thousand settlers—an eclectic mixture of landless former labourers, Sinhalese from the south, local minorities, Tamils and even a few Muslims—the very *raison d'être* for the entire massive project, increased agricultural production, was a fizzer. Nobody, not government's best thinkers, nor a succession of puzzled donor experts, could think why in this the nation's premier project, the settlers were just not settling and getting on with growing crops?

And then the Sri Lankan government had a stroke of luck. Despite opposition from the Ministry of Lands and Land Settlement, the then senior of the two ministries who operated the scheme under the Mahaweli Development Authority, UNICEF recruited a little known former Pakistani civil servant as their man-on-the-ground in System H.

In February of 1979 Shoaib flew directly from Japan to Colombo. London and the family would have to wait. Musarrat would have dearly loved to see Shoaib but his new job meant their family could go on with their life. Shoaib the magician had pulled yet another rabbit out of the hat.

Shoaib relished being back in the 'real' world and wrote immediately to tell Musarrat how he felt, writing *'when I landed at Colombo from Nagoya I felt as if I had come from a world of fantasy to a world of reality.'* But when he finally pitched up at the raw seven-month old settlement town of Galnewa in the dry lowlands of central and northern Sri Lanka, the city of Colombo also joined the

ranks of unreality. *I realised* he confided in one of the first of a stream of letters he sent to Musarrat *that this is the real world and not Colombo.*

For Shoaib, the elegant old colonial city with its parks and gardens, its mansions and gracious old world hotels was only an imitation of westernized cities. The real world, he feels, is something else *it is the world of the majority of people living in the developing countries.* Shoaib of course was talking about 'his people', the rural poor.

Determined to live on site at the project, Shoaib becomes the talk of Colombo. UN staff and consultants customarily based themselves in the comfort of Colombo or at worst, in one of the larger inland towns such as Kandy. No one roughed it out in the sticks for any length of time. They took day trips, or on occasion spent the night in one of the circuit bungalows the British had left behind. In these they may have dined on village-toughened chickens, slept on thin mattresses under billowing mosquito nets, sipped bed tea in the morning. It was not all that uncivilized.

But there was more. Would the government senior counterpart allocated to partner Shoaib's posting be prepared to actually live out on the scheme? A hardship posting, the project site was a four-hour drive from Colombo and the prospect of having to live on-site would have had senior officers scrambling for excuses. So not only was a live-in senior counterpart an unlikely event there was a further objection: stationed on-site, some of the other stuffier senior government officials would not have their new high-powered consultant *at their beck and call.* Oh dear! As had generations of colonial servants, UN consultants were supposed to follow 'the form', and there was Shoaib stirring up the waters even before his feet were wet!

He should have known better. Hadn't he been a senior civil servant himself?

All this said Shoaib with a mischievous smile *caused a bit of a storm in a tea kettle.* In no small part because it also put on the spot other international staff assigned to a variety of field projects. Most had chosen to avail themselves of the comforts of Colombo or Kandy. As Shoaib said laughing now, *there were a lot of UN eyebrows raised and Paul Ignatieff, the UNICEF representative, was also very keen that my counterpart should be a very senior officer.*

Shoaib solved the matter, or at least sent the chatter underground by asking what was it UNICEF wanted him to do. If it was to resolve field issues and properly address the problems and needs of farm families, then the best place for him to be was on site on the project, and the best man for him to work with would be the person in charge of community development in the field. Being no fool and recognizing an impasse when he saw one, Ignatieff had surrendered. He would soon become a friend and an ardent, no-holds-barred supporter. However, the ripples Shoaib had created in Colombo's international pond never quite settled.

It was not the last time Shoaib was to raise UN eyebrows or create a furor.

Later there were to be sharpish interchanges between the senior UN agency UNDP and Ignatieff about Shoaib's hands-on approach, something that was unheard of for UN consultant advisers. And then there were the inevitable mutterings within the UNICEF office in Colombo. However, Shoaib had quickly become a star performer whose time Ignatieff held was too valuable to waste on the normal administrative and procurement drudgery of a programme officer. And although most staff appeared to be friendly on the surface, the office became a barely dormant mini-volcano. One day the many petty grievances muttered over the water cooler would surface. But at the beginning, for Shoaib the UN freshman, all seemed sweetness and light.

Arriving at the Handungama Circuit Bungalow near Galnewa, Shoaib finds he has been allocated the best room, one usually reserved for the Chairman of the Development Board and that a flurry of work was afoot to repaint, fly proof and generally refurbish his new home. I was touched by this warm welcome he writes.

Galnewa Township was also only seven months old and fairly raw *but surprisingly, the post office was housed in a small, beautiful building.* Hoping to further amuse Musarrat, Shoaib described what a stir he had caused when attempting to post a letter to London. *The poor chap,* Shoaib wrote. *had to disturb the post master who put down his newspaper, and fished out an aged rates register. After some consultation three rupees was adjudged the postal cost.* Shoaib was also very impressed by the hustle and bustle of this fast-growing frontier town where everything *from a photographer's studio to a general store was up and running.* And, perhaps with the menu of the rest house kitchen in mind, he is delighted to discover a thriving Saturday market.

And I guess whether Shoaib was really roughing it, something he often wrote about and which mightily impressed his very urban daughters, or whether his life out at Galnewa was relatively comfortable, is a matter of comparison. Certainly, in the early days there was no electricity or running water, and the rest house was indeed *surrounded by a jungle infested with cobras and other wild animals.* By some standards, Shoaib was not really isolated being only an hour or so from Kandy, but there was no easy telephone access and Musarrat did not write well or often, confessing to us one night in London, *yes, I was not a good letter writer.* So, from the point of view of his previous life as a family man and senior civil servant, and of the UN and other international project staff who had opted without a second thought to live in Colombo, Shoaib did live in isolation and Galnewa could indeed be classified as a hardship post.

But there have been many before him. And somehow, the dense warmth of a tropical night serves to intensify loneliness, and try as you might, you instead toss sleeplessly drenched in sweat until you give up, climb out of the mosquito net and sit out on some empty veranda in the drifting smoke of a mosquito coil, and think what a damn fool you are to be in this hot, godforsaken place when the companionship of friends and the bright lights of a great city are yours for the asking. But if this was the private Shoaib, his public face was always cheerful, always full of humour and he never gave in. Despite retaining a spacious set of rooms in a favoured part of Colombo, Galnewa rest house and the Kala Oya basin remained Shoaib's base of operations for the four years he was to serve in Sri Lanka.

Then again, it is seldom all bad.

In more ways than one, the few high-ceilinged, airy rooms in a leafy part of old Colombo were one end of an extended axis of family accommodation beginning in London, a pause in Pakistan, and the other end in Colombo. Their use to friends and family was nothing more and nothing less than any man of Shoaib's social background would expect to be able to offer. There was an excellent cook, *old Anthony*, Shoaib wrote encouragingly to Musarrat. As for his circuit bungalow, Shoaib tells Musarrat he is very lucky because, like Anthony in Colombo, his Galnewa *chowkidar* is also tops, prepares excellent food and takes care of all the washing and cleaning. But Musarrat is not impressed. She is not well enough to cope with the humidity, she says. She will come, but only to Colombo and only for a few months in the cool season. His daughters however, were not at all inhibited by the climate. They came and went quite often. Afshan in fact, lived in the Colombo rooms for a year, while Shoaib's three-year-old grandson Amil and his specially recruited nurse used them as a retreat after his parent's break-up. The rooms were rarely empty.

During that first year Shoaib simply ignored Musarrat's irritated pleas that the avalanche of letters were 'too much for her to deal with and could he write less and telephone more often'. He could not stop: for his own sake. Shoaib needed to maintain the thread of contact made tenuous by time and distance. Had he lost this, he freely admits, his resolve may well have broken. And so, eager for Musarrat to share his enthusiasm for his new posting he does what he had done in Japan, he attempts to provide this singular woman, perhaps his most trusted confidante, with a personally revealing thumbnail sketch of the Sri Lankan people. *The Sri Lankans are basically a very polite people* he begins, *and exhibit none of the brashness that you find in other inhabitants of the subcontinent.* Much later though, trying to fight his way through the web of intrigue and jealousy spun by those who resent the way he has been singled out for praise, he will add a stark footnote, writing *what I perceive to be a diffident attitude in Sri Lankans sometimes bothers me.* A man accustomed to the rough

manners and grinning bear-hugs of the people of Pakistan's Frontier districts, he is at a loss when kept at a distance. '*Sometimes they act so coldly and distantly*' he later laments, '*that one wonders if anything is the matter*'. Unfortunately, when Shoaib penned those words there very definitely was something the matter. But we will come to that.

Shoaib admits to being a trifle shocked when he discovers that *the civil service is indeed poor.* However, he is impressed by the fact that the general difference between rich and poor in Sri Lanka is not the enormous gulf it is in India and Pakistan despite there being a lot of comparatively poor people. *There is an absence of total poverty* Shoaib writes *you don't come across beggars and people in rags* adding *nevertheless, the Lankans are still very elitist in their approach* leaving it up to Musarrat to decide whether this is a flaw or something in their favour. And he cannot avoid mentioning, however briefly, the ethnic divisions that were to so fatally divide this jewel of an island, the increasingly bitter divide between the Sinhalese and the Tamils who *were lobbying for their own state in the north*—a dream that would eventually turn into a nightmare. It is a subject that bothers almost everyone who lives on the Island and Shoaib wants Musarrat to think about it too.

In 1979, it was all still a war of words but a terrible civil war was to come. Always one to look on the bright side of things, Shoaib writes of the Tamil leaders that *no one has put these people behind bars,* and that *the political tolerance in Sri Lanka is worthy of the highest praise and a model for others to follow.* Is he thinking of his own country?

Attending a district meeting he describes feeling both strange and familiar. *It was,* Shoaib writes, *identical to those I once held in Kohat except that here I was one of the spectators.* There was also one big difference and it was an important one. *Here,* he adds, *although government servants are indeed at the beck and call of the politicians, the system works well because the politicians know they are answerable to the people who will not tolerate excuses at election time.* And then rather sadly he finishes the letter with something that Musarrat already knows, how India and Sri Lanka are outstanding examples of the fact that ultimately democracy pays off, and how authoritarian rule or dictatorship is a very poor alternative.

And then, putting on a brave face it was cheerfully back to business. *The office of the Regional Project Manager is a short stroll from the bungalow, about a mile* Shoaib informs Musarrat. The new incumbent, with one of those difficult to pronounce Sri Lankan names is a man called Karunatillake. *He seemed a very nice person, showing real pleasure at my arrival* Shoaib innocently writes, and then ever the anglophile enthuses, *a Cambridge man too, can you believe he used to live at*

Wolfson, adding with just a touch of condescension *one of the new colleges you know, but just opposite my college of Selwyn.*

However, being fellow Cambridge men eventually proves not to be enough. Within the year, Karunatillake will become a sullen and implacable opponent. But right now, before Shoaib's star rises leaving his Sri Lankan workmates far behind, Shoaib writes of the project manager being quietly friendly and welcoming. One day for example, Shoaib finds himself admonishing an uncharacteristically brash and critical young Sri Lankan official who had lived in the UK for the last twelve years, to write later with uncharacteristic primness *the manners of the West do not sit well on the Sri Lankan character.* Shoaib put the young man quietly but firmly in his place by casually mentioning that the project manager had been to Shoaib's old university, Cambridge. Although they had chosen to live out on the project, he should know that neither Shoaib nor the manager were rural hicks. *After which* Shoaib notes with some satisfaction *he appeared to be a nice person.* No doubt the project manager, always a conservative man, quietly approved. With Shoaib's agreement he immediately assigned the deputy in charge of community development as Shoaib's main contact. Another of those Lankan names, Jayawickrama, is an old hand and has been on site since 1976. As most field people do, he warms to Shoaib. It is a very good start.

When Shoaib arrived at Galnewa the project was nearly three years old. Fifteen thousand or more settlers from all over Sri Lanka had been relocated. They were however, far from happy and had commenced farming only in a very desultory way. Government and donors were dismayed, disaster threatened and nobody could tell them what was wrong. But Shoaib could— in very short order he thought he knew where the trouble lay. Although there was, as Shoaib later said, *a whole army of community development workers nobody had thought beyond the turnout gate.* Surely, everyone apparently thought, twelve to twenty settlers could organise themselves. But of course they couldn't. Few of the settler families had ever seen each other before. They also came from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Why should they trust each other? How could they work together? They looked at each other with sceptical distrust, kept a close eye on their marriageable daughters, and otherwise sat on their hands. The problem for Shoaib was how to convince the government and then the donors that there was a very obvious and very simple solution. But how was he going to get 'air-time' for his ideas?

Shoaib was given a humble table in the office of the project's community development officer. This didn't bother him at all. *I said fine, just let me sit there and read all the reports.* And so he did, and while doing this, as he later said, *to my great*

good fortune I found there had already been a lot of studies done. One of these was an anthropological study carried out by a French firm of consultants.

And Shoaib said, beginning to smile, *nobody had said anything about this report but I casually picked it up and began to read*, and then he had laughed in delight. *It was one of the best reports I had ever read.* For Shoaib, the consultant's concluding remarks were quite remarkable—that an average settler village may have up to twenty-seven different organisations but could never be described as being organised. Said the consultants, *before anything else, village organisations will have to be created.* Shoaib remembers the moment vividly. *My God*, he remembers himself thinking, *these people could have come straight from Daudzai or Comilla. What they are recommending is exactly what I, and AHK have been talking about for years.* Shoaib immediately wrote a paper based on this report confirming that he thought the recommendations should be put in place immediately. He sent it to UNICEF for clearance before tabling the paper with the Mahaweli Authority. Shoaib laughed again and said, *well, when the UNICEF people read my paper they were very worried because they thought that nobody would accept what I had written.* Shoaib had a ready answer. *I am not saying anything that is new*, he had told Ignatieff, *I am simply endorsing the conclusions of the consultants of a first rate international consulting company who based their findings on twelve months of exhaustive field studies in Area H.* Then he had smiled a little ruefully, *but you know Noel, simple logic is hard for most people to accept.* It is even harder when the aspirations of rival UN agencies are also involved.

To Shoaib's amazement, there were few people, in government or in any of the UN and other donor agencies, who had read the report. This however was not, as Shoaib put it, *the only fly in the ointment.* A separate UNDP mission had recommended a raft of social and other studies which, if you happened to tally them up, amounted to a staggering three thousand man months of foreign expert consultancies, and eight thousand man months of Sri Lankan counterpart time, something any UN agency would not forego without a fight. So at first, perhaps waiting to see which way the wind would blow, Shoaib writes *the UNICEF chief Paul Ignatieff sat on the paper.* But Shoaib was an old hand at bureaucratic infighting. He managed to recruit the head of another UN agency, UNFPA, to his cause. Backed by an ally, Ignatieff felt strong enough to forward Shoaib's paper to the Secretary of the Ministry of Planning and Implementation, Dr. Wikrama Weerasooriya. Shortly afterwards Shoaib met with Weerasooriya, a man whom Shoaib believes persuaded his brother-in-law, the minister, to override any opposition. *I was greatly impressed by his kindness* he writes.

With UNICEF now behind him, and his paper officially submitted to the government and given a tentative go ahead, it was time for Shoaib to carry out

the next and perhaps most vital step—persuading his Sri Lankan field colleagues of the essential need for social organisation at the turnout gate level.

At first it was hard going. The project manager Karunatillake and many of his staff opposed Shoaib's proposed approach point-blank. All that was needed, they firmly believed, was to form water management committees at the larger hamlet level. Shoaib quietly argued that although this was not an entirely bad idea, it would not work unless each turnout gate was represented on the committee. Even then, he maintained, such a committee would have too much on its plate to be effective at the micro-level. Small self-interested groups were the answer Shoaib argued, each one imbued with a sense of self discipline and the acceptance of mutual obligations.

The project manager was not at all impressed, said Shoaib, laughing as he so often did when speaking of the past, *he thought it was an oversimplified solution to a more complex problem. But simplicity is the beauty of it.* But Shoaib can be very persuasive, so 'alright' said the project manager, 'if Shoaib could convince a group of farmers to take action' he was prepared to give the idea a try. To settle the matter once and for all, he called a gathering of farmers the very next day. Shoaib would address them.

This was exactly what Shoaib wanted.

He knew that without the farmers, without their views and support he could argue his case with project staff for weeks and get nowhere. Shoaib admits to being just a little nervous when he stood up and began, as he inevitably describes such occasions, *to interact with the people*. This phrase is very important because what it means is not just haranguing farmers to adopt a specific practice but encouraging them to actually tell you what their problems are and how they might be resolved. It is an art form Shoaib will eventually take to its highest level. In Mahaweli it did not take very long before the farmers began talking—with Shoaib it never does—and what they said was this: *If you really want to hear our problems and help solve them, then please deal with us as turnout groups*. Now, most of the farmers at the meeting were immigrant transplants. They had arrived as individual families rather than as intact social groups, had never met or worked with their fellow turnout group members before, and the ties of trust and mutual obligations had yet to be developed. They needed help to do this and they knew it.

Shoaib says he could not understand the ensuing conversation as the project staff questioned the farmers in detail in Sinhalese. For an outside adviser, this is always a nervous time. More so for Shoaib who had not been in this position before: wondering what on earth everyone was talking about? Is it good news or bad? He need not have fretted. When all the talk was done Karunatillake had walked over to

Shoaib, and with a small smile of resignation, told him he had been right. The farmers had made exactly the same suggestion. He would go along with it.

There was one last hurdle. Official approval at the highest levels.

As soon as he could, Shoaib arranged for his paper to be tabled at a meeting of government and donors. There was really not much argument. Shoaib had done his sums. Each settler had so far cost more than five thousand dollars; he asked for a relatively small add-on amount, another fifty dollars. With this, Shoaib assured the assembled meeting, the entire scheme in system H would start to work. How could they refuse? There were no other options on the table. *So they did* said Shoaib *and in no time at all the* (entire) *scheme began to work.*

Afterwards, Shoaib just had to write to Musarrat, his sounding board, *if officials everywhere would only begin to involve the farmers in decisions*, he told Musarrat *most problems would simply not arise and in their turn, the officials would not be subjected to unnecessary criticism.* Eventually however, this was one of the reasons things turned sour. An essentially conservative officer of the old school, the project manager could not cope when farmers became openly critical of bureaucratic blunders. There were subjects best left unsaid, he believed, subjects that could be dealt with, or not, in ways that did not embarrass officialdom. In a word, farmers should know their place.

One final hurdle was a man called de Silva, Additional Secretary to the Ministry of Lands and Settlement—a man who may well have opposed Shoaib's appointment. Writing to Musarrat, Shoaib worries, *I think I will have to work on him to assure government backing for the programme.* He wondered where to start. Then it was de Silva's turn to visit the project. A meeting was called. Shoaib arrived to find a throng of farmers standing outside the meeting hall peering through the windows while the officials sat within. *Maybe this sort of exclusive behaviour was the norm*, he fretted. If so, an uphill battle lay ahead. However, Shoaib was soon relieved when the waiting farmers were ushered into the hall and served tea like everyone else. Again, Shoaib made his speech. In Japan, he said, fifty years ago the farmers there—Buddhists too—were as poor as the Sri Lankans. Now they are not and it has all been due to a partnership of equality between farmers and government. There was much more of course and whether the speech impressed or puzzled we will never know; it was Shoaib's final question that really mattered. It was very simple. He asked *would you like me to come to your hamlet and discuss with you how to improve your income and banish poverty from your village. There was an instantaneous 'yes'* Shoaib wrote, *and clapping from the farmers.*

Shoaib had been mistaken; de Silva was not the final hurdle.

There is still hostility between officials and the farmers Shoaib writes of the tasks ahead. And indeed, after three increasingly frustrating years there was a lot

of fence mending to be done. For example, some of the initial farmer meetings were poorly attended. The reason soon became clear and it was not only because Shoaib was uncharacteristically late for the first meeting. Instead, people feared they were to be injected, as Shoaib put it, *against having children*. In other words, forcibly sterilized. The idea was not as far-fetched as it may seem. A very unpopular sterilization programme was already underway in India. Shoaib quickly quelled any speculation, and once he had gained the farmers' confidence, he was quietly asked to just come by himself and he would be told everything. *Of course* added Shoaib, *I had no intention of doing any such thing.* It would only drive a further wedge between the farmers and the officials, and do Shoaib's cause far more harm than good.

In an attempt to build bridges, Shoaib invited de Silva plus the project manager and his three deputies to dinner at the Circuit bungalow. Despite Shoaib's nervousness the evening was a great success. The cook excelled himself, producing a six-course dinner that *everyone liked*. Even better, a frugal Shoaib notes the total cost for the six people was less than three English pounds.

Also a fellow Cambridge man, de Silva's rooms had been in Wolfson as had the project manager's. *I think all these things* Shoaib writes hopefully, *may have helped the ministry to change their views about the consultancy* adding, *the real truth will come out later in the year when the extension of the consultancy will come up for consideration.* And then, as if he wished he had not voiced such worries to Musarrat he adds, *anyway, you needn't worry about it—God has always been merciful and kind to us.*

With the farmers on his side and seemingly also senior government officials, Shoaib writes of at last breaking through to the general project staff. *My first big break came when I held a meeting of seventy-five field officers from two of the project's regions.* He used an approach he was to hone and simplify until it became an unchanging message. First, ask his audience to identify the problems that needed to be resolved. The answers to this challenge came thick and fast, all simple but vital issues. It was a long list and it took some time before everyone was satisfied; everything was included, from the distribution of water to education and health. With this under his belt, Shoaib then moved on to the second and most important step.

Each irrigation turnout area was about fourteen to twenty hectares divided into equal packages between twelve to twenty landholders, families from all over the Island who had been hurriedly bundled together. Sometimes a turnout group shared common beliefs and backgrounds and sometimes not, but few turnout groups had ever functioned as a working community. This would have to change.

Shoaib's message to the assembled officers was this, *without organising the farmers of each turnout you field officers can never hope to solve their problems.* Shoaib talked for three hours, hammering away at his main theme. He had been given the authority to impose his ideas, but he wanted the field officers to understand and accept them. Unless this happened, Shoaib knew nothing would work. To his delight they did. That night he wrote excitedly to Musarrat, *my proposals in this regard were totally accepted.*

The farmer-members of each turnout group knew there was something seriously wrong and they knew why. But nobody had ever sought their opinion. Shoaib writes of one group where the land allocated to two farm families in the turnout group received no water because of a damaged gate. The water reached the first eight of the ten farms in the turnout group, who, lacking any social cohesion or group responsibility, cared little that the last two received nothing. They simply shrugged their shoulders and got on with their own work. Why should they care about the last two farmers? It was a government scheme after all, they said to each other, so government should fix the turnout gate. Shoaib leapt at this chance to make his point. *I made it quite clear* he wrote with some emphasis *that if the water was not reaching the sluice gate it was the responsibility of government but within the 'turnout' area, the responsibility rested solely with the farmers.*

Somewhat abashed wrote Shoaib, everyone, field officers and farmers alike quickly got the message. The farmers had simply needed help to put it into practice, and to form working groups so that in this case, the gates could be fixed. The project's officers needed to find out how to do it. Shoaib could now start training courses that would do just that, show his field officers how to teach turnout groups to work together, and even better, select and then teach a few bright stars from each turnout group the same thing.

And then Shoaib ran head-on into a donor-driven stupidity. Farmers complained bitterly about the loss of top soil because of aggravated erosion wash. Shoaib traced the problem to the tyne-tiller, a type of tractor-drawn implement the donors had insisted he used for cultivation. Hundreds had been imported. When he discovered this, Shoaib well remembered Akhter Hameed Khan saying *the World Bank is a great 'disruptionist' and they often destroy projects.* Or at least their experts do. Shoaib *raised the issue in Colombo*, a World Bank mission was due, *let us see what they have to say* he writes. Unfortunately, Shoaib does not note if the offending tyne-tillers were abandoned.

Back in System H all seemed to be going smoothly. Shoaib's training programme for officers and farmers met with approval from the General Manager of the Mahaweli Development Board, perhaps in part because Paul Ignatieff had agreed to throw half a million rupees into the kitty. How could the

GM resist? Shoaib described Paul as perceptive and dynamic and *being a great tactician (who) took all possible steps to see the proposal through.* He would. A bright star in your stable keeps headquarters happy. However, life for Shoaib is not entirely a bed of roses. When he presented his ideas to a UNICEF staff group meeting in Colombo *few turned up*! Were the others sulking?

Shoaib shrugged it off. Despite the lukewarm approval of those who did come to hear him he remained positive. *They generally agreed with the idea* he wrote afterwards. And so they would. Any opposition would not be open but in the way of UN agencies the world over would instead be carefully clandestine. Why didn't staff turn up? Was it a matter of pique? Shoaib mentions in passing that *a controversy rages over whether I should be required to do the work of a programme officer,* procuring supplies and managing the budget for Mahaweli. Is Shoaib's time as a consultant too valuable for routine administrative matters? Ignatieff thinks so, and he is the boss, but there are rumblings about favouritism. Shoaib decides to stay out of it, ignore the snub of a poorly attended meeting. There were more important matters. He knows that all he needs to finally cement his proposal in place is the blessing of the very top echelons of government. At last, one day in July the minister arrived, three hours late of course and to Shoaib's surprise, complete with a bus-load of members of parliament and the media. Why all this hullabaloo? The minister intends to debunk once and for all the rumour that nothing was being done in Mahaweli H.

Everyone in Mahaweli performs to perfection, farmers, government officers and of course the new star of the show, the UN consultant. The MP's are impressed, the journalists scribble furiously and photographers snap pictures of officers advising and farmers cheerfully farming while water flows where it should. The minister is delighted and demands a photograph with Shoaib at his side. Making sure the press can hear, the minister promises Shoaib full and continuing support and vows to come again, this time for three or four days. The minister's visit was *splashed in the papers* said Shoaib, uneasy because one paper gave *prominent coverage to my utterances and relegated the minister to the inside page.*

Luckily the minister did not seem to care. A seasoned politician he knew that any publicity was good for him. But when Weerasooriya cheerfully said *Shoaib, you seem to be blazing a trail in Mahaweli* Shoaib could sense trouble coming. *I mumbled* Shoaib wrote, *that the minister was too generous but he countered by saying he had been himself to the area last Saturday with the Newsweek columnist Vittachi and had found nothing but good things. He personally got the impression* wrote an obviously uncomfortable Shoaib, *that I was highly acceptable to the area.* While all this was indeed flattering, as Shoaib said to us one Islamabad morning, these articles and many subsequent donor reports did more harm than good as *they sort of singled me out and left the entire community development section, the*

regional manager and other staff, completely out of the picture. Inevitably murmurs began, 'what are the others all doing', and specifically to the regional manager, 'what have you been doing all this time?' *It was all very unfair,* Shoaib had added very quietly. *How was he* (the minister) *to know what I had already learned the hard way? Donors can be a nuisance.*

Unfair or not, Mahaweli H was fast becoming a must stop on the government's aid tourist route. On the heels of the minister came five key governmental secretaries, the chairman and the general manager, some Dutch sociologists, a handful of curious British water management experts, and many, many others. UNICEF's Eimi Watanabe wanted another presentation to staff and guaranteed a full house this time, but Shoaib didn't really mind what staff members thought or did. One of the visiting Dutch sociologists had been *especially encouraging.* The Dutchman had seen Mahaweli in the early days; in his view the changes resulting from Shoaib's innovations in organising and training farmers were nothing short of miraculous.

Does this help? Too late to worry because the pace is picking up fast. Does it all go to his head? Shoaib says no, writing to Musarrat to reassure her, *you know full well that I am never carried away by these things. It is only the beginning and much remains to be done.*

In July 1979, two USAID officials look in. What Shoaib was doing was apparently an 'eye-opener'. He writes happily to Musarrat of the mission leader who was about to sanction funding for another irrigation scheme, *after hearing me and seeing what is being done here, he felt that USAID was just going to waste its $10 million because it was concentrating on rehabilitating the irrigation infrastructure but had no provision for human organisation.*

And so Shoaib has waved his magic wand and almost overnight, System H begins to hum with positive energy. This one act has enormous consequences. It will result in a simple but profound change to the entire approach to organising settlers, a change that will enable the Sri Lankans to overcome the seemingly insurmountable roadblock that had paralysed the country's premier project.

For solving this question in a seemingly simple and effortless manner, for this bright new beginning, the Sri Lankans will be initially very grateful, that is until they are increasingly relegated to the background by a growing ground-swell of thoughtlessly directed donor applause that singles out one man as the star and leaves the Sri Lankans out in the cold. It was unfair and something Shoaib did not want at all, but it happened, and when it did it was the beginning of the end for Shoaib in Sri Lanka.

Publicly, life for Shoaib is very much a success story but his personal life is an empty page. His loneliness is intense. Although he reassures himself it is all

for the best, some nights, weighed down by the hot heavy slowness of time passing he cannot help feeling just a little sorry for himself. As an antidote he pens letter after letter, pages of personal trivia, writing to Musarrat of waking from a troubled sleep to see a bright star through the slats of the blinds in his bungalow room, *it immediately came to my heart that this star must be twinkling in London also. The two tall windows of my room reveal a new world to me.* He now notices little things he had never noticed before, *how I often gaze at the stars from these windows while lying in bed.* Then, to add a jolly note, writes of his frequent visitor, a long black-tailed bird, the beautiful emerald doves in the nearby trees, sparrows having a dust bath, a rabbit hopping in the brushwood, or being *touched to see a cat and a dog playing together.*

Even when he writes of work, Shoaib sprinkles his letters with maudlin messages to his daughters. *Please give Shelley a thousand kisses* he might suddenly add, or write of elephants walking along the roadside on *Poya day* (the full moon day), doing *parahera, a sort of offering to Lord Buddha,* or stopping at Dambulla, and of *a strenuous half mile climb on barren rock* to see the magnificent rock temple, a complex of five linked caves with huge reclining Buddhas carved out of *'living rock', painted in gold by the ancient kings.* Then there is *the most beautiful thing I have seen so far in Sri Lanka,* not the forests or the mountains or other natural wonders but *the 39 ft high statue of Buddha at Aukana, about a mile as the crow flies from the Circuit bungalow,* carved on the orders of the same King Dhathusena who ordered the construction of the Kalawewa tank to celebrate its completion.

In March 1979, Shoaib writes telling Musarrat to plan to be in Karachi or Islamabad in May and that *inshallah* he will be there also and again in July for Munchu's all important 'big fat Pakistani' wedding. He also fusses about the importation of the car he hopes to organise as a wedding present.

And of Roohi, to tell her *that there is always a return ticket available...she doesn't have to ask for it. I owe her so much that I don't think I can do enough for her.* And then he adds a hopeful note that perhaps Afshan might send her designs early so he can show them *to the people here* and perhaps point her towards gainful employment. And in fact Afshan does gain employment with several UN agencies, *and* sighs Shoaib *has a new obsession, painting Buddhas* curiously enough in a 'Grecian' style. Meanwhile, Shoaib continues his life-long habit of Sunday mornings in bed. Not even a trip to see a famous statue of Buddha organised by his Sinhalese counterpart Jayawickrema will persuade him to leave his bed at an early hour. *Don't worry about the heat* he says, *an afternoon visit will be just fine.*

Eventually, Musarrat becomes fed up with Shoaib's avalanche of letters. She is not entirely comfortable with English and is not interested in pages of tedious detail

about people and places she does not know; to Musarrat they are blank spaces she does not need to fill. *So you want me to write only one such letter a month* Shoaib writes with just a touch of defiance, *well, this is the fifth letter I am writing and this is only the fourth week* and then as he gains momentum, *no, I don't think I can stop writing these long letters now that you have promised to publish them,* so there! A wise move, he backs off just a little asking *do you really find them interesting? Do write honestly* and then, back again in full attack mode, *in fact you should start writing long letters to me also...so that I would feel as if I was present on these occasions.* Shoaib hungers always for detail about everything the family does, requests Musarrat chooses to ignore.

The news from Pakistan is very depressing. *I have been quite upset these last few days* he tells Musarrat, *I never liked Bhutto but I would never like him to hang. It may be a catastrophe for the country...and further alienate the Sindhis.* But always looking on the bright side adds, *let us hope and pray for the best.*

Afghanistan is also a worry he writes, *the trouble on the Afghan border also does not augur well. I don't know where our rulers will take the country.* And then of course he becomes protective of his womenfolk, as if it is his duty to reassure them that all is really very well indeed, *you shouldn't worry about such things. In the solitude of this place it was becoming too much and I had to get it off my chest.* Then suddenly Musarrat writes: who is this Dr Eimi Watanabe? Oops! Has Shoaib been a trifle over enthusiastic in his letters? He cannot remember so he pens a workmanlike paragraph putting Eimi's role in his life in perspective, noting the help given to him by almost every UNICEF staff member including Paul Ignatieff's wife *who happens to be a Scot. They are all very hospitable and supportive,* he writes. Musarrat no doubt just shook her head and smiled to herself. Shoaib!

One night, during a dinner at the Kalawewa guest house, Shoaib hears the trumpeting of elephants. Six or seven have been trapped in a small area of jungle and are to be rescued. Later he will send a newspaper clipping of wild elephants being driven from the project area to a nearby game sanctuary. Then there is a dinner hosted by probationers of the Ceylon Administrative Service under training for a month at the project. The dinner revives bitter-sweet memories of *those best of days* at the Lahore Academy, Shoaib tells Musarrat. Irked at having to talk through an interpreter, Shoaib begins to learn Sinhalese *which has many words in common with Sanskrit and Hindi.* Everywhere he addresses farmer groups he is applauded, an unvarying formula that will become his trademark, the direct simplicity of his message invariably rewarded. *They really like it,* he tells Musarrat, *and always clap heartily.* For Shoaib it is important that Musarrat should understand that he is working for the rural poor of Sri Lanka and that they approve of what he is trying to do. This alone justifies the pain of separation.

Of the country, he writes of being impressed not only by the well developed school system but also by the open sided design of the schools in the area which are *ideally suited to the climate here.* Adding *there are no thefts of school furniture or equipment* as if this fact is very special and so perhaps it is.

In reply to a question from Musarrat comparing his life and the climate he now works in with Bengal days he replies *well, this place is not exactly Bengal but I have certainly gone back to my SDO days. My work, my office, the atmosphere and environment are indeed no different,* except perhaps for the isolation and accommodation which is more primitive than could ever be imagined by even the most junior member of the Pakistan Civil Service. And then, perhaps because he has time to think of all that has happened in his life he harks back to Musarrat's contribution *to the advancement of the cultural life of Brahmanbaria and* the famous episode where she had danced the role of Mira, and infuriated the mullahs, *'the SDO's wife, a Muslim, adopting the role of Mira, it was blasphemy of the highest order'* they had all spluttered in their ignorance, he writes.

Still fresh in his mind after all the years, Shoaib cannot help but wonder if he had done the right thing. *You laughed it away* he writes sadly, *but I could not, and had reluctantly to curb your artistic talents.* Had he been *most unfair* he asks, and then admits he had. *If I would have allowed you to lead your own way, you would have blossomed into a big artist and would have been much happier.* And then, as if taking a deep breath he finishes *anyway, there is no point in weeping over spilt milk now.*

Shoaib next writes of meeting another Pakistani UN expert, Dr Mushtaq Hussain, who *is very nice.* They occasionally wander around Colombo, and then, taking up a standing offer from the Pakistan ambassador, Shoaib decides to make a courtesy call. It was a bad idea. *I had the most terrible time,* he tells Musarrat. The ambassador *took pains to justify Bhutto's execution,* but Shoaib believes he was speaking in *his master's voice* and laments *unfortunately some of our ambassadors consider themselves the personal employees of the rulers in power and pose themselves as 'more loyal than Caesar'.*

Leaving the woes of Pakistan behind Shoaib spends a weekend with the Ignatieffs at a tea estate in Bandarwela whose bungalow, excellent cuisine, comfortable Raj-style rooms, impeccable service and scenery *is indeed perfection personified* and all for $7.50 a day. *This is one place* Shoaib enthuses *I would like Munchu to spend part of her honeymoon.* I wonder if she did?

Success brings problems, and one of them is praise; lots of it. The Sri Lankans are proving to be touchy *but what could I do* he says, *how could I stop them?* Shoaib means outsiders such as visiting USAID officials who *heap*

unwanted praise on me. He hopes that it will not upset his Sri Lankan colleagues, realises it probably will, time and again makes the point that he did not ever entertain ideas of self-aggrandizement, that the aim of his work was to simply help the rural poor, to unlock a wonderful project that had everything else in place except for the human element. It doesn't stop. One day, in front of the Sri Lankan staff, a USAID official, a man who for an engineer had the unfortunate name of Rust, said loudly, *hey there, people like you don't grow on trees,* adding the entire project would be going nowhere *without your perception and vision,* capping this by saying he was also sure that putting such ideas in place and making them work would be far from easy in Sri Lanka. And then he did that very American thing, he shot from the hip, suggesting that Shoaib divide his time between Shoaib's current area and Galnoya, a System the Americans were about to fund. Shoaib could only quietly groan, and courteously agree, so long as his own results were encouraging, and the Sri Lankan government thought it to be a sensible move.

Aware that all this praise may eventually get under the skin of the Sri Lankan staff, stoking the murmurs in Shoaib's own UN office, Shoaib hopes that he has all eventualities safely covered. He writes to Musarrat of how, having organised a conference where warring community development staff and water management engineers were able to air and resolve their differences, like the good deputy commissioner he once was, *I am getting to know* and manage *the inter and intra-unit jealousies.* But Shoaib the UN adviser simply cannot avoid occasionally thinking and acting as if he were a civil service mandarin commenting on talented but rather opinionated and sometimes misguided juniors. And so he writes of the Director of Planning in one of the Mahaweli ministries *he is a little brash in stating his point of view but I like him.*

The first serious whispers of discontent do not come from government officers. A precursor to Gilgit, visitors flock to the project, five Englishmen this time and unannounced which led to an awkward moment or two. However, one is an Oxford man, a fact Shoaib wrote *he rather apologetically told me on learning that I had studied at Cambridge.* But there was also a Cambridge man so of course the group was welcome. These five visitors make the first mention, as Shoaib wrote to Musarrat, of an American *they had met at the circuit bungalow* who had *totally misled them....about the situation in the project and about Sri Lankans.* The American was apparently trying to run an experimental farm from his comfortable quarters in Kandy, disliked being shown up by Shoaib and was having a hard time with the Sri Lankans. He was one of Shoaib's earliest critics, someone whose sour grape attitude about this upstart Pakistani who lived roughly to save money and who had weird socialistic ideas about people-power, caused tantalisingly delicious whispers on the Colombo 'cocktail circuit'.

And then there was a certain Sri Lankan scholar...*with a doctorate*...no less, wrote Shoaib perhaps expecting more from an academic mind, who after a presentation asserted flatly that Shoaib's assumptions were all wrong and that the project was bound to fail. In his usual understated way Shoaib wrote to Musarrat, *it was a very interesting thing*. Maybe it was more than that. The scholar was quickly followed by the then chairman of the US Senate Foreign Aid Sub-Committee. The visitor wanted to talk to farmers but, says Shoaib rather cryptically *higher authorities had over-ruled* this idea. Shoaib arrived at the same time as the visitors to find no farmers in sight at all. About twenty were then hurriedly assembled for the congressman to meet. He listened to Shoaib's brief presentation with some impatience. He did not want to chew the fat with foreign bigwigs; he was a politician, he wanted to speak to the people. Once the congressman had talked with the farmers and visited a few homes he *declared this was his best visit* on a trip that had taken him to no less than *56 countries*. Far better than his next stop, the USAID water management farm whose adviser was a major critic. *Our friend*, wrote Shoaib in a rare burst of sarcasm, *our good friend George Kernin who lives in Kandy, complained that the Sri Lankans were* totally uninterested in levelling land with teams of water buffalo. He was right, but equally, after a year, Kernin hadn't put a single buffalo in harness.

The Sri Lankans politely pointed this out, Kernin rushed to harness up a team, while the Sri Lankans told the visiting politician the American adviser was welcome to continue with his trials, but they needed tractors to clear the jungle. With system H still fresh in his mind, this was not the most inspiring of visits for the congressman.

Then the UK overseas development minister, Dame Judith Hart, arrived trailing a long coterie of embassy and government officials. Perhaps she had already been briefed about Shoaib at the embassy because to Shoaib's embarrassment she jumped out of the official vehicle and plumped herself firmly down in Shoaib's little Fiat. She wanted to talk about farmers' organisations. For Shoaib this was not the best of situations. Once again he was being singled out by an important visitor at the expense of the Sri Lankans. *It left me embarrassed and the project officers sheepish...I had no choice but to drive her around the project area for three hours.* On her next stop a member of a large UK consulting firm, seeing the possibility of his company's fees vanishing, told the good Dame she should not believe everything Shoaib said. It made no difference at all and later, the consultant, embarrassed by his outburst, retracted. *I was of course delighted* Shoaib said, but not with their work ideas. *I found their attitude rather rigid and doubted government could afford their ideas*—land preparation alone cost twelve times that in Shoaib's own system.

There were to be more plaudits. A visitor from Bangladesh assured Shoaib he would recommend the same approach for a UNICEF-assisted programme in Sirajgang. *I was really amused that what I had learnt from Comilla was going back to Bangladesh via Sri Lanka.* And then as luck would have it, a helicopter arrived with a parliamentary group from Europe but *did not land where the project manager was waiting*, Shoaib wrote, instead *they came straight to the Galnewa community centre* where Shoaib was running a training course for project officials. The chairman and the parliamentary group were delighted to see training in action but the project manager had to wait fruitlessly for the helicopter to arrive while Shoaib entertained the visitors. He was far from pleased. And there it is, although some of his critics are shown up or come on side, gradually, and through no real fault of his own, not only is Shoaib beginning to annoy his Sri Lankan colleagues, he is also being seen as 'too big for his boots' by some experts from the West, and even by some in his own UNICEF office. All this does not portend well for the future.

Meanwhile, it is the end of July, Munchu is married, and Shoaib's arrival back in Sri Lanka is anti-climatic in every way. He feels intensely lonely and the prospect of once more heading out to his jungle rest house and having to continue the battle for social mobilisation leaves him feeling very gloomy. Almost straight away he feels compelled to sit down and write to Musarrat. He needs someone who will understand how he feels. *Munchu's wedding was one of the most beautiful events of my life* he writes. *This last visit* (to Pakistan) *has totally upset my resolve and concentration. I suddenly feel that I cannot live without you and the children. Galnewa, where I used to keep myself very busy with work, now seems a lonely place....I had hoped to get busy but the first few days were really heavy.* Even Colombo beckoned. *I started counting the days* he added. So the lonely expatriate consultant climbs back into his protective shell and does what he has to do, but not before he makes one last bid for sympathy....*you don't realise the fact that your love for me is the most beautiful thing in my life* he writes, *whether you are near me or not, I want to remain assured of your love.* It is just too bad. Musarrat will stick to her guns. She will talk as long as Shoaib likes on the telephone, but answer Shoaib's every letter? Absolutely not.

Life slowly brightens. Shoaib realizes he has something to look forward to. Not only is he being increasingly heaped with accolades, with the exception of Roohi who has her head down and is hard at work in London, his other three daughters, Munchu, the bride of his heart, and his much loved youngest daughter Shelley are due to arrive soon and will be followed by the newly graduated artist Afshan. *I am keenly awaiting their arrival* he adds as a footnote. Unhappy with her London school, Shelley wants to stay with her daddy in Sri Lanka: the family also thinks it is a very good idea to wean Afshan from London for a while. Perhaps Shoaib can find her a job in Sri Lanka?

In yet another July letter Shoaib reflects on the past.

The UN is his third employer, he notes, the Wali of Swat his first, although technically he continues to be in the employment of the Government of Pakistan. *How things have changed* he writes, *from a basic salary of Rs 300* (approx ten pounds) *the UN is now paying me a basic salary of Rs 24,000* (approx 800 pounds). But then again, Shoaib has traded direct command for the hands-off power of an advisor. Sometimes he finds this trying. And then, for the increasingly spiritual Musarrat he qualifies his self-satisfaction, *yet I don't feel any great change in contentment or in comfort. Of course,* he writes, *I am profoundly grateful to the Almighty for this bounty and benevolence and I can never thank Him enough.*

In August, Shoaib detours via Kandy and takes in the world famous *Perahera* where hundreds of gorgeously decorated elephants accompanied by dancers and drummers parade nightly to the Temple of the Tooth. *Legend says that the tooth was brought to Sri Lanka hidden in the hair of an Indian princess* he writes, describing how the sacred relic, Buddha's tooth, is carried on the back of *the main temple elephant, which is a big tusker.* The tooth, he adds, is *encased in a golden lion.* He almost apologises for enjoying himself, and justifies his lapse by attending only the cheaper, pre-full moon parades.

Back in Colombo, Shoaib decides to throw a party to welcome Shelley and Munchu and then panics. In the absence of Musarrat who will organise it? It was one thing to organise the farmers of Mahaweli; quite another to hold a party in Colombo. Luckily, the landlord stepped in and arranged everything; sixty people thronged the apartment. *Shelley made everyone dance.* After the party, Shoaib had tried to telephone Musarrat and wish her a happy wedding anniversary. *Number twenty-nine,* he writes, *but you were away in London,* adding with an almost audible sigh, *there was a time when we were never away from each other on the 14th of August.* Next time, he resolves, *either I will make you fly to me or I shall fly to you.*

Shoaib writes of taking Munchu and Shelley to a tea estate, *the atmosphere in the tea estates* is as it must have been *in the early part of the century during the colonial regime...the superintendent is looked upon by the workers as a demigod....most of the workers are of Tamil origin awaiting repatriation to India* and *almost tremble and shiver in his presence.* They are paid and housed well enough, he writes, but *their plight is indeed awful...a very ugly aspect of a very beautiful countryside.* An estate with Sinhalese workers was shabby and ill kept but *the people are happier.* Is this what matters, Shoaib asks, *was the regimentation and authoritarian rule of the old estates* (with their high production) *worth the suffering it caused to the workers?*

With his daughters happily around him, Shoaib combines work and play, making sure Shelley and Munchu have a great time; visiting a national park where they excitedly watch some leopards and climbing the Sigriya rock. In Colombo, he is mildly shocked to find Eid is a rather perfunctory affair. Back at the project area Paul Ignatieff visits. *He seemed visibly pleased with what he saw* reported Shoaib, and later wrote *a very nice letter commending the work I am doing in the project area.* Maybe Shoaib did not yet realise that UN success stories are few and far between; and they rely on the spin of a well geared publicity section.

Then it was down to a beach hotel where UNICEF was holding a workshop for managers of the nationalized tea estates. Shoaib was asked to give a presentation and *like the 'turnout' in Mahaweli,* he cheerfully wrote *I identified the 'gang' in the estates for launching production programmes to improve the workers standard of living.* He was hailed as an innovator.

The best news yet.

Musarrat has finally agreed to visit Sri Lanka. Knowing just how chancy things can be with Musarrat, Shoaib pulls out all stops to reassure her that everything will be fine, in fact better than fine. *The rains have started* he assures her, *and the humidity has decreased, it is all very pleasant,* he coaxes, *by the time you come it will get even better.* And then, finally, she does come, arriving at last in late November. She will stay until the mounting heat of February. Shoaib cannot escape his early training and details her arrival and departure dates and times, meticulously noting her *thirty-three days in the project area.* No doubt the rest house had been properly spruced up.

Meanwhile, at the UNICEF office change is afoot. Eimi Watanabe will leave for Burma. She had played *a big hand in getting me here and was one of my greatest supporters,* publicizing Shoaib's work widely. *Fortunately, Paul is still there* Shoaib writes, and has ensured the extension of Shoaib's contract to 30 April 1981, which has a number of added financial benefits, Shoaib writes happily, including *the freight for the car.* Shoaib's motor-mania has yet to subside. Amongst the many people who had visited Shoaib's project was a team of media people. *I was able to make some good contacts* he writes.

In time, and to Shoaib's regret, Paul Ignatieff's tour of duty finished. Luckily for Shoaib, Ignatieff was replaced by a vital Egyptian career feminist Hoda Bodran, whom an admiring Afshan, who was staying with Shoaib at the time, described as *one of the greatest women I have ever met.* Career woman notwithstanding, Hoda did her best to pair Afshan off with a *quite nice and quite intelligent* Egyptian man. The idea would not wash for Afshan who held firmly to her lifelong view no matter how weird it may have sounded to others, that there was no way she could marry any man who hailed from the subcontinent or

the Arab world. *How could I ever marry men I regard as family* she had told a no doubt mildly incredulous Hoda.

Afshan had many more escapades which are of no direct consequence to this book and which an understanding Shoaib seemed to have taken in his stride. Perhaps this was because she continued to work, getting solid paying assignments with UNICEF and a Norwegian charitable organisation. Flattered perhaps by the extravagant attentions of a famous Sri Lankan landscape painter, and with the ever hopeful and enthusiastic support of her father and her Dutch fiancé, Afshan also settled down to paint, producing twenty-seven paintings on her twenty-seventh birthday. For Shoaib, who believed firmly in his daughter's artistic talents, this was a major breakthrough.

It was Afshan's first one-woman show and was quite a grand affair in its own way. Shoaib's minister, Gamini Disanayaka, came along to open it and so the Colombo cocktail circuit joined the throng. Afshan provides the only personal description we have of Disanayaka, a man who was one of Shoaib's most important supporters. He was, she said, *very young, good looking and vibrant.* Distressed when some years later she learned of Disanayaka's assassination, she sighed, *what a great pity, I truly believed he would have made a very good prime minister for Sri Lanka.* A few months later, a somewhat disconsolate Afshan flew back to London. She had enjoyed her happy two-and-a-half year romp in Colombo. She had proved to herself she was employable, had staged a show of her paintings, and more than held her own on the diplomatic cocktail circuit. After the vibrant colour of Sri Lanka, London seemed just a little grey and dour. Of her time in Sri Lanka, Afshan had one curious and somewhat provocative afterthought. *I find it very strange about my life in Sri Lanka,* she muses, *it is the only country in the world from which I do not have a friend, even though I spent nearly three years of my life there.*

Up in the northern lowlands all seems well again in System H. Shoaib's Sri Lankan colleagues are once more outwardly friendly and cooperative, but he is uneasy; is all well, he wonders. The feeling becomes fact when the minister arrives to open a new right bank canal, and at lunch quietly suggests that Shoaib had better come and see him in Colombo. Shoaib does so but is surprised to be told that the minister is busy. A note is passed by hand. Will Shoaib meet with the minister later at his house? Shoaib knows this is a bad sign. He is right. What the minister has to say is fairly radical—he tells Shoaib in confidence that there has been a lot of commotion taking place including an incident in his own home district where settlers at a place called Kotmale were left without water for some days. One of the project's officers was to blame. A bus load of members of parliament had arrived, and angry at being first displaced by a reservoir and then denied irrigation water in their new area, the settlers had complained loudly and bitterly before them. Although Kotmale

was not strictly under the aegis of system H, the minister had to be seen to be taking action, find someone to blame. He decided that the project manager, the quietly conservative Karunatillake would take the fall. The man has been an irritant for quite a while, he says, the project will be better off without him. Shoaib says he tried to defend his project manager but the minister was adamant. Karunatillake lacked initiative and drive. He assured Shoaib the project manager would be given a good appointment in Colombo and deaf to Shoaib's arguments, refused to change his mind. Karunatillake had to go. He would appoint a much more dynamic man, a former tea plantation manager in his place, a man called Rohan Wijenaike.

Having made his decision and got things off his chest, the minister was happy to chat about other things, telling Shoaib that farmers should not be grumblers, and that they were being given a lot. Shoaib quietly explained that unless their demands and difficulties are attended to, *little else could be expected of them.* The minister *good naturedly* accepted Shoaib's defence and then moved on as minister's will, to matters of greater importance. There was nothing more Shoaib could do. Worried that little good would come of such a drastic move, he took his leave. Had the minister made the right choice? Shoaib decided to find out. *On my way to Galnewa* Shoaib wrote, *I spent a night with Mr. Wijenaike at his tea estate near Kandy and was pleased to find that we agreed with each other.* Wijenaike would become as good a friend as any in those Sri Lankan years. This must have been a considerable relief as, to Shoaib's puzzlement, Karunatillake, perhaps knowing full well which way the bureaucratic wind was blowing, had started to create problems. Rohan, as Shoaib soon came to call him, had agreed that instead of changing the management system which Karunatillake now seemed bent on doing, they would concentrate on organising the farmers. Once the farmers were organised, project services would become increasingly effective and the management system more responsive to the farmers needs. Changing the management system would achieve nothing.

Despite the minister's attempts at appeasement, the Kotmale settler incident would not go away. Conspiracy theories also slid like snakes through the underbrush. In the project area, bad feelings had arisen between two key divisions, the settlement division and the construction engineers, and nothing could dissipate them. One thought the other had deliberately stirred up the settlers to *put the settlement division in a bad light.*

More accolades, this time from Professor Epstein, *an opinionated lady,* Shoaib writes, *too hasty to jump to conclusions.* As if he does not already have enough trouble? Maybe he felt a bit frayed at all the scheming and plotting that seemed to be in play as, unusually for him, Shoaib gave the lady professor short shrift, telling her *if she really wanted her ideas put into practice she should do it herself.* Unfazed, perhaps hardened by the academic world, Epstein took

Shoaib's curt retort in her stride and on her return to Colombo wrote directly to Ignateiff: *Shoaib had inadequate resources and very little assistance where it was needed most. More should be done* she trumpeted, *especially for the Mahaweli women's programme*. Shoaib ran for cover.

In the project area there were murmurings critical of the emphasis now being given to turnout groups. What was wrong, the critics said, with focusing on hamlets, ignoring the fact that hamlets had been government's original preference, one of the reasons the project had stalled for the three years. Shoaib continued to patiently argue the case. *Turnout groups were the key to everything* he said again and again to anyone who would listen, *once people were organised at this level then the six to ten groups who lived in a hamlet more or less self-organised with little need for outside intervention.* And once you had a self-organised hamlet then, Shoaib said, bringing UNICEF into the picture started to make sense. Because just as if a light had been switched on in a dark room, after years of inaction, hamlet organisations suddenly started to work identifying, for example, the need for day-care centres to which UNICEF added immunization centres and play-schools. The agency was suddenly in business, although still not quite sure how it had happened. Ignatieff knew of course, but there were others in the UNICEF office who refused to accept the truth—without Shoaib's simple but brilliant identification of the turnout group as the key to almost everything, UNICEF would not have been able to exercise its mandate of focusing on the needs of women and children in the Mahaweli project area.

At least the World Bank's missions continued to be *very favourably impressed*, writes Shoaib with a sigh of relief, *especially their agricultural expert Andrew Seager.* Shoaib had made the existing administrative structure work, unlike the Hunting's experimental block where the mission's members had apparently *violently disagreed with the proposed structure* which excluded the Ministry of Agriculture. But missions come and missions go and so Huntings' consultants simply sat tight. After all they were British and it was their country not the World Bank's who was just picking up the tab in their area.

Shoaib is starting to feel under attack but he is still confident, still defiant. He writes an upbeat letter to Musarrat, says no matter what anyone else may say and think *the World Bank expressed great admiration for the work being done by me and especially thanked me for helping World Bank.* Of course they would. The World Bank had provided half the foreign exchange costs; they wanted their investment to make good. The Bank's mission members are not Shoaib's sole supporters. Invited to a subsequent dinner in Colombo to honour the team, Shoaib is singled out for praise by senior Sri Lankan officials. During the after-dinner speeches and in front of everyone, foreigners and Sri Lankans alike, the Chairman of the Mahaweli project had concluded his glowing accolade by

declaring *Khan is one of us, he is not a foreign expatriate. I felt very pleased at this compliment* Shoaib later wrote.

Thirty years later, reflecting on all that had happened in those long ago years in Sri Lanka, Shoaib is no longer so sanguine. The six-monthly World Bank missions had, he now believed, a decided downside. Although applauding Shoaib's work as remarkable, they did so at the expense of almost everyone else. It was a far from healthy situation and Shoaib knew it, but he also knew he deserved the praise. It was simply not the place of one of Burgess' young gentlemen to say so.

Oh yes, Shoaib said in quiet reflection one morning in Islamabad, *it really was remarkable in a way because the settlers became much happier, farming started to work, and all the community development centres just sitting there redundant and unused started to come to life.* Shoaib had also started a style of training which he would one day make famous, selecting two people from each turnout group and training them as leaders, 'activists' as they would later become known, one of the key elements of effective social mobilisation. It was these men, the activists, who became the point of entry for all the other social and technical activities, from agriculture and water management to health and education.

Every turnout representative attended a training day once a week. There was a happy fringe benefit. As Shoaib said, still laughing years afterwards at how surprised everyone had been, *instead of having to run all over the place looking fruitlessly for busy individuals, the various officers knew where they could find the turnout representatives and could work out a timetable of interaction.* It was Daudzai all over again, this time down in the humid lowlands of Sri Lanka. The training centres were an eye-opener for senior government officials, a magnet for visitors. There, farmers could be seen talking, participating, and interacting with government's technical staff. It was all go; no one was complaining. When the Chairman and the General Manager of the Mahaweli Authority chanced to visit they were astounded. Having prepared to be immediately button-holed by complaining farmers, they were instead welcomed by farmers busily at work learning how to make the project work. They went away shaking their heads saying they had never seen anything like this before.

The project manager's impending transfer soon became common knowledge. Shoaib believes *Karu is now reconciled to going.* He feels quite sorry for the man and says so, but somehow, Karunatillake remains in place. Whether he has friends in high places is left unsaid, but a rather awkward situation ensues. On the surface it is business as usual, but unknown to Shoaib, the now embittered project manager sets out to undermine all that Shoaib has achieved. Embedded in the system, Karunatillake knows he has time on his side.

The intelligentsia are also curious so the well known Sri Lankan writer, Gamini Irrigala pays a visit. Shoaib writes that Irrigala *had raised a political storm with his controversial book 'The Truth about Mahaweli'*. Having parlayed his critique into a consultancy with the ministry, Shoaib is relieved at Irrigala's positive reaction to the farmers' training programme. Shoaib tells him that the project has been stagnant for two months while everyone waited for the project manager's transfer. Now the man was apparently to be retained after all, although he is supposed to report to the minister's new man, Rohan Wijenaike. No one quite knows what to make of it all. The situation begins to smell of political compromise. Shoaib senses he may well have been left out on a limb. Irrigala is sympathetic but already a *cause celebre* he is not about to delve into local project politics.

Shoaib knows he has a problem. He is adviser to a man who does not want his advice. He also has to work hard to convince other project officials to do the right thing, in this case, listen to farmers and answer their needs and demands in a quick and timely fashion. His influence is waning, *if this state of affairs continues*, he writes (with the unresolved needs of farmers increasing every day), *the farmers will lose confidence in their organisations* and in the thirteen hundred farmer-leaders Shoaib has trained.

From a world view, Shoaib continues to rise and rise, meeting Hopper, the vice president of World Bank who dispatches the Bank's sociologist Anna Quandt to see him. Anna arrives with the minister's sister and they both require Shoaib's time. It seems she is not quite sure why she has been sent but nevertheless quickly becomes an enthusiastic supporter. Then an unwanted complication—Shoaib is unwittingly drawn into a local UN turf war.

It happens like this. Back in Colombo, the decision makers in the UNDP office had never let go, were still *quite appalled* with Ignatieff's agreement that Shoaib could work at an operational hands-on level in the H area, or so they said. Worried about the possible political ramifications if a UN adviser actually started taking decisions, and stinging still from Shoaib's critique of their earlier massive consultant study proposal, there was a flurry of memorandums and meetings. This only stopped when the UNDP Resident Representative stepped in and brought a halt to the controversy, sensibly accepting the inevitable. What was happening down in System H of the Mahaweli Project was starting to be news. It was too big to stop. However, UNDP as 'head of the table' and senior UN agency, needed to be seen to be doing something and although Shoaib's work was being heaped with accolades, there were also rumours that it was at the expense of what UNICEF really should be doing. So two 'Australian ladies' were dispatched to check if Shoaib was running a rogue show where women were being 'cold shouldered', their needs ignored.

The Australian pair came back completely star-struck. Most visitors were. The brouhaha settled down. Another took its place when Shoaib found himself caught up in one of those petty but often extremely vicious squabbles over agency boundaries. This particular *storm in a tea cup* (it is tea country after all) blew up over the question: should UNICEF be handed the UNFPA/FAO women's programme? Shoaib innocently suggested that UNICEF is the logical implementing agency *since they are already involved in social development of the H area.* FAO lost and a few disgruntled FAO operatives joined the list of those who would not mind at all if Shoaib were to meet his comeuppance.

They were not alone. The project manager Karunatillake's feathers are ruffled when he mistakes a ministerial information team for NBC TV. He had not been informed, he grumbles. He calms down when told the facts but is becoming increasingly prickly, watching from the sidelines while Shoaib is asked to spread his wings. Norwegian Aid want help with their integrated project and the new Working Director of the Mahaweli Development Authority wants Shoaib to assist in organising farmer training programmes in the Authority's own experimental area, H 5. *Things have been going on so smoothly it was almost too good to be true*, Shoaib notes. It was. Real jealousies start to surface. Primed by Karunatillake, some senior officers began to plot. They were tired of being confronted with the same old question: *prior to Mr. Khan's programme nothing had been done and if this was so, what had they been doing all this time*? Shoaib would rather the question had not been asked.

Then by chance, Shoaib discovers one reason why he seems to be hitting brick walls; why some officers seem to be out to subvert all that he has put in place. He is told the story by the General Manager of the Mahaweli Development Board, Dr Abey Gunawardena. Apparently *an interested officer* in Colombo had seen a World Bank aide memoire lavish in its praise of the farmers training programme, dubbing it 'Mr. Khan's programme'. The officer, *who considered himself an expert in the field, had been incensed*, and had set out to *put Mr. Khan in his place*. The Board, however, assured Shoaib that nothing would come of it all. He was valued and would be supported.

Yet, Shoaib was understandably upset, wounded. He found it hard to believe—it seemed like Daudzai all over again; a clique of jealous government officers out to oust him. *This was something I wanted to avoid at all costs having learned a bitter lesson at Daudzai*, he said. Shoaib also recalled his friend Tariq Siddiqi's sound advice—*before I cause jealousies I should get out of the project.* He thought about it, wondering if he should just cash in his chips but this was easier said than done. He was one of UNICEF's prize exhibits; they certainly did not want to lose him. And there was the money. Maintaining a family in London and keeping in touch with Pakistan was not cheap. In fact,

when push came to shove, unless the situation became dire he would just have to put up with it. Shoaib needs the job nearly as much as the job needs him.

Shoaib tries to mend fences, but he writes *I don't know how far I have succeeded.* Not too well it seems, *our relationship is not as free and frank as it used to be* he tells Musarrat. Then the young minister adds more fuel to the fire, praising Shoaib in an interview broadcast on the national news—but still the project manager Karunatillake seems to be immovable. Officially, he now answers to the new coordinators of System H, Rohan and Jayantha, the former tea planters, but it is a clumsy arrangement and does not really work. Karunatillake could still raise hurdles or slow things down by simply sitting on the paperwork. Rattled, Shoaib makes a promise to himself; *I am now determined to be even more careful. I cannot afford to take any chances with my work.*

Shoaib is then reassured by yet another senior Mahaweli project officer secure in his Colombo office that Shoaib's work is *the only grassroots programme he has ever seen in the Mahaweli Area.* He desperately wants to believe the situation is improving and notes in his diary, *Rohan and Jayantha are in full support* and even better *it seems as if Karunatillake, the project manager, is again regaining his poise and confidence.* This could be good or bad. It is bad, on two fronts. Not only has Shoaib just poached an FAO programme and left the UN establishment muttering, he blithely carries on, arranging a foundation course for project staff despite the former project manager being dead set in opposition. Has he forgotten his earlier resolve to take no chances? But it is not all work and warfare at Galnewa. A farewell party for the agricultural deputy project manager, Sam Alwis, *was a real late night affair* Shoaib happily reports. *I never realised there was so much musical talent amongst the project officers.*

Shoaib's influence widens. He takes System C under his wing, an area where the British consulting firm Huntings originally thought to set up a National Centre. Now it will be a Development Centre. *I was very pleased with this change* Shoaib wrote, *because this ensured the expansion and continuity of the programme started in the H Area.* The British Government had also funded a consultant whom Shoaib considered to be very good, and with this man located in system C and the construction of a small furnished house, Shoaib was able to consolidate and assure continuity.

Old friends drop by including Professor Guy Hunter and his wife. Hunter, Shoaib noted, *fully endorsed my strategy of organising farmers in 'turnout groups' but cautioned against undue haste in federating them in hamlet organisations.* Hunter is also apprehensive about using community and development staff for tasks such as the distribution of seed and fertiliser. A major problem for Shoaib however is that the concept of 'Hamlet Organisations'

predates his arrival and is still seen by some government officers as the correct way to go. The idea resurfaces and Karunatillake joins in. He has changed his mind, continues to deploy delaying tactics, and counters Shoaib's plans by ordering alternative activities.

In the capital all is sweetness and light. Shoaib and Ignatieff are asked to expand the UNICEF mandate to as many areas as possible. It is not going to be easy. Returning to Mahaweli, Shoaib is dismayed at what has happened in his absence. *Back in H area* he writes in the understatement of the year, *things got a little muddled up with the project manager showing some reservations towards the programme.* More than muddled, Karunatillake has taken considerable umbrage at Shoaib's honest but perhaps undiplomatic comment to the minister the previous November that *farmers' complaints identified in the training sessions were not being attended to; this*, Shoaib said, *was why the farmers were so dissatisfied.* Well, that was one grievance out in the open. Shoaib hopes there are no more but of course there are. To his dismay he finds he may have left it too late to quench fires, mend fences. The project manager's outlook hardens; he point-blank refuses to listen to any new ideas, and insists Shoaib limit any follow-up courses to theoretical training. He also commands the exclusion of all monitoring and progress reviews which he believes only lead to unseemly criticism and complaints by the farmer-representatives. He believes that rather than being a source of positive feedback, and allowing the project to be modified and improved, *giving such freedoms to the farmers simply plays into the hands of those who wish to criticise his style of management.* Such a thing was never done in the past and Karunatillake is now adamant that it will not happen again. Shoaib has at last hit a double brick wall. He cannot go against the direct instructions of the project manager, while those who can, the two senior coordinators who are supposed to keep Karunatillake in check, have dropped out of sight.

What can he do, he wonders? What would Burgess or his grandfather counsel? Of course, fall back on a bureaucratic tactic, take the long way around the problem—resort to paper. So he decides to carry out an evaluation of his training programmes and then to write a detailed report with recommendations and suggestions about the future of training in the Kalawewa area. But he does so with a heavy heart. *I am quite amazed*, he writes in obvious distress, *at the similarities between what happened in Daudzai*—where a junior official started the slide—*and what is happening here.* There is a difference however. At Mahaweli, Shoaib has some solid support, not only in the junior ranks, but where it counts, in the top echelons of government. *It is only a couple of people* he believes, *at the lower policy level and the upper project operational level who seem to be at loggerheads with the programme.* They are, however, more than enough to close it down. And of course it is the junior staff members, writes an exasperated Shoaib, *who are on the horns of a dilemma. On one side is*

a programme they genuinely believe to be good and effective and on the other are (some of) *their superiors who seem to have reservations. They have even been berated by the Additional General Manager for the interest they have been taking in the programme.* Shoaib counsels patience and for the junior staff to *hope for the best.* It is small comfort but, at that moment it is the best he can offer. It is enough to depress the strongest spirit.

Does Shoaib feel he has to show Musarrat that it is not all bad, that another Daudzai is not about to break over their heads? Maybe he does because we find him writing an upbeat letter to Musarrat. Ignatieff, he says, has shown him his UN assessment. Shoaib had been graded 'outstanding' in every respect except for punctuality in attending the office and meetings. When typing up the report, Ignatieff's secretary had apparently taken exception to this last comment. She regarded Shoaib as tops and said so in no uncertain terms. Ignatieff had apologized to his secretary and to Shoaib, explaining he had to give at least one lower grading otherwise people in New York would not believe the assessment.

There may be growing murmurs of dissent in the field but this does not stem the flow of visitors, a steady stream curious to see the marvellous metamorphosis that Shoaib is said to have engineered. One of these is the glamorous Norwegian actress, Liv Ullman. Not realizing that even then he was a celebrity himself, Shoaib was star-struck. In the years to come when his fame is at its zenith he will not change, particularly if the visitor is gorgeous and female. Liv Ullman is both, and in very short order, Shoaib is completely won over. Afterwards he wrote to Musarrat that *she appeared so natural it put you completely at ease.* But then again Liv was an actress, winning over Shoaib the romantic would have been child's play. Almost gushing in his admiration of the actress he wrote to his family *she established complete rapport with the children without knowing a word of their language. I had seldom witnessed a more moving scene. At the well pump she instinctively put her feet under the water to wash the dust away. In this she reminded me of Musarrat. Hah.* I can hear Musarrat exclaiming when she reads these lines. She would not be taken in so easily by a *filmi* star. Or would she?

Taking a break from the overheated situation in Mahaweli, Shoaib heads for the Maldives. He has been 'lent' by Ignatieff to help the government with the social development of the islands. Male is *a concrete jungle* Shoaib writes, *with housing like Kabul minus the greenery...* and no elbow room. But a resort island reminds him of Sri Lanka. *It is all really a make-believe world* he writes. Setting to work Shoaib has a happy surprise. Island communities are wonderfully self reliant he finds, noting that the situation was ideal for a 'diagnostic survey' to help the islanders work out how best to meet their needs themselves. *Outside intervention is needed only in the form of some resources which are beyond the*

reach of the islanders. The government happily accepted his ideas and a paper was written *with the help of young Richard Bridle, our liaison officer in Male.* The young man's initial scepticism had been quickly replaced by enthusiasm.

Shoaib often has that effect on people, and always appreciative of literary assistance writes *that he thought the paper was very well argued, lucid and all in all, a complete document.*

Yet more praise heaped on Shoaib. Two groups from a water workshop organised by UNICEF, New York visit Mahaweli. The South American delegate is embarrassingly extravagant in his praise *nowhere have I seen UNICEF funds more properly utilized.* The only *fly in the ointment* was the regional office man from Delhi. Shoaib writes of being *quite irked* by the man's continued questioning of project funding, querulously demanding to know *why such a project was accepted by UNICEF in the first place*, and why it didn't fit in with the normal run of projects undertaken by the agency. It is a minor irritation however and given the increasing wave of praise, the officious fellow can be safely ignored. There is however, one matter Shoaib will not ignore—he wastes no time in correcting those who label him a social worker. He most certainly isn't, he insists; he is a social planner!

And so the plaudits continue. Next to join the chorus of praise is a delegation from another UN agency, one lady member enthusing *that this was the only project they had seen so far in Sri Lanka which had a genuine element of community participation.* Then a group of Nepalese development officers arrive eager to see the project. It seems as if Shoaib's personal fame is growing exponentially. Every incoming group wants to meet him and see 'his' project. *How could the project manager avoid thinking that I was inviting them all to visit* Shoaib writes in exasperation? And even if Karunatillake could be persuaded this was not the case, the fact that the man all these important visitors wanted to see was Shoaib and not any of the Sri Lankans clearly got under his skin. Resentment simmers on.

Ignatieff has a lucky escape. Three weeks after inaugurating a new day-care centre at Galnewa the coconut branch roof suddenly collapses. Shoaib writes with relief, *I thank God it did not happen on the day of the inauguration when the centre was packed with small children.* Other day-care roofs also begin to fall but luckily no one is injured. Shoaib urges the designer to proceed quickly *to stop endangering users* of UNICEF's day-care centres. *He appears quite unruffled* Shoaib notes in amusement.

The minister visits over the New Year and in the project manager's presence pointedly asks Shoaib when his contract will expire, and when he should write to UNICEF requesting an extension. His message is loud and clear.

Shoaib's further involvement is not open to question. And just to make sure there are no misunderstandings, the minister concludes by saying unequivocally that Shoaib *has to complete the project*. Although this conversation is mainly directed at the project manager and said at the breakfast table in a voice that even the cook can hear, it is also a message for Shoaib. No doubt whispers of impending trouble have reached the ministerial suite. Shoaib's attempts to defuse the situation and his subsequent offer to remove himself *if the project manager regards him as an obstacle* will have set alarm bells ringing.

The reprieve was short-lived. Once the minister took himself back to Colombo all the old problems resurfaced. At his wits end, Shoaib wrote *the project manager is indeed a bundle of complexes and impossible to get along with in matters where he seems to have made up his mind.*

Will the minister's worst case scenario become a reality? It might; there are those who advise Shoaib to simply up stakes and go, leave the brooding Karunatillake to 'stew in his own juice'. He doesn't even have to leave Sri Lanka. There are other project areas where Shoaib is in demand, but they are not all that appealing. Should he do this, Shoaib wondered? *I thought in my heart that he* (the project manager) *would be quite happy* Shoaib confides to Musarrat. Shoaib wins a minor skirmish. Invited by Karunatillake to 'review and reorganise' the programme, a Sri Lankan academic quickly backs away when Shoaib invites comment from other officers on the need for a review. An open forum was the very opposite of what the manager had intended.

The war is very definitely not over and Shoaib knows he cannot win, not with Karunatillake continuing to undermine his training programme. *Everyone else told me that if I withdrew from the programme, the training would come to an end,* writes an increasingly despondent Shoaib, *all the work I had done so far would come to naught, but I have not yet decided what steps to take.* More and more it seems Shoaib is starting to find his role as a UN adviser limiting and irksome. It is one thing when his ideas are embraced wholeheartedly but something else entirely when they are being maliciously 'white-anted' or undermined by those who refuse to take his advice. It all becomes too much.

Finally Shoaib reaches the end of his tether. *Nothing will come of any attempt to sort things out* he writes, *because the project manager has a closed mind.* Shoaib at last decides to take action. *I considered this an appropriate time to inform the general manager about the project manager's attitude towards training.*

He does so, politely as ever, but also in no uncertain terms. Alarmed, the general manager makes soothing noises and attempts to *pour oil on troubled waters.* Promises are made, carefully opaque memos are written, the project manager's knuckles gently rapped. It all comes to nothing.

The project manager's hold on his position is tenacious. Apparently, he cannot be moved or persuaded to change his mind. All that happens is a hardening of his resolve to reduce the power of the farmers, a power that Shoaib has unlocked. An arch conservative, the project manager's world was rocked and his confidence undermined when the farmers openly questioned and criticised his decisions. In an attempt to dilute the project manager's power, from his office in Colombo, the beleaguered general manager issued an order elevating the community development officer, who is firmly in Shoaib's camp, to Assistant General Manager Training. Shoaib thought this might do the trick. An old hand at the game, the project manager simply sat on the order, leaving it in his in-tray under the list of 'matters to attend to'. As the orders were not conveyed, the promotion could not be implemented. A hiatus ensued and then a make-shift, face saving solution was devised. The officer would be placed under Rohan, the project coordinator, and known as the 'Incharge' of the training unit instead of assistant manager training.

Shoaib is well and truly stalled and the attitude of the project manager hardens.

Over at System C, however, Shoaib's ideas have been embraced with enthusiasm. The training programme is going swimmingly. *The first session was a great success* Shoaib writes with relief, and the second programme seems to be *proceeding smoothly*. Not so in System H where matters come to a head. The project manager is peremptorily summoned to Colombo, and is called to account for deliberately tampering with the training programme. Shoaib is not privy to the dressing down but notes with satisfaction, *most probably the general manager had a word with him.* Shoaib was back in the driver's seat, or so he thought. Chastened, Karunatillake returns from Colombo. Shoaib thought him to be *a changed man*, but mutual trust and respect had vanished.

And then there is a sudden UN-sponsored visit to South Korea to organise. At the last minute Rohan is co-opted to replace the general manager. It is the usual scramble but Rohan eventually manages to arrive in time for the seminar. Shoaib was deeply impressed by what he saw in South Korea, writing *here was a situation where a Daudzai or Comilla project had been extended and replicated country-wide with tremendous results.* The seminar itself was hard work, early morning until late at night and the regimentation in the dormitory was *near military* Shoaib writes in surprise. There was a two kilometre jog to start the day and each 'room' had to elect a leader who presented his six-person room for inspection every night. It was like being back at boarding school but Shoaib seems to have enjoyed it all. Shoaib writes in all innocence that his speeches were met with *great approval.*

Back in Sri Lanka, Shoaib is shocked to find Paul will soon be leaving for New York. *I considered this no less than a catastrophe for the programme* he

writes, but he is wrong. Paul's replacement is an Egyptian lady named Hoda Bodran who proves to be, if anything, even more supportive. There is a pleasant surprise when Akhter Hameed Khan suddenly re-enters Shoaib's life, talking in glowing terms of his latest brain-child, the soon-to-be famous urban project at Orangi Township in the sprawling slums of Karachi.

In Colombo's UNICEF office Ignatieff's protective mantle is indeed slipping; office politics run rampant, petty grudges begin to surface. Some of Shoaib's colleagues, even those he had thought to be friends, oppose his expanding the Mahaweli project. There are people in important positions or with access to those in power, both in the UN system and in government, who are against him. Afshan, who is now firmly installed in Shoaib's Colombo apartment, picks up on the office gossip and intrigue. She counsels an astonished Shoaib who to trust and who not. Then a certain Mrs. De Silva emerges from the woodwork. The head of settler studies for the Authority, de Silva also wields 'pillow power'. Her husband is the same additional secretary whose ministry opposed Shoaib's original appointment. Shoaib is not certain what her problem is except that she has one.

The situation started to get serious when Shoaib's consultancy was, as he noted, *skipped over* and in an apparent power play, it was announced the government was negotiating with UNDP to have a consultancy and research cell located in the Authority. Now UN agencies are not supposed to be openly competitive but if government asks for help, even if it is at the expense of another UN agency, what is a Representative to do? It seemed both UNICEF and Shoaib were about to be given the cold shoulder. Ignatieff of course leapt in, and on the defensive and thinking they could perhaps rein in this successful Pakistani by locking him away in this way, the government offered that Shoaib could *be in the proposed research cell.*

Upset and disappointed, *I now knew* Shoaib wrote sadly, *why the letter relating to my extension, written at Mahe's behest, had elicited no response for over a month.* Mahe was the Working Director of the Mahaweli Development Authority, one in the labyrinth of government bureaucracies involved at one time or another in running the project. Shoaib had been just too successful. He had, through no fault of his own, garnered far too much praise from the donor community.

Beginning to feel besieged, the list of government officers now gunning for him seemed to be growing as he watched. Petty jealousies were also quietly festering in UNICEF, and UNDP was still somewhat put out because he had exposed the faultlines in their massive consultancy proposal. At a loss Shoaib began to think seriously about his friend Tariq's advice to get out while the going was good. Rather than considering ethically unacceptable compromises, Shoaib began to think about alternatives. Then he remembered Ignatieff's street-wise advice, *you have powerful*

friends, misuse them. Ignatieff himself was stalled but if the minister came out in favour of Shoaib, lame duck or not, Ignatieff would have all the ammunition he needed to resume the battle. Such is the politics of aid.

Mud continues to be thrown. National pride is also thrown into the arena when rumours circulate that Shoaib has shamelessly borrowed Sri Lankan ideas such as 'social mobilisation' and working at the turnout level, and claimed them as his own. Ted Scudder, an American professor, is drawn into the battle when he hears that an idea in his Sri Lankan student's report has been plagiarized by Shoaib. Intrigued, Scudder visits Shoaib who walks the professor back, step by step, showing how the fundamental theory of social mobilisation can be traced to Comilla and beyond to nineteenth century Germany. Then, understanding academic wars and bureaucratic infighting very well, Scudder advises Shoaib to get out of the Kalawewa area and away from the project manager's hostility. It is a war Shoaib cannot win. He wisely suggests Shoaib should concentrate on other component systems in the project; systems where he is wanted. *I think Ted is right* writes Shoaib, *his advice was almost the same as Tariq's, which was to get out as soon as I started exciting jealousy.*

Wounded but a realist, Shoaib attempts to step out of the limelight, politely declining an invitation to attend a meeting at the Authority and getting on instead with a training course at System C. It does not work. *On my return to Colombo* he writes, *I found the situation confused and dismal. Paul tried to rationalize it all, but I knew it was nothing but personal jealousy and a vindictive attitude on the part of some people....*

Ignatieff manages to persuade a reluctant Shoaib to try again. He agrees, and with Ignatieff, meets with Gudammune in Colombo, and is asked to write a position paper on the comprehensive training programme for the Mahaweli project. A diversion, it is better than nothing. *I listlessly prepared the position paper which I knew nobody would read.* Shoaib wrote dispiritedly. He was wrong. Paper is the lifeblood of a bureaucracy, the report was impossible to ignore.

The young minister Gamini Disanayaka resurfaced full of energy. He had been absent in mourning over the death of his brother and was furious to find that the consultant whom he had championed and who had seemingly and almost single-handedly rescued his project had been humiliated; pushed into the background. Summoned to the minister's house, Shoaib did not beat about the bush. As direct as he can ever be, Shoaib also asked the minister to *clarify whether or not I was needed and if not, it would be better to inform UNICEF of that fact.* This was too much for the minister, *this is my ministry,* he had apparently fumed, *what I say will be done. I have already told you that I want you to continue and complete the project. Who are here to say otherwise?* Ignatieff had been dead right. 'Misusing' powerful friends seemed like it would pay off.

True to his word the minister took immediate and effective action wrote Shoaib. A request was promptly sent to UNICEF through the external resources division in London for an extension of the programme from 1981 through 1983, pointedly singling out Shoaib's consultancy and training programme. On the surface Shoaib was completely vindicated, but he knew that his opponents would bide their time—ministers do not last forever. *Paul left on the 1st of October* wrote Shoaib, carrying with him the government's approval of an extension to the Mahaweli project and a pledge from the Swiss to fund the consultancy and the Farmer Leaders training programme in 1981. Shoaib however was bereft. *He was such a source of strength,* he writes, *his going away has saddened me beyond measure....I know I am going to miss Paul.*

After Ignatieff's departure and his apparent easy victory over his contract renewal, Shoaib headed for London. Every day counted. When, all too soon it was over, he wrote to Musarrat, *the forty-seven days that I spent with you surrounded by Roohi, Afshan, Munchu, Shelley, and four grandchildren...were too happy and too good to be believed. Suddenly, from the solitude of Galnewa I was transported to a different world...a world which has eluded me since you and the children left in December 1976* (when Musarrat, with Roohi's cheerful help, had taken herself off to London), *and particularly so since August 1978* when Shoaib headed off in the other direction for Nagoya. *It is seldom we are together and very rarely all of us,* he writes, *the visit...was like a very happy and pleasant dream; it passed in a flicker...something keeps on reminding me that I have lost something and this sense of loss makes my heart ache unbearably at times...misery turns into melancholy and the mood lifts...I had never realised that the feeling would be so acute and recurrent. But then* he writes as if once again old Burgess has taken control of his thoughts and stiffened his resolve, *one can't have everything. I am grateful to God for all that He has given us.*

Earlier, a Pakistani friend Tariq Farooqui, comfortably installed in UNICEF's New York office as an auditor, *seeing my lonely existence* wrote Shoaib, had vowed to do something to take me out of it. The 'something' was an opening in Egypt. Shoaib was marginally 'lukewarm' and was taken by surprise to learn that his transfer to Cairo had been requested. At the time, Ignatieff had mounted a successful resistance—he did not want to lose his star. Nor did the new UNICEF representative, the Egyptian-born Hoda Bodran, at least not until she had her feet firmly on the ground. She had, however, proposed a compromise: Shoaib could spend part of his time in Egypt and the rest back in Sri Lanka.

Flattered, but unwilling to offend by giving an outright no, Shoaib instead skirted the issue, hoping he might be able to do a lot better if he waited. Another post was available in Beirut but Shoaib *wasn't too enthusiastic about Beirut* either. Luckily the opportunity fizzles out.

While Shoaib has been in London with his family there has been yet another World Bank mission to the Mahaweli Project. The outcome is both good and bad. The good part is that Shoaib's work continues to be singled out as one aspect of the project that is really positive; the bad part is that the report adds new fuel to the fire of Karunatillake's resentment just when Shoaib thinks it might all be ebbing. Perhaps wearying of the continual sniping and backstabbing, he decides to accept the commendations as his rightful due, writing to Musarrat *in their report they* (the World Bank Mission) *mentioned my name twice, commending the good work done in the farmer leaders' training and settler participation in the development effort,* the very aspect that the project manager, Karunatillake and his supporters are trying to scuttle.

The report however changes little, the project manager still complains bitterly to anyone who will listen, including the new coordinators who are Shoaib's supporters. *Rohan told me* Shoaib writes in exasperation, *that Karunatillake complained that I was obstructing him from doing his work. He is so mistaken* adding firmly however that *there is no doubt that I do not like his lack of support for the training programme.* However, following the advice of Scudder, the American professor, Shoaib had taken himself out of the project manager's ambit. *I have left his area alone* he writes, but Karunatillake still complains.

There has been yet another reshuffle of responsibilities and the management of the project has been taken over by the Mahaweli Authority. This should help as Shoaib's friend and supporter Rohan has been appointed the new overall Resident Project Manager, while Jayantha is given the curious and colonially inspired position of 'Additional' Manager. It might be impossible to dislodge Shoaib's nemesis Karunatillake but perhaps he can be further watered down. All this is good news as far as Shoaib is concerned.

His new boss, Hoda Bodran, acting on Ignatieff's commendations and the very positive accounts of various mission reports, has so far been fully supportive of Shoaib's work, but she has yet to visit Galnewa for herself. Discovering that she will have to present Shoaib's work to an upcoming seminar in New York, she manages a flying one day visit. It is a huge success. She promises to come again soon. She does, this time with David Haxton, UNICEF's regional director from New Delhi who has been a critic. There was a little tension at the outset notes Shoaib, but Haxton was also quickly *won over* and afterwards, *full of praise* excusing his earlier lapse by commenting *that the annual report did not fully reflect the innovative work being done here.* An old hand, Haxton would know all about strategic retreats.

Back again soon for a third visit, the busy Hoda has soared in Shoaib's estimation. Ever the optimist *I must say,* he writes to Musarrat, *I felt very reassured about the future of my work in Sri Lanka.*

Hoda also wants her star to spread his wings, and now include the Maldives in his beat.

She follows this move by re-designating Shoaib as a Senior Project Officer, Social Development, and makes sure he is nominated to the office management group. Shoaib is flattered. Hoda also offers a two-year contract and holds out a glittering prize—the possibility of an eventual assignment to New York. Shoaib counters with a request for a two-and-a-half year consultancy which would give him five years of service and pension entitlements, but Hoda will not do it. She says it may make New York suspect that Shoaib is more interested in money than the project or that he wants to attain pension status and then leave. She keeps his contract in synchrony with the project cycle. This gives her a little leverage over her star which can be handy.

And a star Shoaib has become, his name splashed over a one page feature article in the January 5th edition of the prestigious international news magazine, *Newsweek*. The article is written by Varindra Tarzie Vittachi, the magazine's Sri Lankan correspondent. It singles out Shoaib, calling him very special, very different, *a rare man*, because although Shoaib is an international expert he actually lives with the people *in a village*.

It does not really matter that Tarzie invokes journalistic license and slightly exaggerates the discomforts of living down in Galnewa because everything else he writes is absolutely true. The results of Shoaib's work are extraordinary, and he does share the area's hardships with the villagers which increases his credibility. Even more importantly, he does not give commands, he listens, and almost magically, he manages to get people to start talking about their real problems and how they might resolve these problems themselves. It is community participation as it should be; a phrase, as Vittachi writes *that is no longer a piece of pious humbug mouthed by professional bureaucrats and alleged experts in made-to-measure safari jackets, but a meaningful response to an understood need.* There is more. Shoaib, writes Vittachi, has joined a very small, very select group; he has become a development superstar.

The *Newsweek* article may seem like the highpoint of Shoaib's brief years in Sri Lanka and from an international perspective perhaps it is but for Shoaib the really magic moment was the day that previously dysfunctional turmoil groups began to coalesce into unified communities; villagers began to work together to solve problems.

It will never be better for Shoaib in Sri Lanka.

Tarzie visited the project again just after the article was published and came *away very pleased with what he had seen* Shoaib notes. In Pakistan, an article in *The Muslim* came out with a headline in bold—'The Mysterious Mr. Khan of the

Newsweek'. Shoaib was on a roll and everyone who could was cashing in. In December 1980, Shoaib's trip to New York *resulted in another article on my work in the UNICEF News Bulletin although the last word on the subject* writes Shoaib with some satisfaction *had already been written by V. Tarzie Vittachi.*

Shoaib says he was overwhelmed by the article. *It was the best tribute I could have hoped for after two years work* he writes, adding it had made worthwhile all the *hardships I had subjected myself to—above all, separation from my loved ones.* Shoaib writes on about *the darkness of lonely nights, snakes and other dangerous wildlife, and driving at midnight on deserted roads through the jungle.* Ironically, in just a few years, Shoaib really would dismiss the hardships of Mahaweli as nothing out of the ordinary. His new yardstick—the hazardous conditions in the Northern Areas of Pakistan and the truly frightening and dangerously unstable track from Gilgit to Hunza.

Shoaib was not impressed with the UNICEF seminar in New York writing *the officers had little inclination to learn about innovative approaches and there was a decided 'I know it all attitude'.* Shoaib admits to being mildly irritated by this but the visit *proved a boon in other respects.* Heywood, the Senior Deputy Executive Director, invited him to lunch in the main UN building. Shoaib was surprised to find he was the only guest. He should not have been. *Everyone wants Shoaib Khan,* Heywood had laughed, *so I wanted to see the man myself.* A jovial Australian and nearing retirement, Heywood apparently asked a lot of very well informed questions which surprised Shoaib. He finished by asking *why is it that only Khan's do this kind of work?* Heywood had been a frequent visitor to Comilla and was obviously referring to the great Akhter Hameed Khan.

In the course of the lunch Shoaib asked Heywood if UNICEF would be interested in trying the approach in other countries. Heywood replied, as so many would reply in the years to come, *how do we find 50 Shoaib Khans?* Shoaib answered optimistically that a three-month course for ten committed officers would do the trick nicely. Heywood was sceptical but did indeed follow up the idea with Hoda in Colombo, only for it to fall by the wayside. To Shoaib's surprise it was kept alive for some time by Heywood's successor Egger. Yet another 'old hand' and also nearing retirement, Egger recommended Shoaib for a core post in UNICEF *to pre-empt my leaving the organisation* Shoaib told Musarrat.

In New York, Shoaib met various old friends who had managed to find a slot in the UN system. None of them seemed particularly happy. He made a point of meeting Ignatieff and his wife Catherine. *Paul appeared a little lost but was putting up a brave front.* The difference between a field post and New York was not lost on Shoaib. His friend the Ambassador Akram Zaki's wife was also in New York with her ailing brother, a former Prime Minister of Nepal, but

Shoaib was unable to meet her. He of course made a point of meeting Paul Ignatieff and his wife Catherine.

Those whom the gods wish to punish, they first raise to the heights. Shoaib has reached the heights and unknown to him he is about to plumb the depths because the situation in Kalawewa is about to sour beyond repair.

It all starts in a fairly mundane way. Shoaib frets that Karunatillake continues to obstruct wherever he can. Jayantha, the new additional manager/incharge, airily dismisses Shoaib's worries as being nothing that cannot be handled *in the fullness of time*. But Shoaib cannot let go. He feels lost without talk and no one will really sit down and *chew the fat* with him. More than that, *what I perceive to be a diffident attitude in Sri Lankans sometimes bothers me*, he writes, *sometimes they act so coldly and distantly that one wonders if anything is the matter*. There are no hugs. Kunio Waki is another UNICEF visitor. Chief of the Asia Section, Waki is a convert describing the project as *one of the few successful projects UNICEF was assisting in Asia*. But where it really counts for Shoaib, the situation is souring very quickly again down in the Kala Oya basin. It begins with the transfer of Shoaib's firm supporter Rohan Wijenaike. Worried and unsettled, Shoaib reminds himself yet again of Tariq's injunction to 'get out as soon as you feel you are causing jealousy'. *Sometimes I feel that perhaps I have reached that point*, he writes wearily. In fact he has. The Sri Lankans can plot and scheme to their hearts content, Shoaib no longer really cares, and even better, the future suddenly seems wide open.

Earlier, in late 1980, when Shoaib stopped off in Peshawar on his way back to Colombo, he had run into Akhter Hameed Khan. Contact now re-established, the old man used his latest interest, the Orangi project in Karachi, to try and catch Shoaib's attention. Shoaib, in turn following up on Hoda's proposal to invite eminent men to come and interact with the staff, tossed a counter offer back.

Shoaib was delighted when his mentor accepted; AHK arrived in October 1981 and although happy to see all that Shoaib had accomplished, visiting Mahaweli was not the main reason for his trip. He had in his pocket a couple of job offers and suggested Shoaib think seriously about them both. They were first rate offers, one in an urban project in Karachi that was to become famous in its own right, and one with the Aga Khan Foundation. Shoaib agreed to think about them but first he needed to get a few issues off his chest. Soon after Akhter Hameed Khan's departure, however, a defiant Shoaib submitted a well argued paper to the Mahaweli Project's Secretary General about the need to organise turnout groups with even greater vigour and of the need of a policy directive to this effect.

The timing of the proposal could hardly have been worse. The old idea of hamlet organisations had been revived by Shoaib's opponents. It was a home grown

Sri Lankan idea, they argued, and made far better use of resources than focusing on the smaller and more dispersed turnout groups. Rohan rashly opposed changing the focus from turnout groups to hamlet organisations tooth and nail. This had disastrous results. Mahe would not tolerate open opposition from someone below his pay scale—his attitude hardened against turnout groups.

In an attempt to calm tempers Shoaib *wrote a long note explaining the need for turnout groups*. The note did nothing to change Mahe's mind. He simply ignored it. Scenting victory, Shoaib's enemies begin to close in. Worried that the Sri Lankans were about to *cut off their noses to spite their faces*, the members of the all important six-monthly World Bank Appraisal Mission stepped into the fray. Having arranged to include Shoaib in their schedule, the team met him at a place called Medagama where he was told that the government's line was that there seemed to be some disillusionment within the project's field management group about turnout groups, especially during the recent drought, when it was alleged that the turnout leaders 'proved to be of little help' and to make matters worse had apparently taken the law into their own hands.

And why wouldn't they, Shoaib argued, when they were the victims of a purely political decision to cut off their water to save another more politically sensitive area. Not only that, he told a Canadian team member, in the absence of a policy directive from the Authority's senior management, many turnout groups had been left without direction or support so no wonder it all turned ugly. It was certainly true that a thousand settlers had indeed embarrassed the government by sitting and making a lot of noise until the sluice gates of the left bank were opened, *but it could have all been avoided if the channels of dialogue between the turnout groups and government officials had been open and frank*. But nobody wanted to hear this. It meant that mistakes had been made. It also meant that rather than a return to the failed hamlet concept, Shoaib's turnout group ideas should continue to be the focus.

Shoaib writes that the Canadian's *warning proved correct*. Government needed a scapegoat for the mess, preferably not a Sri Lankan. They had been seriously embarrassed. At lunch Shoaib was stunned by the savagery of Mahe's attack. *Mahe literally accused me of corrupting project officers, of channelling all assistance to the project manager instead of to children, and of meddling in internal affairs*. Surely this must be a joke Shoaib thinks. When he discovers Mahe is deadly serious, Shoaib is shaken.

The World Bank Mission leader responded by telling Mahe in no uncertain terms of the Mission's serious concern should there be any changes to the existing pattern of training farmer leaders. They emphasized how impressed they had been by the work done so far in this field with UNICEF assistance. Flummoxed by such a direct and uncompromising statement, Mahe

prevaricated. He would wait until the World Bank team left the project area. As soon as they had, Shoaib went to see Mahe in Colombo. He was kept waiting several hours, and although the meeting did take place, Shoaib was not able to get through to him. He wrote in his diary, *but I did get a rather rude letter immediately after the meeting in reply to mine explaining the need for turnout groups.* The letter was also brutally direct. The Ministry of Settlement and Land had decided to organise hamlet associations and wanted to know if Shoaib would go along with their decision.

As an adviser, Shoaib had little choice but to accept; he could not stop government from going ahead and doing exactly what they wanted to do. Without referring to Hoda, Shoaib agreed. He had been outflanked and he knew it. *UNICEF always worked in accordance with the policy of the government and there was no question of my doing the contrary* he writes with finality.

It was the beginning of the end, time to say farewell to the Mahaweli project, time to look for alternative employment.

Shoaib had done his best to convince the Sri Lankan decision makers of the essential importance of turnout groups and it had not been good enough. But who had really lost? Although they may not have known it at the time, in ridding themselves of Shoaib, the Sri Lankan government had thrown away the opportunity of a lifetime. And if the settlers of the Mahaweli project were losers, if the universe demands to be in balance, then the losses of the Sri Lankan farmers would be offset by the amazing gains that were about to be made by the desperately poor farmers of the Northern Areas of Pakistan.

In Sri Lanka, Mahe's directive has been circulated to all project managers. There is no way it can be ignored. There was considerable consternation amongst my friends and well wishers in the project, wrote Shoaib, who took exception to the content and language of the letter. He tried his best to make light of the whole affair. Indeed I was hurt but Hoda's attitude and stance in the matter stopped me from taking any rash action. If Shoaib had thought to resign he should think again, she said. She made me feel really wanted by UNICEF, Shoaib writes emotionally she was determined to take a stand with the Ministry. However, the UNICEF project was now on its own. It was an unsustainable position, but it is not in Shoaib's nature to give in without a fight. You can however almost sense the frustration boiling up from the notes he writes. He is a hands-on man who likes to throw himself into a job heart and soul. He does not enjoy just sitting back cajoling and suggesting. It is not his nature, at least not yet.

And although he may not yet be ready to admit it even to himself, Shoaib has in fact already left Sri Lanka. But if he does, how will he support his family. The answer is simple. Why not think about the offer AHK brought with him

when he visited; an offer from the Aga Khan, Imam and Prince to the Ismailis of the world, to initiate a rural development programme in the remote Northern Areas of Pakistan. Shoaib had discounted it at the time *I was not yet mentally prepared to go back to Pakistan after the horrendous experience of Daudzai.*

There was also AHK's own soon to be famous Orangi project in Karachi, one of the projects in the philanthropic stable of the immensely wealthy Agha Hasan Abedi, head of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. Shoaib was of course very tempted. He would dearly love to work with his mentor, but he also knew that the security of a UN job was not something that a man with his family responsibilities could give up lightly. So he said yes to AHK with one major condition. He would join Akhter Hameed Khan in Karachi if his UN post could be resumed at any time and if his pension rights were not disrupted. He would have to be obtained, he said, on deputation, this time from UNICEF. He was in a strong position. UNICEF did not really want to lose him permanently, and he was being head-hunted by the Aga Khan. It was all very flattering and must have been a boost to his spirit during an otherwise very dispiriting time. Shoaib's answer was the same a month or so later when a letter finally arrived signed by Robert d'Arcy Shaw, Director of Special Programmes of the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva. He would consider the offer if the Foundation could arrange his deputation from UNICEF.

First come first served. The race between the prince and the banking czar was on.

The 'czar' moved first. Shoaib was flown to Karachi and met Agha Hasan Abedi in June 1982. Although commanding immense wealth, Abedi did not quite have enough clout however, to impel James Grant, the Executive Director of UNICEF, to take that most difficult step for any bureaucrat—make a special exception. Abedi's request was firmly but politely refused but a window was left open. UNICEF could release Shoaib to work on the Orangi project for up to three years with the period being treated as a break in service.

In Colombo, Hoda had curled her lip, advised Shoaib this was a poor alternative; said he would lose more than he would gain. She of course was anxious not to lose him at all. Even the pragmatist Akhter Hameed agreed with Hoda—the conditions were far from ideal in terms of career options and pension rights.

However it was an entirely different story when the Aga Khan, in a carefully crafted and quite chatty letter, asked the same question of Grant. While the UNICEF hierarchy was more than equal to the task of dealing with an international banker, a prince no less, a man whose impeccable religious, international and financial power was bedded in history was another story. Shoaib could be released on deputation and continue to pay into the UN pension

fund. However, UNICEF's bookkeepers had been thrown into disarray at the prospect of having to deal with a secondary contract so rather than funding Shoaib through UNICEF, Grant asked if the Aga Khan Foundation could pay Shoaib's salary directly. He enclosed a copy of Shoaib's terms and conditions for good measure.

The prince agreed without hesitation, and made sure his Foundation's offer was more than handsome. Shoaib would find it hard to refuse. The prince also, as we will discover, happily cut Musarrat into the deal, anything to ensure the social magic-maker happily took himself up to the Northern Areas in Pakistan to bring life to the prince's latest enthusiasm, a project to lift farmers out of poverty. A few months later, Hoda reluctantly called Shoaib to her office. An exception had been made. She had just been informed by UNICEF's New York office that Shoaib's deputation to the Aga Khan Foundation had been confirmed.

We next find Shoaib typically in motion, making a flying visit to meet Robert Shaw in the fabled town of Gilgit in the far northern mountains of Pakistan, and then in a preview of the hectic travel schedule he would maintain for the next ten years, down to Karachi to lunch with the powerful Ismailis who would sit on the Board of the Aga Khan's new programme.

In Gilgit, in what was to become a commonplace event, the scheduled return flight was cancelled due to inclement weather. Wrote Shoaib with the amused tolerance of a man already in love with the prospect of working in the area, *I stayed in Room Number 8 at the Chinar Inn, little realizing that it would become my constant abode for the next twelve years.* The airport, he fondly added *was the most primitive imaginable with tin shed security boxes.* An unfazed Shaw had quickly organised a local taxi to take them down to the plains, *the fastest journey I ever did on the Karakorum Highway* wrote Shoaib happily. A connoisseur of super-fast journeys, it must have been fast. Then Shaw in turn flew out to Mahaweli. He brought good news. The newly formed Board of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme had confirmed Shoaib's appointment as General Manager. Had there ever been any doubt?

One of the brains behind the programme and someone who made things happen, Shaw was full of enthusiasm. He was also delighted to have stage-managed the recruitment of a man he regarded as a catch. *I developed an instant rapport with Bob* Shoaib enthuses, *and was most impressed by the depth of his support for the kind of work I was doing.* This rapport between the two men, and Shaw's energetic and vital behind-the-scenes supporting role would be one of the main reasons for the amazing success of this new programme. A lot of wonderful years were still ahead as the pair plotted the future, years where Shoaib, with Bob Shaw's support, would take the programme to heights no one at the time could have ever dreamed of.

The prince may think he has won but Abedi is a man accustomed to getting his own way. Shoaib is besieged with calls from Abedi's personal assistant in London. Needing to have an uncomfortable medical condition dealt with by a specialist in London, Shoaib agrees to a meeting. Abedi has done his homework and adds additional incentives. Shoaib can base himself in London; buy a house the bank will finance. Abedi will throw in a handsome down payment and an interest free loan. It must have been immensely tempting and thoughts of Musarrat's reaction must have raced through Shoaib's mind. But he has already committed himself to the Aga Khan Foundation, and so with regret, declines.

Abedi however simply refuses to give in. He believes every man has his price; any deal can be circumvented. A slightly dazed Shoaib finally escapes Abedi's office with a signed and sealed letter of appointment in his pocket to be effective after the completion of one year with the Aga Khan Foundation. I do not know what Shoaib did with the letter but it was well that Shoaib did not take up Abedi's offer. Although the Orangi project in Karachi became internationally famous as an example of urban self-development, Abedi suffered a massive heart attack a few years later, never fully recovering, and his bank crashed amidst allegations of serious misconduct.

Back from London Shoaib writes with little of the emotion he may have felt, and never one to waste time, *I relinquished my post with UNICEF in Sri Lanka on November 30th 1982* he writes, *and the following day, in Karachi, I joined the Aga Khan Foundation.* The Sri Lankans would just have to manage without him. Literally bubbling with an enthusiasm he could not have imagined five years ago Shoaib had hardly a backward glance, hardly a recorded thought for the Garden of Eden where he had tried so hard. Instead, we find him full of optimism and joy at the triumphant homecoming he was about to make, *the impossible had been made possible* he writes… *I was coming back to Pakistan to resurrect Daudzai.*

Before we move on to a period I can only describe as the 'years of glory', two incidental matters need to be to put to rest. The first concerns the curiosity of James Grant, UNICEF's Chief Executive Officer, the second a service one of Shoaib's lifelong civil service friends was able to perform.

Not long after arriving in Gilgit, and while the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme was still young, Shoaib was surprised to receive a call saying James Grant of UNICEF wished to visit the programme. Grant was puzzled and intrigued that a man in Shoaib's position and circumstances would forego a promising career in a UN agency for a post in the wilds of Pakistan's Northern Areas—he wanted to find out why Shoaib had left. For three days Shoaib took his distinguished visitor to see the amazing changes already underway, and all the time, Shoaib kept his curiosity in check. Finally, as Grant was about to leave he asked the question Shoaib had been hoping he would ask, 'do you know why I came?' Shoaib says he recalls

replying *well, no Mr. Grant. I am of course very flattered that you have come to see our work and I am very happy and encouraged by your comments, but otherwise, I do not know the purpose of your visit.* Then, said Shoaib, laughing as he did so often during those days in Islamabad, *he looked at me and said he had come to find out for himself the real reason why someone like me would choose to leave UNICEF, and that after seeing the work we were doing and all we had accomplished in such a short time, had he been in my shoes he would have done exactly the same thing.* Grant flew straight back to New York.

Shoaib's return to Pakistan may have been triumphant, but there was, as Shoaib noted, *still another hurdle to be overcome—I was still on deputation to UNICEF from the Government of Pakistan.* Joining the Aga Khan Foundation was thus a 'double deputation', that is, after Shoaib's initial deputation to Nagoya, arranged by Ejaz, when Shoaib joined the Aga Khan Foundation, Ijlal, former Commissioner Peshawar, still the establishment secretary, yet again approved his status as 'officer on deputation'. However, this caused some grumbling in civil service ranks and Shoaib felt it was time to finally leave a service he had once wanted so badly to join, and also absolve Ijlal from a difficult position. Mind made up, Shoaib said he went straight to his friend and said *look, I do not want to embarrass you any further.* Shoaib had already completed twenty-seven years as a civil servant and so was qualified for a pension. Ijlal was saddened, although in his heart he knew Shoaib had been lost to service in 1978. So he summoned his deputy, Zafar Altaf, who happened to be one of Shoaib's probationers from the academy years and who *knew all the ins-and-outs of government's rules and regulations* including a recent incentive programme that would mean Shoaib would receive an enhanced pension if he retired now. More important than the additional amount however, was that it was an honourable retirement, and at a time of his own choosing. It must have been an emotional moment. *Yes, it was* he said, *but Ijlal signed and approved my application and that was that.* He was no longer one of the heaven-born.

Later, Shoaib wrote with sad finality, *this was the end of my twenty-eight years of government service; a service which began with a letter of appointment signed by the then Establishment Secretary, Government of Pakistan, Sir Eric Snellens 'Your Most Obedient Servant'.*

And as the years passed, Shoaib would be honoured by all but an embittered few, regarded as a man to admire, an officer to emulate, a man who had not flinched from the truth, an elder of the civil service. Neither Shoaib's grandfather nor Burgess of the 'golden rules' would have been disappointed.

Shoaib had kept the faith. In his heart, in his every action, he had remained one of the heaven-born—the best of the best.



Musarrat greeting His Highness



With Akhter Hameed Khan at Orangi



Musarrat with Akhter Hameed Khan in Sri Lanka



With His Highness at Teru Channel (1987)



With His Highness at Broshal Nagar (1987)



With Gen. Ziaul Haq (1988)



Brief Encounter with Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto
at Shandur (1989)



Receiving Sitara-e-Imtiaz from Ghulam Ishaq Khan (1990)



With Princess of Spain and
Shaheed Major Khalid Sultan S.J. (1991)



Receiving Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at Gilgit (1991)



With Princess Diana in Chitral, Sir Nicholas Barrington in the background (1992)



With President of Philippines (1992)



With President Leghari on a village visit (1996)



Flanked by Akhter Hameed Khan & Fayyaz Baqir (1997)



With President Musharraf on a village visit (2000)



With King of Nepal & Ambassador Zamir Akram (2005)



Launch of Microhealth Insurance by Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz flanked by Mahmood Sultan, Jahangir Tareen, Suleman Ghani, Asif on the right and myself, Shandana and Saima at the left, with Rashid Bajwa, Nazar Memon, Sono Khungharani, Masood ul Mulk and Agha Ali Javad at the back (2005)



President Musharraf Conferring Hilal-e-Imtiaz (2007)

4

THE MAN IN THE HAT

Dardistan

'Gilgit is a dusty, dirty, spread out place, reminding you of the frontier towns in the American West that you see in cowboy films', wrote Hilary Adamson and Isobel Shaw in 1981 in their 'Traveller's Guide to Pakistan'. 'The town contained' they add a trifle dismissively, 'no buildings of any architectural or historical interest, with hardly a decorated wooden door to be seen.' This scruffy little town, this tiny human flea-bite on the vast and towering landscape was once, they note, 'the most isolated outpost of the British Empire'. Here, eccentric Commissioners of the Raj Sarkar maintained the peace and the pipe band of the Gilgit Scouts in their Black Watch tartan marched each day in the Chinar Bagh, the thin defiant skirl of their pipes slowly fading in the roar of the summer-swollen Indus while beyond the soaring rock shoulders and slender ice-clad fang of Rakaposhi reached for the heavens.

Once, as John Keay writes in his book *The Gilgit Game*, all of the country west of the Indus where the Maharajah of Kashmir sought to extend his rule over the fierce mountain tribesmen, all of this was lumped under the title Yaghistan, meaning the land of the ungovernable, the savage. The whimsically academic but no less determined adventurer Dr. Leitner rejected the term as infamously derogatory, naming these mountain people 'Dards', supposed descendents of the Daradas of Sanskrit literature, a conjectural derivation which as Keay notes, nevertheless neatly gave to the Yaghis, in their ferociously isolated valleys, each tribe so individually distinct, a racial identity.

Of course it was never as simple as this. Not only is this incredible and dangerously rugged area the meeting place of several of the great slowly shifting tectonic plates that underlie the earth, and above, two of the world's great mountain ranges, the Karakorum and the Hindu Kush, it has been an extraordinary human crossroad. As a result, the small, tough and indomitably

independent mountain people could count as their ancestors Aryan wanderers from Central Asia, Tibetan bandit-warriors, Afghan mystics, traders and holy men from northern India. Into this wonderful mix might also be added some of Alexander's 'lost' legions for how else could the early explorers account for the fair hair and wonderfully fair complexions of so many of the mountain peoples whose women were highly prized in the slave markets of Samarkand.

A bewildering array of languages and dialects are also spoken, the greatest variety of languages in the whole of Pakistan. The most common of these are Shina, Burushaski which with Domadi is the language of the Hunza valley, and Balti the language of Baltistan. Then there is Wakhi a language spoken in higher valleys; and in Chitral, Khowar, each the language of at most a few hundred thousand people. Dardistan was also a place where Islam is present in much of its amazing variety, with individual valley systems succumbing separately to the varied messages of wandering missionaries. As a result Hunza, Punial, Yasin and Ishkomen are almost entirely Ismaili, the valleys of Chilas, Darel, and Tangir are Sunni, while except for a few Sunni and a minority mystic Shia sect, the Nur Bakshis, Baltistan is almost entirely mainstream Shia. Gilgit itself is about three-fifths Shia and two-fifths Sunni. However, until the outside world intruded, except for the odd raid or attempt to extend territory, religious tolerance was commonplace within and between each tiny valley state.

The agents of the Raj dubbed them Dards, although Leitner's simple academic nicety meant nothing to the Dogra garrisons of the Maharajah of Kashmir. They called the people who ambushed their columns and besieged their forts Yaghis, and told tales of their awesome ferocity. In 1866, twenty years after purchasing the area from the British, Leitner found the Maharajah's forces once again trying to reassert their shattered rule in the Gilgit valley. It was a case of one bloody uprising after another. The Dards, it seemed, simply wanted to be left alone.

Perhaps it was something about the Dogra troops, or maybe they didn't like the maharajah, because when the British finally established Gilgit as an agency after a bitterly fought campaign with its remarkable feats of heroism and derring-do and posted 'political agents' in Chitral and in other strategically significant valleys in the Northern Areas, to the astonishment of many, the Dards, the men of the mountains, could hardly have been more friendly. British agents found them to be hospitable and peaceable. No one ever really discovered why.

Then, as Keay also wrote, *with Independence and the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the Maharaja of Kashmir, after much vacillation, elected to incorporate his state in the Indian Union; he was after all a Dogra Hindu.* His mainly Muslim subjects objected, and while the historically more peaceable people of the magically beautiful Kashmir valley waited for the United Nations

to announce the results of a plebiscite, the men of the mountains, the Dards, Keay writes, *simply took up arms.*

Descendents of the once feared 'Yaghis', the Gilgit Scouts, with the tacit compliance of their sympathetic British officers and a few unruly *lashkars* of their Pathan co-religionists, *bundled the maharajah's representatives out of Gilgit and pushed* (them) *back to Astor and up the Indus to beyond Baltistan.* The Gilgitis might have pushed the boundaries even further had not the Pashtun *lashkars* stopped to indulge in some casual looting on the way. But stop they did and so the Indian army was able to rush in reinforcements and one of the world's most troublesome and bloody 'lines in the snow' was drawn.

Many of the eccentric colonial adventurers such the erudite and self-important Leitner or the long forgotten Royal Geographical Society medalist and secret agent of the Raj, George Hayward, all who had risked their lives in this rugged mountain world would surely have applauded the exploits of the Scouts, writes Keay, because in one of those curious twists of fate, *the Kashmir ceasefire line—'The Line of Control'—in the Northern Areas is not very different from where Leitner and the murdered Hayward believed the Kashmir frontier always should have been.*

This new boundary settled nothing. The 'Great Game' of the colonial era was replaced by a new and even more lethal 'Game' that has three times sent the two great nations of the subcontinent to war, and created a simmering and at times lethal confrontation on the glaciers and mountains. It is a 'Game' that had the secret agents of the services of both Pakistan and India watching and reporting every move, every word, innocent or not, of everyone who counted and many who did not. It was all still very much in play when Shoaib arrived in Gilgit in December 1982.

A complication that Shoaib could well have done without, it was always there in the background, something little spoken of, a complication which Shoaib managed with a level of skill, influence and finesse that few others could have brought to bear. It was a pitfall, and if Shoaib had once stepped into it the resulting furore would have brought down the entire amazing development project he was to create because as improbable as it might have seemed to anyone who chanced to stroll through the muddy shuttered bazaar in the winter of 1982 when Shoaib and his handful of originals were setting up in an open shop front, Gilgit was to become a brightly burning star in the firmament of the development world. It would in fact achieve the equivalent of international rock-star status—the dusty town of Gilgit would become synonymous with one of the most exciting and successful rural development projects of our time.

If you are one of those who have hurriedly taken tea in the dark of an Islamabad morning and then scurried out to the airport with the mix of super-strong tea and unleavened bread sloshing about in your stomach, then sat waiting on hard plastic chairs, yawning in the stale air of the empty lounge while the pilots try and make up their minds if the weather will allow a flight into the mountains then, if it is a lucky day and the aircraft lifts into the red dust-smudged horizon of the plains at dawn and climbing hard arcs towards the smudge of mountains that stretches across the north, you are in for one of those rare treats travellers are sometimes offered: an eagles-eye view of the Hindu Kush. One minute you are flying over sleepy undulating farmland and low hills and then suddenly you are soaring over a wall of mountains, great peaks rearing on either side until for ten minutes or more you are treated to one of the world's great sights as your tiny aircraft creeps past the massive rock shoulders and sheer glaciers of Nanga Parbat.

When Keay made the long and sometimes treacherously dangerous road journey in the 1960s, a seasoned traveller, he was confronted with a sight he would never forget. Just north of the brooding gateway valleys of Chilas the cliffs drop unbelievably sheer for nearly two thousand metres, and then again for another two thousand tumbling in a jagged mess of crags and precipices. Out of this incredible trough rises Nanga Parbat *in one uninterrupted sweep, the greatest slope on the crust of the earth.* Beyond, in a vast, chaotic sea of immense mountains, snow-smoke streaming, black rock gleaming, somewhere *in those deep north-eastern folds lie the villages of Baltistan,* ice cold and arid, while to the north, *nestling in amongst these gigantic peaks were green and smiling valleys, orchards of apricots and cherries,* the ancient bandit kingdoms of Hunza, Nagar, and Yasin, and all the other valleys and villages of a land the Dogra garrisons of the Maharajah of Kashmir called Yaghistan. Keay wrote with the pen of a romantic. Life in these valleys was not an idyll—it could be hard, harsh and very hungry.

Even today with the latest in small turbo-prop aircraft and avionics, so narrow are the valleys and so high the unforgiving peaks that flying is a dangerous proposition when the weather closes in. No matter your importance, it is commonplace to be stranded in Gilgit—or in the equally mountainous district of Chitral—for days on end, a situation which feeds the anxieties of many a traveller. For when clouds blanket the north and the huge snaggletoothed peaks wait in ambush for the unwary aviator, the only way to escape the north is to take a jeep along the narrow road out of Chitral and traverse the dangerously unstable flanks of the Lowari pass unless it is choked with snow, or board a mini-bus in Gilgit and head out along the broad polished tarmac of the famed Karakorum Highway, deceptively benign until it plunges into towering gorges and skitters across giant rock cliffs as Shoaib's narrative will attest, sometimes

cut impassably in a hundred different places by huge rock falls and mudflows that could swallow a bus entire.

Chancier still are the hundreds of tiny incredibly precipitous feeder roads and tracks that Shoaib's happy bands of determined villagers have hewn out of their enormous mountains. During the years that have passed since Shoaib and his merry band wove their magic in the north, although a network of roads and tracks now traverse the area, nature is still dominant. Scrambling over the huge quivering rocks and slippery scree of an instant landslip into which the track vanished, steadied by the hands of smiling villagers who chose to ignore my shaky steps, I stared down through the evening gloom at the five hundred metre near-sheer shifting fall to the steel cold waters of the gleaming grey ribbon of river on the road to Booni when we last crossed the Shandur pass in November of 2007.

The Northern Areas have not yet lost their sting.

Of the eight or nine high passes by which Central Asia could be reached direct from India, Keay tells us, *six in fact lay within a week's march from the little township*, and by 1880, no man had seen as much of these Western Himalayas as the secret agent and servant of the Raj Sarkar, John Biddulph. Described by Keay as an obscure explorer and reluctant travel writer whose accounts were unusually austere and spare, Keay cites how Biddulph was astonishingly moved to write thus, *'on the occasion of my visit to Hunza in 1876, I suddenly found myself confronted with a more difficult and dangerous piece of ground than I had ever traversed in a tolerably large experience of Himalayan sport'*. Biddulph though, apparently thought the track was even more dangerous than it need be, and that, *the Hunza people, intrepid cragsmen, preferred to keep it dangerous*. It was their best defence Keay conjectures, against the Dogra soldiers at Gilgit.

Then at Chalt, at what is now a gaggle of 'chaikhanas' and scruffy shop fronts on the upper stretches of the Karakorum Highway, Biddulph came upon a bridge of plaited twigs (hanging) limply across the gorge... to a track that led to Nagar, the twin and deadly rival of Hunza proper whose rule extended only along the right hand side of the river. Whoever controlled this dangerously unsteady bridge and who also held the downstream town of Chaprot became the besieger rather than the besieged. Nagar is described as the more peaceable of the two and this may be right. It was also firmly mainstream Shia, one of whose enlightened religious leader's was the key that first unlocked the way for Shoaib to include the non-Ismaili world in his great plan. Over the deep gorge of the Hunza river, the Mir ruled over a mainly Ismaili people and demanded that every able-bodied Hunza male keep a loaf of bread, a sword and a loaded rifle beside his door, ready to be called into instant action on a signal from the Mir's Baltit Fort.

And although the Pahlwan of Yasin to the west was described *as a small, rather unkempt little man with a fierce spirit*, whose long-locked warriors defied entry to anyone they chose, far from being brutal 'robber kingdoms', Biddulph found the men folk of Hunza for example, to *be quick, intelligent and obliging, the girls unveiled, pretty and no less obliging. Each village had its band, every man was a dancer and the wine, the fabled 'Hunza water', never ran out*. It has now, as has the apricot brandy of Chitral, the last of which I poured from a silver chased flagon dining under a great spreading Chinar tree one moonlit night in Chitral nearly twenty years ago.

Keay believes however that although impressed, Biddulph had no illusions...*if the place had an air of prosperity it was thanks not so much to the husbandry, as to the traditional amusements of waylaying rich caravans on the Leh-Yarkhand road or of selling neighbours into slavery*. When the Raj Sarkar gradually brought an end to these pursuits, the economies of many of the valleys suffered and declined. Men began to leave in increasing numbers to find work elsewhere, villages slowly fell into a state of increasing poverty and social disarray, a state exacerbated even more so when the unifying rule of their mirs and rajahs was finally abolished in 1972 by Pakistan's fiery Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

But back to the late 1800s and the indomitable Biddulph. The Mir of the day, Ghazan Khan was, in Biddulph's words a genial host who betrayed a weakness for breech-loaders and scotch. And if Ghazan Khan had seemed confident as he welcomed Biddulph to his astounding fortress of Baltit backlit by shards of sunlight on the Ultar glacier, in one way he had every right to be and in another not. His family had ruled the kingdom for more than nine hundred years, fending off at one time or another his local rivals, various Tibetan incursions, and paying tribute to the Imperial Court of China who viewed Hunza as a dependency. So it was to Sinkiang that Safdar Ali fled not for fear of retribution for dispatching his father Ghazan Khan, but for incurring the wrath of the Raj Sarkar by sending his Hunza highwaymen off to raid caravans on the Ladakh-Sinkiang road when he had been instructed to desist, and even worse, for entertaining a Russian delegation in the heart of the Hunza valley.

One hundred years later his scion, Mir Ghazanfar, now the area's parliamentary representative, guest of honour at a village celebration we had chanced upon in November 2007, sat with his rani on a neighbouring *tahkt* chewing gum, while the old men slowly circled and danced, roses bobbing in their pakhols, white shokhas flowing. The Mir tossed the village's gifts to one of his retainers. The villagers were not impressed, *oh yes, we noticed*, they said, *we will think carefully before voting for the Mir again*. Maybe it was just a bad day because the mir is known in Islamabad diplomatic circles as a jolly and unstinting host. Once, in the past, he had generously made his house in

Karimabad available when I badly needed somewhere to convalesce; and as a politician he has many times been returned as the valley's parliamentary representative, so what was wrong that day?

And why, over the course of the next two days, did Mir Ghazanfar decline to meet us. Why did he say *I do not know Shoaib, tell them to talk to someone who knows him*. Because Shoaib's notes speak of many a 'lavish luncheon', many a meeting with the mir at Karimabad and so surely Mir Ghazanfar could think of something to say. And then he and his rani slipped out of Gilgit and we did not see them again. Perhaps this book is the poorer for it. And if in this section, we dwell on the valley of Hunza and neglect other equally dramatic and important parts of the Northern Areas it is in part because Hunza is so well known to the world, but also in part because it became the centrepiece of some of Shoaib's earliest and most astonishing successes. It was also where the first non-Ismaili villages chose to join the programme, brought in by a far-seeing religious leader of Nagar, Syed Yahya Shah.

There were of course many other valleys equally difficult of access, other valleys far poorer, some far more reluctant to drag themselves out of the sloth of despond into which they had fallen, from far-off Baltistan to the hidden valleys of Chitral, all of whom were to eventually fall under the spell of Shoaib and his prince's amazing new brainchild, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme. A very few didn't. Perhaps even more extraordinary than the doings of the kingdoms of Hunza, Nagar, or Yasin with their hereditary Mirs and Rajahs, or even Chitral and its famous siege, was a valley described in wide-eyed wonder by Leitner *as entirely republican, each village a self-governing entity with its own council of state to which even women might be elected* . A hundred years later all is changed. The valley of Chilas is known for its strict fundamentalism, women are neither seen nor heard, and its unbending mullahs fiercely deny entry to Shoaib's marvellous programme. There is no one to tell us why.

Before the Chinese blasted out this most difficult section of the incredible Karakorum Highway, the tarmac strip from Gilgit to Hunza and over the sixteen thousand foot Khunjerab Pass to Sinkiang, the fifty-two mile jeep journey to Hunza took, as Keay found in the 1960s, at least seven hours; and that was on a good day with no ice or rain. Keay also reminds us of a phenomenon first remarked by Biddulph—all the valleys of the Hindu Kush are far narrower at their mouths than higher up; it was this first incredibly dangerous section that acted as a natural defence for the tiny 'kingdoms within'.

Keay's perilous jeep journey had traversed giant sliding scree slopes and sheer cliffs on the Hunza road, he had watched transfixed as *a whole slice of the mountain fell away* and with it the track while *the river below gobbled up the last of the debris*, but the worst was yet to come—sheer rock faces up some of

which the road manages to zigzag with hairpin bends so tight that six-point turns were commonplace—as they still are on so many of the new hand-hewn feeder roads—while the jeep's rear end hung out over a sheer precipice. Other sections had to be traversed across narrow grooves blasted out of the rock face, bridged in *long heart-stopping sections* on scaffolds and trestles of old worn tree trunks and twisted bits of wood wedged in any handy crevice or simply holding on to some boulder by nothing more than weathered friction. As Keay wrote, *the logs creak and bounce as a jeep approaches; pedestrians cling to the rock face as much to keep their balance as to allow it to pass*, while through the cracks in the shifting slippery logs the grey thundering water of the Hunza River races four hundred feet below.

Twenty years later Adamson's and Shaw's journey to Hunza was less arduous, the road far less of an adventure—*now you turn a corner*, they write, *and in stark contrast to the grim desolation you have driven through, the magic vale opens up before you...rich, fecund and of an ethereal beauty...a fairytale land*...quoting the climber and traveller Eric Shipton, *the ultimate manifestation of mountain grandeur*.

The likely model for James Hilton's Shangri-la, Hunza really does live up to every expectation. Alluvial fans transformed by staircases of tiny terraced fields reaching almost to the snow line, each enclosed by a dry stone wall, each fed by snow-melt carried in ingeniously crafted irrigation canals, some many kilometres long carrying the precious water across sheer cliffs and mountain faces to the tiny waiting fields below. *An ever changing scene*, enthuse Adamson and Shaw, *the colours change with the seasons: emerald green in spring, golden yellow and orange in the autumn...and everywhere the slender poplar trees cut ...vertical lines in the horizontal terraces, standing out against the glacier-scarred rock...from below the Ultar glacier the white-washed fort of Baltit looks down on the entire valley....the palace of the Mirs of Hunza* who ruled the kingdom for more than nine hundred years who as we know, fought and murdered each other as readily as any European noble family. *Above it all towers the eight thousand metre high Rakaposhi, dominating the entire valley.*

While Hunza might be the best known of the many fabled valleys of the enormously overpowering landscape known now as Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly the mundane Northern Areas, there are many, many other valleys, each locked behind the soaring walls of an improbably steep and narrow gorge, each opening out to reveal hidden kingdoms of soaring fertile terraces dotted with stone walled villages and pencil thin poplars where a traveller will always be welcome, showered with hospitality and offered every comfort a household can afford. History is everywhere, from Hayward's lonely grave in far off Yasin to the polo fields of the Shandur Pass, the highest in the world.

And it was all still there when we flew in one crisp November day in 2007, skirting the rugged immensity of Nanga Parbat, wave upon massive wave of mountains sharp as obsidian axes slicing into a cloud of whiteness, dipping down past Rakaposhi in PIA's newly purchased faster and higher flying Dash-8 turboprop aircraft, bumping as we slowed along the same ageing tarmac strip, hard by the once famed and famously unpretentious square block buildings that once housed one of the most daring and ambitious rural development programme's the world has seen. As we stepped onto that familiar ground with the halting reluctance of those who know they will see only the remnants of a once brilliant time, I felt the first familiar squirm of the growing gutful of giardia we had both unknowingly imbibed on one of the thronging terraces of the restaurant atop Islamabad's Margalla Hills. It brought me down to earth—with a thump.

It had been one of those extraordinary impromptu evenings that travel sometimes springs upon you, an evening spent in the company of a graciously smiling Shoaib who spoke softly of the power of the people, and his mercurial first cousin and deadly shot, Mahmood, he of the improbable Karachi hunting lodge with its staring trophies, a seeker of record heads and horn as ardent as any of his colonial predecessors, Mahmood and his latest passion, to craft cheap insurance policies for the poor of Pakistan so they too may be free to seek a doctor or a hospital and not be barred because of empty pockets.

Yes, it was all still there, seventy-five thousand square kilometres of mountains and valleys, as so were Biddulph's Dards and their almost overwhelming hospitality, one million of them now, one hundred and twenty thousand households, more than a thousand villages, their once fierce reputation a distant memory, the improbably shining villages lifted from the grind of poverty, from the inevitable annual hunger of spring, a plug of raw opium once the only solace for so many against the gnawing pain of hunger or the listlessness of illness, against the biting cold of winter where every warming twig was used but sparingly; villages where summer cooking fires had been banned in valleys such as Hunza to conserve fuel so that people gorged on fruit and little else; where in winter, families had huddled around a tiny halo of warmth in frigid stone-cold kitchens, where rough-spun winter woollens were always damp; all this lifted out of the trough of despond by Shoaib's brilliantly energetic dreams. All still there, the fading mirs and rajahs, the once powerful pirs and polo-playing village notables, legs now leather booted but once wrapped tightly in thick woollen bandages, protection from the savage bite of an opponent's rugged pony stallion. And such was the nature of their land that there was no word for simply going—you either went up, or you went down.

And of course for those who chanced to survive the scourges of their early years, the wives and children who survived the rigours of childbirth, illness, breaks and bruises, those villagers with their 'wonder' diet of fruit and rough-ground wheat, a little butter, tea or milk, cheese grey from its years of burial, brought out for a wedding, and rarely, oh so rarely, meat, these mountain men lived on to an astonishing age. Skin wrinkled and walnut brown, mahogany, like the tiny old man wrapped in his grey hand-spun and woven Shoka, Chitrali cap and thick-lensed spectacles, sitting in the sun on a low rock wall, who smiled as we strolled down the cobbled road from Baltit fort, and drew two small, wrinkled but deliciously sweet apples from one of his voluminous pockets and offered them. A gift, always the amazing hospitality, nothing withheld, 'it is an honour' he said, hand on heart, 'it is my duty', and so it was. It is times like this that you think, 'No, I do not want to be anywhere else'.

So absolute was the proud poverty in some villages, so meagre the land—three-quarters of all households owned less than 1.5 hectares—that when Shoaib's old friend Ejaz Naik, fresh one day from the prince's helicopter came upon an old man harnessed with his cow, dragging a plough across his narrow field, a challenge even to legs made sturdy by a lifetime of clambering the oxygen-starved heights above his village, he was aghast. *My God*, he cried, *they look like cave men, is this their existence*? It was indeed their existence—Shoaib had deliberately taken his friend to a truly poor and deprived valley. And from this encounter was born Ejaz's determination *to open up the aid floodgates*. When he returned to Islamabad and his job as head of the Economic Affairs Division, one of his first actions had been to remove the prohibition on AKRSP's ability to directly negotiate and accept bilateral aid. This was unprecedented—no other non-governmental organisation had ever been granted this privilege. His bureaucratic colleagues were said to be aghast, but there was nothing they could do. And when the funds began to flow, starting with a million dollars from the Dutch, to be quickly followed by five million from the British, there was no stopping Shoaib.

There were to be many others like Ejaz, who in the years to come would stand by Shoaib no matter what the sceptics later said, no matter the niggling doubts from Shaw's Geneva office, no matter what the Karachi businessmen planned, no matter that the dreaming of the north fell silent. No matter for anyone except for the villagers of the north.

Yes, it was still all there, or was it? For although the town now sprawled beyond the old bazaar in piles of dusty concrete and reinforcing rod, lorries daily plied the Karakorum Highway and the high passes into China, silk and refrigerators now commonplace while fortunes are made by enterprising customs officers, there was something missing, almost as if some vital spark was

gone. And again later, although the lawns of the Gilgit Serena were as green as they had ever been and tea was still served as you sank into the cushions of elegantly woven cane settees, and the stewed apricots at breakfast still had a sediment of sand from the village rooftop drying pads, Gilgit was not the place I remembered in the late 1980s, thrumming with newly awakened energy and interest, the talk of the Islamabad diplomatic cocktail circuit.

When Shoaib arrived in his solitary jeep still shivering from his coldest night ever, and with Tariq Husain set up business in a shop-front in the Gilgit bazaar, change was in the air. No longer a once and future land where each rajah, each mir or mehtar, all of them watchful for familial treachery, each independently equal village off to raid a caravan or to further an occasional feud, trading slaves and apricots, all equally poor, all equally hungry in the poverty of spring, all equally rudderless. Why was this so? Because in one grandiloquent gesture Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had cut away the power structure, the social glue that for better or worse had unified the villagers for centuries. The Northern Areas was in some ways a 'slate wiped clean', history ready to be writ anew. And so it was, all of it, gloriously rewritten, blazing brightly for ten amazing years, until the words faded and it was over.

There is of course one more element, one more distinctive feature that made Shoaib instantly feel at home in the Northern Areas of the 1980s. Shoaib felt as if he had walked out of the future and back into the past, felt the ghost of his grandfather nodding in approval. It was something Chitral's quietly intellectual Masood ul Mulk tossed off in passing, a throw away remark—it was the way the north was still ruled and administered when Shoaib arrived. Across the mountainous entirety of the Northern Areas, the civil service was still supreme. deputy commissioners held court in their valley posts, their rulings law, while in Gilgit the power of the commissioner was almost absolute, or at least, as absolute as it could ever be in this region of independent mountain men. It was a situation that Shoaib instinctively knew how to work. He had once sat on the 'other side'; he knew exactly what that meant.

To all intents and purposes the commissioner and his staff were colleagues, fellow club-men; some had even been his probationers at the Civil Service Academy in Lahore. I had a big advantage, Shoaib happily admitted, the Service still had a certain esprit de corps which meant that we would all go out of our way to be as helpful to each other as we could. The first commissioner for example, four years Shoaib's junior, treated Shoaib with great respect, as a senior in his service. When he found Shoaib needed offices for his new organisation, he ordered the staff of the ailing Northern Areas Transport Corporation (NATCO) to vacate their premises. Shoaib had laughed then because it was somewhat of a backhanded gesture. It was like a godown, a huge empty warehouse when I went there on December 7th. Was it a 'white elephant'? Not at all says Shoaib, not one little bit. With money no object, and the energy of excitement on his side, the offices were quickly refurbished and refurnished. By January 1st we were operating out of the place, Shoaib said with pride. It did not matter that the local electricity service was chancy so that blackouts were a fact of life, that there was a minimal amount of furniture and no heating. Who cared? This rambling office block just over from the old Gilgit airport was to achieve a level of fame and status few could ever have envisioned.

From the outset, Shoaib deliberately set out to keep government 'on side'. He initiated the process of regular briefings held at his own offices, and took government officers with him to the field. They were happy to go. Not only did this save dipping into their own limited travel budgets, later, there was the added prestige of arriving in a helicopter even if it wasn't theirs. As early as 1983, the commissioner in Gilgit remarked he thought the two hundred village organisations established by then were an excellent way to reach the district's twenty-four thousand farmers, and that really, he could see no other way.

So yes, Shoaib's CSP background gave him status and respect amongst the 'establishment' in Pakistan, as it was also to do in India twenty years later. It may well have been one of the factors that influenced Shaw and the Aga Khan, although it was the famous article in *Newsweek* that is said to have really fired the prince's imagination. Shoaib himself admitted that he was surprised to find many *who went out of their way to help in ways they would never have countenanced* while he was still an active member of the service.

Masood ul Mulk, son of that loveliest of old men, Kushamadul Mulk whose green fingers have created an extraordinary hanging garden on the edge of a cliff above the wildly tumbling stream that disgorges from the wooded valleys of the Kaffir Kalash, spoke of Shoaib as a master at keeping the wheels of the programme rolling by knowing instinctively what it was that would ensure government officers at all levels remained on side. Shoaib's life he said in his laconic way has been all about relationships and human networks, he is a past master at working a system where even people at any level from the lowest to the highest ranks of bureaucracy can create almost insuperable blockages. One such man, smiled Masood was a poor and lowly clerk in Chitral who nevertheless controlled the files. You only have to walk into the filing store of a government office and see the mass of dusty folders from which only the filing clerk can ever hope to unearth some ancient file, blow away the dust, and plunk it down on your desk with a secret smile. Such a man can also 'lose' a file or delay its appearance and so block almost anything he wishes if he has been affronted. However and here Masood smiled again, by 'unofficially' making a vehicle available to the clerk each Eid for three days, the files Masood needed always moved through the system with alacrity. And this invisible working of

the system was something that Shoaib taught and practiced, giving a resource-strapped administration whatever support they asked for, and keeping a couple of vehicles at the ready to support a deputy commissioner, a man who in Chitral invariably told important visitors, 'oh yes, AKRSP is a good organisation'. It is something, Masood believes, the Aga Khan Foundation people in Islamabad and Karachi never understood.

While Shoaib was not immune from occasional blunders such as landing in the Aga Khan's helicopter in the traditional Pushtun Sunni heartland of Charsaddah outside Peshawar, he would never have left the powerful commissioner Shakil Durrani and his official party waiting fruitlessly and infuriated on a mountain. The helicopter had been re-routed at the last minute and nobody thought to inform Durrani. This casually thoughtless action turned a friend and supporter into an enemy and a relentless critic. When I asked Shoaib about this incident he had smiled tolerantly, *yes* he said, *Steve* (the new AKRSP General Manager) *made a mistake, poor chap;* as for Durrani, whatever he has done Shoaib holds of little account. Another poor chap whose mistakes can be forgiven. And it is this amazing capacity for forgiveness, for never holding a grudge, for believing he has no enemies, that earns Shoaib the head-shaking admiration of men such as Masood ul Mulk who know they too have enemies, and although they may forgive, like most of us, forgiveness comes at a cost.

With his unwavering belief in the importance of involving government wherever possible, Shoaib was not content only to seek advantage from the past. He also looked to the future. One of his closest friends, Tariq Siddiqi, had been appointed director of the civil service academy in Lahore. In Shoaib's day, probationers were sent to Comilla to experience development under the tutelage of Shoaib's famous mentor, Akhter Hameed Khan. Tariq wanted to continue the practice of 'exposing probationers to the realities of the field', and where better than the Northern Areas in a project run by his best friend, a programme that was also supported by Shoaib's mentor. So during the time Tariq held the top job at the academy, each year, fifteen or twenty probationers would trek up to Gilgit where, as Shoaib said with a smile, *their eyes were opened.*

While some in the Aga Khan Foundation grumbled that it was a waste of precious time and resources, as did a few staff in Gilgit, Shoaib remained completely unconcerned. It was not just a matter of 'buttering up' the establishment either. Good God, he had said when I mentioned this, did anyone really think that? He saw the probationers as part of an ever-expanding network of the converted, who in the future would hold high decision-making positions and who would help rather than hinder the spread of rural support programmes. No, said Shoaib, of course I did not ask the Board and really, I did not know of anyone who objected to having to show the probationers around. Later, when

they were posted out I believe they always remembered their experiences with us, it was the best public relations you could imagine and here he had laughed with just a touch of chagrin, and they got their regulation dose of rural development for a few months. As a result, although the niggling reports of minor establishment spies might have crept onto important desks in the capital, and although there may have been occasional local grumbles, the relationship between AKRSP, a privately funded development organisation that oozed with resources, and the administration, an immensely powerful public service that did not, remained cordial and supportive.

It was yet another reason why things were to go so well.

The Prince

It is never easy to write about a man you have never met, the direct descendent of a thirteen-hundred-year-old dynasty, the embodiment of the beliefs of millions of ardent followers, the absolute spiritual and temporal leader of one of Islam's most vital, secretive, yet outwardly enlightened sects. However, as this chapter unfolds to reveal the golden era in Shoaib's life we find this decisive decade is so closely entwined with the remarkable 49th Ismaili Imam, a prince in his own right, a modern, superbly educated and erudite man who moves with ease amongst the leaders of this world, that some explanation is inevitable.

As the on-line reference libraries of the internet inform us, our story must begin in the later years of the eighth century AD, well after the bitter split between those who elected to follow Ali, the Holy Prophet's cousin and husband to his daughter Fatima, and thus became known as the *Shia* or 'followers' of Ali, and the far larger group, the 'followers of the way' or *Sunni* who supported the caliphate of Abu Bakr. Also relevant to the story is that for most Shia, there is always an 'Imam of the Age' who is the divinely appointed authority on all matters of faith and law in the community and as such is free from error and sin and whose words and deeds are a guide and model for the community to follow. For all Shia, Ali was the First Imam of this divinely appointed line, the rightful successor to the Holy Prophet, whose male descendants through the Prophet's daughter Fatima Zahra become Imams of the Age.

The Ismaili story, in fact, concerns yet another succession dispute, this time over the seventh Shia Imamate. The main body of the Shias supported Musa al-Kazim, the younger son of the sixth Imam, while the breakaway Ismaili element supported Musa's elder brother Ismail ibn Jafar whose demise is surrounded by conjecture. Ismail's supporters were, to say the least, ambitious. By 909 AD the

Ismaili Fatimid leader Ubaydulla had founded an empire where art and science burned brightly and which at its zenith in the eleventh century had Cairo as its capital and included Sicily, the western part of the Arabian peninsula, including the holy cities of Makkah and Madina, and the Mediterranean coast up to Syria.

In 1094, before the authority of the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt crumbled, the Fatimids in Syria and Persia had selected as their Imam a brother of the Egyptian caliph, one Nizar. The Nizaris, also known as the 'Assassins', began seizing territory in northern Persia finally making the legendary fortress of Alamut their home. Eventually crushed between two great rival powers, the Mamluke sultans of Egypt and the invading Mongol armies, the survivors of Alamut went underground, and secretiveness and subterfuge became a survival trait.

The story lapses until the early 1800s when the young and ambitious Ismaili Nizari Imam, Hasan Ali Shah had the honorific title 'Aga Khan' or 'Commanding Chief' bestowed on him and his fortunes restored by the Persian ruler Fath Ali Shah. The Persian Shah also gave one of his daughters, Sarv-i Jahan Khanum in marriage; Hasan Ali could now claim the status of prince of the royal house of Persia.

All went well for Hasan Ali until the old Qajar Shah died. He was succeeded by his grandson Muhammad Shah Qajar who took exception to Hasan Ali Shah, dismissing him immediately from the governorship of Kerman. Hasan Ali fought back but was eventually forced to flee Persia. His confidence still intact, he arrived in Afghanistan in 1842 with a few hundred horsemen having first sent his family to Iraq, which was then a centre of refuge.

In Kandahar, he set about proving his worth to the British who were occupying Afghanistan at the time. Undeterred by the threats of the irate Afghans who vowed to hunt him down, Hasan Ali rode boldly south and placed his services and his horsemen at the disposal of the British General Napier who went on to famously defeat the Sindhis. A lance for hire and eager to consolidate his position, the dashing Aga Khan then helped in the subjugation of the Balochi Mir Sher Khan, sending his brother, Muhammad Baqir Khan and his horsemen to assist the British. He had an adventurous time, once having to escape on a horse from a savage night attack clad only in a nightshirt. Thrown when his horse stumbled, the unconscious Hasan Ali was carried by his men to Hyderabad. Tough and resilient, he apparently recovered quickly and for his services was granted an annual pension of two thousand pounds on the recommendation of his new-found friend Charles Napier, the British conqueror of Sindh.

The Aga Khan's luck continued to hold. The Persians wanted to get their hands on him but the British were not about to hand over a man who had served them so well and whose good offices would almost certainly be of use to them

in India. Exiled, Hasan Ali was obliged to become a permanent resident of India. Accident or masterstroke, the move to India signalled a remarkable change in the fortunes of the Ismaili dynasty.

Hailed as a great leader by the British Raj Sarkar and rewarded with rank, recognition and nobility for amongst other things, his support in suppressing a Muslim rebellion in northwest India in 1887, the Aga Khan became the only religious or community leader in British India granted a personal gun salute. A highly personable man, Hasan Ali became a friend of the future King Edward VII and was addressed by the British as His Highness. He also set about consolidating his position as Imam and as the undisputed leader of the Ismaili diaspora, particularly of the wealthy Indian Ismaili Khojas.

When the first Aga Khan, Hasan Ali, arrived in India the Ismaili Khojas had spread all over Gujarat—some had also moved to Bombay and Muscat—paying their dues to the Jamaat Khana which was the centre of their religious and social life; they lived harmoniously within their society. Their considerable community infrastructure was a boon to the Aga Khan when it came under his direct control, boosting his influence and the resources he could wield. An important community because of the wealth they command and because of the many eminent professionals in their ranks, Ismaili Khojas now probably number several million in India and Pakistan. They have also settled in East and southern Africa, North America (mainly Canada), and Europe. In Pakistan, there is a large Khoja community in Karachi where they are mostly involved in various business enterprises, and as we will see, it is the Karachi Ismaili Khojas who are of significance to this book because of the power they wielded on the Board of the amazing new development organisation Shoaib came to lead.

Perhaps the most publicly famous of all, the 48th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, the Aga Khan III Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah was a founder and first president of the All-India Muslim League, and served as President of the League of Nations from 1937-38. During his reign, the influence, prestige and munificence of the dynasty in the subcontinent continued to rise.

From the 1930s onwards, however, in an extremely astute move which cemented the international nature of the Imamate, the Aga Khan III also quietly arranged the gradual move of the family's headquarters from Bombay to the great estates and houses he set about acquiring in France and Switzerland.

On his death in 1957, a solicitor travelled with his will from London to Geneva where it was read before the assembled family. Falling back on the thirteen-hundred-year-old tradition, the right of each Imam to choose his successor, Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah by-passed his playboy son Prince Aly, which was really of

little surprise, and chose instead Aly's serious-minded son Karim whose mother, Aly's first wife, was the eldest daughter of the 3rd Baron Churston.

Educated in Kenya in East Africa as a child, Karim went on to an exclusive school in Switzerland and America's Harvard University. A serious student, Karim nevertheless carried on the family's interest in sports, skiing for both Turkey and Iran in successive Olympic Games. Prince Karim al-Hussaini—or HH as he is known— became Aga Khan IV on 11 July 1957 at the age of 20. The title 'His Highness' was granted by Queen Elizabeth II of the UK in 1957 and 'His Royal Highness' by the Shah of Iran in 1959. The prince's decorations include a KBE from the UK, and the French Legion of Honour, and many others bestowed by various European, African, and Middle Eastern countries. He is also the recipient of at least 17 honorary doctorates from the world's best universities as well as nearly 30 major awards and medals.

Apart from the immense corporate wealth of the Ismaili Imamat, the Aga Khan's personal wealth has been estimated at almost $1 billion. A serious man and committed to using his wealth and influence to build modern institutions to improve the quality of life of the Ismaili community; to foster positive relations between people of different races and faiths; and to foster and pursue development, education, interracial harmony, and faith in religion, in 1977, he established the largest architectural award in the world to revitalize creativity in Islamic societies. Both Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology now have substantial programmes supported by an Aga Khan endowment.

All this, however, is just interesting background information that helps us to better understand just what the involvement and support of this prince, the founder and chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), one of the largest private development networks in the world, meant to a man like Shoaib Sultan Khan. With a focus on countries of the Third World, network member agencies include universities in Pakistan and Central Asia; a trust for culture and a fund for economic development; planning and building services; microfinance; health and education services; an institute for development studies; and of key importance to this book, the Aga Khan Foundation and the programme that became its flagship in the 1980s, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, whose flame once burned brighter than any other of those now on the AKDN list.

The Aga Khan Foundation is described as the principal grant-making agency for social development with the Shia Ismaili Imamat. The Foundation is funded directly by the Aga Khan who takes a special interest in new programme initiatives. The Foundation also receives support from the Ismaili community at large and has programmes in at least eleven countries in the Third World, mainly in South and Central Asia and East Africa. It also has active support branches in the UK, Portugal, Canada and the USA. The Foundation may choose to provide grants or funding to non-governmental organisations that share the same goals, may help to create new civil service organisations, or may also choose to manage projects directly.

If you had chanced to stroll along the Avenue de la Paix one day in the early 1980s you might have seen a well if conservatively dressed man who nevertheless exuded a certain flamboyance, an Englishman in fact, hurrying off to some meeting or other. That man might well have been Robert d'Arcy Shaw, Isobel's husband in those years, one of the small high-flying band who made the prince's ideas work. His letter-head on the stationary of the prince's Foundation read 'Director of Special Programmes' which meant he was the Foundation's 'ideas man'. As had his boss, gentleman and General Manager Guillame de Spoelberch, Shaw had cut his teeth as a field man in the prestigious Ford Foundation.

A man who made things happen, Shaw worked hard behind the scenes, recruiting the best professionals he could find, connecting important people to the project, cajoling support from private and public funding agencies, arranging all-important public relations events, ensuring the world's 'great and good' flew with Shoaib in his helicopter, watching while he wrought his magic, gazing in disbelief at some of the incredible schemes that simple village folk had built; and in a master stroke, persuading the World Bank to undertake a series of independent evaluations, something they had never done before for a private organisation.

Even in the measured tones of a World Bank report it was clear to see that the normally conservative and understating evaluation team was won over to a man. It was perhaps Shaw's finest moment.

After this there was no stopping. In his own quiet way, working as he did behind the scenes and largely out of sight, Shaw was as essential to the success of AKRSP as was Shoaib. He was one of the 'inner team'. He also shared the prince's view that the existing, mainly voluntary, Imamat Institutions of the Northern Areas would be overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of work the future would demand, and with traditional systems in decline, government agencies overtaxed and overextended, and the Karakorum Highway about to open up the north to the world, a radical solution was required. It was this. Shaw would work to create a brand new organisation of a type never seen before, a private organisation registered under the Pakistan's Companies Act, staffed by a team of world class experts, and overseen by a Board of Directors chosen solely on merit. This was a remarkable divergence from the past where Imamat institutions had been inevitably registered under the Social Welfare Law. This

startling move meant that innovation could flourish at every level including management and governance.

And so the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme was born, a programme that the prince had instructed should work with all the disparate religious communities of the Northern Areas and Chitral, a programme that had three very clear aims—to double per capita income within ten years; to develop a replicable model; and to create self-starting and self-managing local institutions that would weather the passage of time. All that was needed was a field man of unique skills and experience who could carry the programme in the field, and back in Geneva, a man who would work at the other end of the organisational axis, work behind the scenes ensuring that everything that was needed in the field would be on hand exactly when it was required. Shaw was the 'other' man.

Interestingly enigmatic and unlike Isobel his former wife, author of at least six travel and trekking books, Shaw was the invisible half, and today, unlike Shoaib, has simply dropped out of sight. If you happen to try and seek him out on the internet, while there are hundreds of citations for Shoaib, there is but a single citation for Shaw, that of General Manager of AKF, a position he no longer holds. While Shoaib worked in the full blaze of the world's attention, Shaw stayed in the shadows. And in the shadows, in the background he remains.

The prince also played a crucially important role. Not only did he lend Shoaib the mantle of his approval and so ensured the loyalty of all Ismaili villagers, he also set out a base-line philosophy for the new organisation. It was this. Neither AKDN nor AKF for that matter are involved in philanthropy or entrepreneurship. Instead, he argued, the new organisation should be based on *the mandate of the office of Imam to improve the quality of worldly life for the concerned communities*, and by this the prince meant not only Ismaili, but all communities. The idea was not to offer a handout, but to offer the same chance, the same hand-up to everyone regardless of religious affiliation. And to a man to whom great wealth and influence is commonplace, when it came to deciding how best to improve the worldly life of the mountain people of the Northern Areas, there would have been no need at all to ask his bankers if he could afford to bet three-quarters of a million dollars a year on Shoaib's ability to pull the 'rabbit out of the hat' and provide the villagers with an amazing hand-up. It was a small amount to risk against the chance of revitalizing the poverty-ravaged mountain villagers, the indomitable 'Dards', of northern Pakistan.

It was still an extraordinary bet to make because development projects anywhere else you cared to look in the world had by the 1980s been little more than useless money sponges, soaking up resources and producing little in return. But it was not to be the only extraordinary act by this seriously thoughtful man, although then again perhaps it was the most natural solution for a man known to

his followers as a prince of the technical age. When confronted with the need to solve the sheer difficulty of movement across that incredibly inaccessible mountain area, a problem that threatened to slow the almost impossibly hectic and excitingly headlong initial pace that Shoaib had set, the most natural thing to do for a prince whose every wish was absolute, or almost so, and whose grandfather was once weighed in diamonds by his people, was to think of that most improbable of answers to travel in a land where people were accustomed to inching their way across icy glaciers or over dangerously swaying rope bridges; he would buy a helicopter. And if Shoaib was flabbergasted, if the businessmen and industrialists of Karachi, and AKF's office managers in Karachi and Islamabad were at once flummoxed and dismayed when such a machine was put at Shoaib's everyday disposal, the villagers of the north were not. To them the helicopter was not seen as an extravagance, it was instead a symbol that made them proud, a symbol that also sent the message that Shoaib was the prince's man, that he was someone they could trust and honour.

And in any case, in their view Shoaib had already earned it.

The Impossible Dream

There is a time in some people's lives when they reach an apogee, a pinnacle of achievement they will never reach again. The perch on top of the pinnacle is precarious—very few are able to stay there for very long. Some slip and plummet in spectacular free-fall; some, after a time, begin to gently drift downwards until they plateau out at a level of lesser greatness; others simply vanish quietly as if they had never been. However the story ends, even for the most humble, the thrill of that first amazingly swift climb, the throng of passionate followers, the heart-warming joy in the faces of the people, the incredible recognition by the world's movers and shakers, well, enjoy it to the full while you can because for most it is a one-time event—it will never be repeated.

And so it was for Shoaib. Although he did go on to achieve greatness elsewhere it would never quite be the same as it was during the Gilgit years. Those years were the golden pinnacle, the ultimate triumph, the vindication of all he believed in. Never again would Shoaib be able to focus his energies to such effect; never again would he so casually command so many resources, be so unassumingly powerful, so unsparingly energetic, so revered by the people, so much a part of their lives, so admired by the world at large, leaders and journeymen alike. Never again would he be the centre of so much attention, be so rewarded, so spectacularly successful.

Fifty years or more had passed since the final demise of the Great Game, the century-long rivalry between Russia and Britain for control of Central Asia, years in which the Northern Areas had slipped quietly into the backwaters of historical memory. Now in 1981, Gilgit is once again a key player in the new 'great game'. Needing to secure its new strategic highway to China and to continue to fortify its position against Indian claims to the former territories of the Maharajah of Kashmir, successive governments of Pakistan are willing to welcome any initiative that will add to the area's security and development. At the same time, agencies of the West still think of the spread of communism as a major threat to their world, preferring to use proxies to pursue both armed and peaceful actions to stem the spread. Areas of great poverty are fertile ground for the ideas of communism and so, as many development initiatives have failed miserably, any programme that seemed to be succeeding attracts immediate attention.

And then there came about the conjunction of four of the most unlikely people you could ever imagine, and even more unlikely what it was that would result. Firstly there was an aging ascetic visionary, an often acerbic dreamer, one of the most remarkable men of his age, Akhter Hameed Khan; and then there was his acolyte, Shoaib Sultan Khan, the arch-implementer, an inspired and inspiring man of amazing energy and the rare ability of being able to turn dreams into reality; and then add one of Britain's best, a well educated, well-connected 'operator', a behind-the-scenes ideas man who makes things work, able to connect people and resources, Robert d'Arcy Shaw; and finally there was the unlikeliest of the four, a prince and Imam, an inspirational leader concerned for the welfare of his people and the world's poor but with his feet firmly grounded in the business principles of the modern world—His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan. To each and every one of these men, each one a leader in his own right, can be attributed the trail of glory blazed by the programme they conceived, gave life to and supported to the hilt, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP).

There are many people who do not understand the most important role of a leader, of a chief executive but it is this—to impart and provide the spirit of an organisation. If a leader is a beacon of honesty and good will and is not in any way mean-spirited an organisation will shine, and even more, will be capable of achieving amazing results. And so it was with AKRSP, none of the four very different but very remarkable men who were involved in bringing the organisation to life and giving it support, none were mean-spirited. However, only a few of those we met and interviewed understood the importance of this crucial quartet. Most had a far simpler explanation, believing AKRSP to have been the creation of two men, the brainchild of the Aga Khan and of Shoaib Sultan Khan who brought it forth. *He gave us real leadership* was a phrase we

were to hear wherever we went, whoever we talked to; all of them knew the gift that had been given to them, leadership.

Shoaib's talent, his gift if you like was to be able to attract like moths to a candle a group of extraordinarily talented and dedicated young men and women who wanted to believe they could make a difference, and whom Shoaib inspired to believe that there were no limits, that they could do anything providing they put above all else the interests of the people they served. Shoaib also took on board government officers who had spent years trudging along in the confines of their drab technical routines and turned them into super-heroes capable of engineering or supporting the incredible feats that village people were certain they could achieve. He drew to his person simple men and women from the Ismaili Jamaat Khanas and the mosques of Shia and Sunni villages; drew out their long hidden talents and united them in hope and in splendid visions of their own devising, even turning some of them into leaders and activists. He took a depressed and resource-deprived people whose life had begun to erode or stagnate and added a few essential ingredients as if he were adding tiny dollops of some missing but essential trace element. Shoaib was an alchemist. He turned grey drudgery into golden hope.

It was not so much that the organisation he created filled the theoretical power vacuum that some believed had been created when feudal rule was finally abolished. It was instead Shoaib's unique ability to free and unleash the power that lay within every mountain villager—a power they did not really know they had. This is what Shoaib did. This was his genius if you like. This is how so much was achieved in so short a time.

For all great ventures, there is inevitably a 'legend of the fall' and so it is for Shoaib and the organisation that grew out of the dreams of four very different men. However, there was a difference because for Shoaib, Gilgit was not so much a place and AKRSP not so much an organisation, they became the very essence of himself, part of his inner being if you like, something perhaps only Akhter Hameed Khan, who had studied the mystic side of Islam, might have understood.

And although Shoaib did leave Gilgit and the organisation of his heart, it was not just a physical departure; it was a kind of death. One day, sitting in the wide-windowed room that stretched across the front of the house at Aga Khan Road, Falaknaz House, Shoaib began to speak with so much muted emotion, said so softly I had to strain to hear, *you know Noel, I would never have left voluntarily, never.* How could he leave something he loved and cherished with all his being? Well, it is a soiled and complicated story, one where implacable honesty loses out to devious dishonesty, a story of a man who philosophically lived in another age, a man of exemplary honesty and amazing endurance who

despite this was no match for the schemers and plotters who brought him down, a story where everybody hurt, everybody lost.

One early winter's day in late November, sitting up beside a winter-stilled irrigation canal near the small town of Garam Chashma three hours up the valley from Chitral, trees already bare of leaves, we sat talking with a group of cheerful village men. We knew them all well, Mohammad Wali, Durdana Shah, and Amir Wali, and because we were old friends they spoke freely. They were all happy well-set men, confident in their own abilities, with no need at all to dissemble. They spoke of Shoaib *like a house lighting up with electricity when he came to Yorjogh.* They spoke of being taught to work together, to dream and then to get out and make those dreams a reality; they spoke of unity and integrity and the value of true partnerships and of fulfilling commitments; they spoke of being taught tactics and rules, and that poor, ordinary people who had never thought of banks or of earning interest could save.

We know, they said finally, *that our Imam, our prince gave him guidelines, but it was the GM who made it all work: it was Shoaib Sahib who taught us that the impossible is possible.*

And amazing as it may sound, so it is to these small cheerfully tough mountain men of Yorjogh whose villages are now lit by the electricity of their own microhydels, whose crops are irrigated by new canals they hewed themselves out of the cliffs and mountainsides, whose rushing torrents are bridged by spans they placed and built with their own labour, these and many, many more schemes. Now they sit and talk of building two hundred kilometres of road and a bridge that will connect Yorjogh with Tajikistan and the markets of Central Asia, of new forest plantations to renew their wood supplies, of larger flood management works to protect their precious lands from snow melt and more, much more.

Our dreams fill the future they said, *yes, we now know the impossible is possible, and yes, Shoaib Sahib is in our hearts; he was more than a General Manager, he was our friend and we will remember this to the grave.*

The Prince's Jeweller

Shoaib makes no apologies about the essential nature of the Aga Khan's support and laughs saying *oh yes, at the start I used His Highness's name shamelessly; after all, the whole support programme was his dream.*

Musarrat has a slightly different viewpoint, quoting the prince as once saying *yes, I gave the money but Shoaib spent it like a jeweller, setting fine stones, diamonds, into the very best of jewellery...he made the money worth so much more.* Everyone believed the Aga Khan trusted Shoaib implicitly and gave him his full support.

Shoaib believes the prince was always entirely candid—that not only was the area important to him because of the Ismaili population, it was also an area of high geo-political importance. So as Shoaib said, *Western donors were more than ready to lend support and were very pleasantly surprised and delighted when they found they had something very worthwhile to support.* The prince, said Shoaib, *was always, very clear, always totally adamant that if his community were to have peace and a sustainable existence it would simply not work by having Ismaili 'islands of development', areas of tranquillity, peace and good governance surrounded by a sea of discontent. Any programme would have to be an all or nothing affair, would have to aim to develop in an economic sense, the entire area regardless of religious affiliation.*

Of course, there were setbacks along the way, including the implacable opposition of the glowering Sunni religious leaders of the valleys of Chilas, but none more terrible than the massacre of five hundred or more Shia villagers of Gilgit by a howling Sunni *lashkar* who swarmed over the passes from Kohistan and some of the southern valleys in the dreadful summer of 1988. However, in 1981, nothing could have been further from anyone's mind.

For the Aga Khan, an all-inclusive development programme marked a radical departure from the past. Until AKRSP began, said Shoaib, all Jamati Ismaili programes had focused on the social sector and had been almost exclusively Ismaili. Shoaib talked of the Aga Khan's grandfather starting education programmes in the Northern Areas in the 1940s with money derived from the jubilee celebrations. These were followed by health centres. Now there was to be an economic programme for the entire area. Shoaib says that of course he had been very curious why they should want a non-Ismaili to head the programme, for even though he was known to be extremely tolerant and accepting of other people's beliefs and had no worries about the more sophisticated groups, he could not help wondering how well he would get on with the Ismaili village communities in the northern mountains. How would he fare?

Famously well as it so happened; too well from the point of view of a few Ismaili leaders, both in the north and in Karachi.

Although there are those who point towards the historical secretiveness of the Ismailis, and conjecture about hidden agendas, Shoaib gives short shrift to such notions. It was always all up front and above board, he believes,

programme for the entire region, although admitting there had been other programmes advertised as being inclusive which had ended up located in predominantly Ismaili enclaves. The new programme was to be different: selecting Shoaib as general manager was in itself a huge departure from the past. However, as Shoaib freely admits, he wanted to hit the ground running and the easiest way to do this was to start off in Ismaili villages. *Oh yes indeed*, he said grinning, *I invoked His Highness's name again and again.* He was in a hurry and had no time to waste. He needed people to trust him in an instant, trust the very radical and different ideas he was propounding, trust that he could and would deliver on his promises. They did and the rest, as they say, is history.

Except for providing a helicopter and occasionally injecting a hobby-horse topic or two, the prince left Shoaib to get on with it all. Shoaib says the Aga Khan would say *look, I have only got these three conditions, and all I ask is that wherever you take this programme, the three conditions must always be met.* The three conditions were simple and straightforward and Shoaib was more than happy to comply. They were in fact, conditions he would probably have imposed himself—that the government of Pakistan and in particular the Northern Areas administrators should be fully supportive: they must actively want the programme to take place; secondly, that the budding political leaders of any area must be fully involved and this did not mean merely passive acceptance, they would need to seek out Shoaib and ask for the programme to be implemented in their areas; and lastly, that the religious leaders of any area should fully accept and support the programme. Wherever these three conditions were met, the Aga Khan said, he expected Shoaib to take the programme. To Shoaib, these were the very best of instructions—His Highness had set a very liberal framework and it was up to him to fill in the squares.

Did the Aga Khan or for that matter, anyone in Geneva or Karachi have any idea of the nature of the new and radically different programme Shoaib was about to set free in the north? I asked the question. For a while, Shoaib was lost in thought *well*, he finally laughed, *I think some of them had a very vague sort of idea, but Bob Shaw probably knew more than most of the others.* But even Shaw was taken by surprise.

When Shaw had worked for the Ford Foundation he co-authored a book with Ted Owens called *Development Rediscovered*. The nub of the book, said Shoaib, was that successful development hinged on the formation of very small, very high-powered groups of development experts who would somehow 'usher in' grassroots development. This is what Shaw set out to introduce into the Northern Areas, a small group of first class experts led by Shoaib. His Highness had been persuaded to provide seven hundred thousand dollars a year to cover all programme operating costs; that was it. With this the group was to be turned loose in the north to work their magic.

Shoaib smiled at the audacity of it all and chuckled *you know Noel, Shaw and company really had no idea, no concept or experience about how we were to do it.* However, the resources he offered were not tied at all. Shoaib could do what he liked. The only proviso—one that Shoaib says was almost an afterthought although later it would become embedded in the operational credo of AKRSP—was that the group should aim to introduce changes that would double household income within ten years. As far as Shoaib is concerned, that his programme easily achieved this goal is secondary to all the other marvellous achievements of the decade, none more so than the new-found confidence of the village people in their own abilities.

To the total surprise of a new and still fairly tentative Board of Directors, three months after he arrived in Gilgit, Shoaib flew down to Karachi and presented a very radical operational plan. It caught them napping, but after a few rather limp protests they had little option but to reluctantly give Shoaib the go ahead. They had been outmanoeuvred. Not everyone was happy.

In 1980, the Aga Khan Foundation had fielded a five man team including Robert (Bob) Shaw to travel the Northern Areas and come up with some development ideas. Sahib Nadir Khan, a small but vital man, a Chitrali lawyer with a sharp mind and memory, can still name each of these original fact-finding team members. They did not have an easy job. Hah, he said, as we sat and drank hot soup in front of a fire in Masood ul Mulk's beautiful new bungalow with the great iced-cake shape of Tirich Mir straight up the valley, cooperatives had a very bad reputation by then in Pakistan so the team had a very difficult job. Roads blocked by landslides had not made their journey any easier. After a final dinner and a meeting with government representatives said this compact mountain lawyer with the smile of a man who has seen out many a tediously-protracted case in the Chitrali courts, we rejected cooperatives but accepted development. Shaw came back two months later, registered a company with government, found Shoaib Sahib and then everything began to happen, and he lifted his hands and shrugged as if to say 'and everyone knows what happened then'.

Shoaib understood the problem that cooperatives had become. In East Pakistan he had seen how a very few influential people had managed to take over the cooperative movement and make it work for their exclusive benefit. In the Northern Areas, by insisting on the involvement of every member in village organisation meetings, and of all transactions happening in a completely open and transparent manner, inner circles could not form. The domination of a village organisation by a secretive and powerful executive never happened.

Sahib Nadir Khan makes no secret of his admiration for Shoaib. In his view, His Highness excepted of course, no one else has ever done more for Chitral than Shoaib. Sahib Nadir Khan believes His Highness *had his eye on Shoaib for a very long time*. A student in Karachi in 1968—*I was only a boy* he said smiling his clever lawyer's smile, *but I remember it as if it was only yesterday*. What Sahib Nadir Khan was talking about was the time the Ismailis had cleverly timed a petition to government for land on which to build a hospital in Karachi with the visit of their prince. The lawyer snapped his fingers *and Shoaib, who was the Commissioner, gave the land just like that and of course His Highness noticed*. Shoaib smiles, says *Sahib Nadir Khan is a nice man but I certainly did not have the power to give land to anyone, however I did support the whole process as Commissioner*. As for being noticed by the prince, *who knows* Shoaib shrugs, and then he smiled. It was a nice idea.

An Ismaili and a local member of the Board of Directors for seven years from 1989, Sahib Nadir Khan says he was one of those who went to Shoaib and begged him not to leave. *Just look at AKRSP now* and he shrugged dismissively, it is a shadow of what it was when Shoaib was here…*it is very sad for all of us*. A man who liked to talk and who talked with a snap to his voice, Sahib Nadir Khan shook his head and said, oh yes, a man like him will not easily be found again, and then he laughed and told this story.

Once in the high Chitrali village of Brep a fierce dispute erupted between the villagers and Shoaib's programme officer in Chitral, an SSK man to the core, one of the old guard from Daudzai days, Feroz Shah, active still in a rural support programme in Punjab. Passions often run high in the mountains and this time the villagers became so incensed, felt so wronged they impounded some AKRSP vehicles. *I was consulted*, said the small lawyer, a ball of barely contained energy fidgeting on the edge of his chair *and made some suggestions but Feroz Shah and all the staff were feeling very insulted*. Nobody wanted to back down.

Shoaib happened to be on tour and arrived when passions were about to boil over. *After telling the staff not to worry* laughed the lawyer, and waving his hand as if it contained a magic wand *you know he just went and without any fuss at all he accepted the demands of the villagers and the problem was solved. This was an amazing thing for me*. Shoaib, said our Chitrali lawyer, had not thought about personal pride or prestige for a minute, *he would always say, 'let the people decide' and did not stumble over his own pride. It was a lesson for us all. He had pride of course but it was a different sort of pride to ours.*

The small, tough mountain men of the north are deceptive. A smiling, totally friendly people, their incredible hospitality and inevitable warm welcome hides a warrior spirit and a passionately fierce temper that can run white hot. As

one of our Chitrali friends once said, in the valleys, the difference between an argument and a fight was an intake of breath, and so, while most of the meetings—the dialogues—Shoaib and his team held were peaceable affairs, some very definitely were not.

One of Shoaib's 1983 'Notes for the Record' describes where neighbouring groups in Nagar, the area across the river from Hunza needed to agree that a canal was what they all wanted. But was it? Had a list of beneficiaries been agreed; had compensation for those who might have to give up some land to allow clear passage for the canal been negotiated and agreed; was everyone on side? It seems they were not, not by a long chalk. Accompanied as he very often was, by the deputy commissioner and the man who had effected Shoaib's remarkable secret initial *entre* to Nagar one snowy December night, Shoaib had arrived at the meeting on the heels of several other far quieter and totally successful dialogues, blissfully unaware of what would ensue.

Syed Yahya Shah was a reformer who had once spent two years in prison in the bleak valley of Chilas at the Rajah of Nagar's behest for stirring up the people. A man of religion and now a local politician, *it was only me who broke the feudalism of Nagar*, he said, refreshingly unabashed at establishing his credentials. I immediately liked this man whom Shoaib describes as 'my most important convert'. And this perhaps is true, for it was Syed Yahya who spirited Shoaib into the Shia stronghold of Nagar, and allowed the programme to break out into the non-Ismaili world. At odds for centuries with the men of Hunza, Syed Yahya knew the people of Nagar were far from docile.

One of those men whose aura of calm happiness seems to surround them like a glow of warmth, Syed Yahya had sipped the tea we had offered and smiled, *you know that day* (when he had spirited Shoaib into Nagar) *the valley was full of snow and we ate nothing all day but it was so successful we didn't mind. Our people were tough, illiterate and wild, they fought and lied and were deceitful*, he said, warming to his theme, his voice pitched so we had to listen, *but they would gather and accept his message*, and here he smiled and shrugged as if to say, 'who knows how God chooses to work', *people thought he might be an angel, a gift from God.*

And there were other old men who said this very thing, men such as Subedar Faraj Khan, one of those wonderfully ageless men of the mountains, who said in his slow steady way, *in spite of the 'heli' or his jeeps he would come by foot and would talk as an equal. He sat down with us on the ground, we who could not wash in the winter, and he hugged us despite our dirt, and he never took tea or any food, and he never sat high on a chair in any village*, and here he paused, and looked at me and then nodded to himself, *we didn't know but it looked as if he was a 'farishta', a person from God, an angel*. Mysticism and mountains go together, but this idea, that

Shoaib was more than just a man, was at the same time a burden and a blessing. Angels can fall so easily but until they do people tend to follow them. But back to the very un-angelic meeting and its outcome.

The meeting had grown increasingly unruly, until as Tariq Husain later wrote, *the Sikandarabad troops told the Togdas hotheads in no uncertain terms to mind their own business. The deputy commissioner then made a dignified attempt to quieten things down*—after all this was his patch and law and order was his responsibility—*but the momentary quiet was claimed by a 'Nilth interjector'* (a villager), *tall and dark with a jutting beard, flowing white shawl flung across his shoulders, a white cap perched at a jaunty angle on his head, this member of the 'House of Nagar' stepped into the centre of the gathering and pronounced to the world, 'this channel will not be built'.*

Well, that did it, claim and counter-claim were flung across the gathering and insults traded liberally, appeals for calm from the Pope (Syed Yahya), *and Caesar* (the deputy commissioner) *went unheeded.* To cut a long story short, the police inspector and his men had closed ranks around the deputy commissioner as stones began to fly and fists swung wildly while Shoaib, as calm and unconcerned as he always was and with most of his management team laughing fit to bust, quietly assured those who would listen that AKRSP was in no hurry to help start any project at all. Adding perhaps it was a good idea if the villagers settled their disputes before asking him to come again.

The deputy commissioner, talking over the top of a huddled ring of edgy policemen, tried his best to weigh in with a few stern comments and offered to mediate—he knew he was expected to do something—but eventually joined the others in *beating a hasty and not very dignified retreat.* It was, of course, not the last time something like this was to happen. *But* Shoaib said laughing, *we were never the target and sometimes it took people quite a while to work out their differences, but you know, almost all of them did, even if it took several years.*

In the beginning Shoaib says, more often than not, when he had set out the 'three principles', the villagers would respond by saying 'no, no, you are the Sahib, you tell us what we should do'. Shoaib, or one of his team, would sigh and reply 'no, we are not going to tell you anything, you have to decide this for yourselves'. Maybe the villagers were simply testing Shoaib: did he really mean what he had said? Were they really free to set their own objectives, could they really select their 'dream project', one they had thought about and talked about for years around a winter kitchen fire, under the summer shade of a great walnut tree, a project that would enhance their material well-being as little else had before? Once they realised Shoaib said exactly what he meant the ball started rolling, sometimes remarkably quickly. But then, sometimes it would come to an abrupt halt.

The village of Passu is one of the last before you start to climb up to the high plateau that leads on to the Khunjerab pass, the gateway to China. Passu's new Village Organisation had seemingly selected as its all-important 'productive physical infrastructure' project, some flood protection works. Shoaib arrived for the final 'third dialogue', and as was his custom, patiently went over everything he previously said, how the whole idea was not just to undertake a project but to build an institution, to identify something that would bring them all together and benefit everyone. And then, in a sequence so unerringly repetitive, in village meeting after village meeting, Shoaib began to talk through the costs and benefits of the project they had submitted. *How he did it, why he never became bored I just do not know* was the universal comment of those who had been with him. And then there was a movement as if the waters of a pond had suddenly been disturbed—a villager slowly rose to his feet, tilted his pakhol (flat woolen cap), rubbed his head, cleared his throat and spoke.

Yes, the project was quite good, he agreed, but it would really only benefit those who lived by the river. If the village wanted to do something that benefited everyone, then they should ask GM Sahib for help to bring a canal from Bathura. The meeting began to hum like a disturbed beehive. Some shouted that this was foolish talk because they had tried and failed to do just this for thirty years, many times and all to no avail; others shouted back that they should just shut up because it could be done, where was their courage? Shoaib smiled at the memory, said *so I simply aborted the dialogue and said 'all right, it seems like you should all start talking again until you are satisfied'.* The smile had remained on Shoaib's face and you could see how happy the memory had made him as he said, *and you know Noel, if you go to Passu you will see an amazing thing, an impossible channel and a whole new village.* He had sat back then and accepted a cup of soup, glowing with unassuming fatherly pride as if to say 'look at what village people can achieve if only they believe they can'. The impossible became possible.

But mountain men can be supremely stubborn, they believe they have time on their side, and so occasionally it took years before everyone agreed; but Shoaib never once moved on until they had.

Much has been said about the Board of Directors, but what really were they on about, were they nurturers or nemesis, when did it all begin? Curiously, Sahib Nadir Khan with his lawyer's view on life also maintained that the Board was not legally formed until 1984 when Ramzan Merchant officially became chairman. Other sources suggest, however, that if it was not a *de jure* body, it was certainly in existence *de facto* as early as 1982 when Shoaib was interviewed in Karachi. Whatever the case, right from the beginning the Board of Directors (BoD), caught between what they thought their prince wanted them

to do and an inability to oppose or control Shoaib, became increasingly confused and irritated to find themselves asked to do little more than rubber stamp what seemed to those captains of industry, Shoaib's very vague and very general plans. That the programme turned out to be *a runaway success* did not help. However, as Sahib Nadir said, his infectious grin making us smile with him, *in those early days, no one on the Board would dare to oppose him. We knew he was well educated although he did not speak about it; he was also far-sighted and earnest and had not the slightest interest in personal wealth, and a very big reputation.* His Highness had also been totally clear about his own support, and Bob Shaw and the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva were behind Shoaib. The Board found themselves between a rock and a hard place; accustomed to getting their own way, some of them did not like this at all.

But outgunned, outmanoeuvred, and thoroughly bemused, there was little that the assembled Karachi businessmen and other influential people could do except to sit back and either enjoy the ride, or bide their time. One of those who set out to enjoy the ride happened to be the first chairman, the late Ramzan Merchant whom Shoaib describes as 'a delightful old gentleman'. Ramzan was totally supportive and he had every reason to be. Once, when the prince had asked Shoaib whether Ramzan should join them at a private breakfast, Shoaib had replied 'of course'; and then later when Ramzan and Shoaib had received His Highness's warmest accolades after a presentation at the prince's Aiglemont establishment, moved to tears Ramzan had whispered to Shoaib 'God bless you'. The prince's approval meant everything to Ramzan—there could have been nothing better. Ramzan made sure Shoaib was repaid in kind.

So, having sent the best six-man team they could recruit to the north, apart from having to scrutinize expense vouchers, the Board expected that was more or less that—for quite some time. They seemed to have had no idea what they had let loose. As Shoaib said quietly one day, the twinkle in his eye acknowledging that he was about to understate things a little, *I have to say the Board was a little surprised and really, was totally unprepared to hear what I had to say. They thought those five or six people that had been recruited would just go up* (to Gilgit) *and that would be it, that just as Shaw and Owen had theorized, they would achieve everything, and what is this, what is this retinue of people who had to be in the field here and there.* They were in for a rude awakening.

The operational plan Shoaib took to the Board was a distillation of all that he had done until then, Daudzai with a slightly different spin, Mahaweli taken to the mountains, the fundamental ideas and ideals of Comilla. Shoaib was talking about a concept we now know as 'social mobilisation', and for that as he said, *you needed people on the ground, you needed social organisation units, you needed people to go out and talk—the famous three dialogues—you needed people, social organisers, to help the villagers achieve their goals,* and even if Shaw and Owen thought it to be possible, *not even I could hope* he had laughed, *to organise a million people, one hundred thousand households with a team of five.* Desk men can think like this, but not if you are in the field, not if you have to deal with the mountains of the north.

Shoaib did not present a plan these captains of industry could readily understand; he presented a strategy. He says he tried hard to explain but no one seemed to really understand— where was the detail, they asked? And what was all this about letting villagers finalise the plan, pencil in all the details? The Board members shook their heads. This was very different, radical even, very hard to accept. These were men used to being in control; they did not expect to be asked to simply sit back and let others make decisions—especially not villagers. Shoaib can talk about his famous 'three principles' endlessly and with passion, and always with a consistency, a sameness that even some of his most ardent followers have said became mesmerizing, boring almost, talk as if he simply switched on an internal audio machine, producing with unvarying exactness, exactly the same message in village meeting after village meeting—the only way to unleash the latent power that exists in any village, no matter how poor, is for people to get together as a group. This is what he tried to explain to the Board.

And while he spoke dismissively about the uselessness of the concept of self-help—for how could people help themselves if they had no resources and no idea how to organise—self-organisation was a *sine qua non*, a fundamental. Nothing would happen unless village people met and agreed to work together to achieve goals they themselves had set. He could show them how to do it but they would have to actually do it themselves. If they didn't, he would simply walk away until they finally could get together and work together. Sometimes agreement was achieved immediately, sometimes it took a long time; in the village of Mogh in Chitral, it took ten years. But when they did finally settle their differences and decide to work together to achieve a common goal, it all worked like magic and a canal was built in no time at all. This is what Shoaib meant—the power of this village was finally unleashed.

The second principle was equally radical. Shoaib argued that unless and until the managerial and productive skills of village people were upgraded they would not be able to move forward and they would be easy prey to outsiders. To the confusion of some of the very practical men who sat on the Board, Shoaib was not talking about the technical and vocational skills which are usually at the top of any development list of things to do, but the skills that allow a group to work effectively together in unity, and achieve a common goal.

His final principle immediately had heads nodding in agreement, for if there was one thing the men he was addressing understood it was the power of money. *Capital is power*, Shoaib had said, *so we have to find ways for even the poorest of villagers to start generating their own capital through savings.*

And of course we know this happened, rupee by rupee until the whole became a mouth-watering amount, more than two hundred million rupees 'dead money' in a way as except for interest, the villagers gained little advantage. How best to use this huge sum taxed Shoaib and his staff for years. Credit programmes came and went and still the savings grew—they had become a point of pride, a symbol of village unity, far more than just money, savings showed the world what poor villagers could do. Long after Shoaib's day was done, the Board's decision to shift the savings sideways to underpin a new bank is seen by Shoaib as one of the two interventions that have brought AKRSP down. It is also a solution that causes most village people to curl their lips in disdain—in a way they feel betrayed. And perhaps they have been.

But that was the distant, dismal future. Right now the immediate future is beginning to light up as Shoaib sets out his three principles to a bewildered Board. To their discomfort he gave them a programme that was not based on achieving physical goals but human ones. His was a socio-economic programme and its goal was to unleash the power of the people. They accepted it. They had little choice even though what Shoaib had really said was 'you do not have to understand what I am about to do, just accept it, just sit back and enjoy the ride'. For when Shoaib had stood up and given his presentation to the Board he knew that his ideas would work. *Oh yes, I knew they would work* he said, laughing at the memory of it all, *in fifty-five days we had held fifty-five dialogues*—the ideas were spreading like wildfire. You could hear the quiet pride, the sense of vindication and achievement that is still there all these years later, pride also in setting a pace that would amaze and wilt many of those who shared the journey, a pace that he maintained until the end. When Shoaib returned from Karachi he started a movement that became unstoppable, a programme that went so far and so fast that sometimes it outstripped the inflow of funds. But even that did not stop it. The dialogues continued; and the extraordinary projects that each village embarked upon continued to astound the world.

Perhaps the Board can be excused for being caught wrong-footed by all that subsequently came to pass in Gilgit because Shoaib had given as the programme's first objective: increasing the income and employment opportunities of the rural people of the area with a minimum goal of doubling per capita income in ten years. This was something that the Karachi businessmen understood— money and jobs. What they did not fully comprehend was the means by which these objectives would be achieved—the

organisation of rural people into viable and self-sustaining institutions that would become AKRSP's driver and reason for existence. There are some who continue to believe that having soothed the confused but pragmatic Karachi Khojas, Shoaib simply stood the strategy paper on its head. Shoaib, however, says simply that he had made it very clear that the creation of village organisations and other local institutions, although not at the top of the list presented to the Board, was the primary objective; that there was no other way the goals of economic improvement could be realised.

There was also one additional matter that was to plague Shoaib, and nearly thirty years after AKRSP was born is still an issue unresolved, and that was the matter of an 'exit strategy'. One of the basic concepts of development theory, an 'exit strategy' supposes that all projects will reach a point where the stimulating inputs—money or expertise or both—have created such a buoyant and self-sustaining situation that they are no longer required. It is a theory embedded in the *modus operandi* of all international donors whose time horizon for any particular project rarely extends beyond five years, after which stimulating funding will cease as will 'expert' assistance. There are two main faults with the theory. The first is that the date of exit is not only quite arbitrary but is set by the donor agency rather than the recipient group, and the second is that an exit strategy assumes that a system's requirement for stimulus—money or expertise—is finite, which is of course ridiculous.

In very general terms the concept of rural support programmes can be seen as a continuum. At one end of the continuum are organisations for the poor such as AKRSP, and at the other end are organisations of the poor such as village organisations, either singly or grouped. In Shoaib's view of life, the main task of organisations for the poor is to respond to the needs of organisations of the poor. These needs will, of course, change over time, sometimes quite dramatically, and will so predicate the nature of organisations for the poor. For AKRSP to determine its own exit is thus counter to the entire, carefully developed notions of trust and confidence that are at the heart of the relationships between the two types of organisations. Within the ever-growing matrix of village organisations, specific donor supported schemes will of course have inbuilt exit strategies—once a channel is built then a group moves on from the construction phase to the maintenance phase—but at the level of social organisations, the term 'exit strategy' is entirely redundant.

This was a notion that Shoaib was never quite able to describe in terms that his Board—and indeed many donors—really understood, a notion perhaps they simply did not wish to understand. After all, if most well respected texts on rural development spoke of exit strategies as an integral part of the planning process then so be it—AKRSP should have one. However, all this was well in the future.

As Shoaib, Hussain Wali Khan and 'the few' jolted along the narrow, dangerously slick mountain tracks in the winter of 1982-83, an exit strategy must have been the last thing on their minds. There was just so much to do.

Throughout his life, Shoaib has often been lucky to have as his lieutenants, people who could put a tactical spin to his ideas and so it was right at the beginning. Tariq Husain is not a man unafraid to blow his own trumpet but as far as the famous 'three dialogues' are concerned he can justifiably blow to his hearts content.

I am one of those who tend to wince whenever the word 'dialogue' is used because it has so often emerged from the mouths of wordy politicians or long-winded international bureaucrats. But I have at last overcome my aversion. I have had to because to the rural poor of the subcontinent the term 'dialogue' has become synonymous with hope. When Tariq Husain arrived in Gilgit full of the energy of youth he says he kept asking Shoaib exactly what was expected of him. *It was just not getting through to me* he had laughed *until exasperated, the Boss said just wait and watch, and see what I do.* Tariq did, at the same time reading by the light of the kerosene power lamp, a handbook on monitoring and evaluation he had purloined from the World Bank office. It immediately struck Tariq that Shoaib was actually working through the project cycle, but instead of doing this with government officers or technical people, he was doing it with simple village people.

Shoaib had already coined the term 'diagnostic survey', so Tariq said he sat down with a sheet of graph paper and drew up a three-phase schema, one for each of the three 'dialogues' that Shoaib had in mind. Each of the dialogues corresponded in a very general way to the project cycle set out in the handbook Tariq had most fortunately acquired—project identification which Tariq equated to the formation of village organisations; project preparation where the villagers identify and present their preferred group development option; and finally project appraisal; *and lo and behold* says Tariq the magician, this equated quite well to the partnership agreement between a village and AKRSP. The final follow-up phase by AKRSP was of course the equivalent of the fourth requirement, monitoring and evaluation.

When he presented the 'three dialogues' idea to the group, some of whom had worked with Shoaib in Daudzai, he encountered opposition with some saying Tariq had over-simplified the complex set of social interactions that were at the heart of each dialogue. But said Tariq, Shoaib liked it straight away because he believed it would help to explain to everyone in clear and simple terms how we work and what we do, so that was that, the whole business and the language we used became clear. Everyone now knew the purpose of each dialogue, what was to be achieved and when. Even the village people started using it, Tariq said with a laugh, because the steps were so clear and simple. In no time at all we started receiving formal hand written notes from

village organisations, 'Dear sirs' the notes inevitably began, 'we have sent you our resolutions but you have still not come to us for the third dialogue' and so on. And that was how we all worked in those days. If any of us had a good idea Shoaib would let it run. They were exciting times, perhaps the best years of my life.

One day I decided to ask Shoaib straight out whether his first responsibility was to the Board. The question clearly made him uncomfortable, so much so that he paused for some time. Then he cleared his throat and replied in an uncharacteristically laconic manner, *well, yes, technically I suppose it was*. But was it? When Shaw had set up the luncheon meeting with the Board in Karachi, and had prepped Shoaib with a list of likely questions, something all those years later Shoaib was still a trifle embarrassed to admit in the lexicon of modern Hollywood movies was the 'fix in', had His Highness already made up his mind? And if he had, where did that leave the Board? Shoaib chose not to answer this question and instead laughed, saying in defence of the Board *of course, they were all good people, but yes, the questions were very general*, and once Shoaib started to explain his theory of development all the Board could really do was to smile and hope this man whom the prince had chosen would live up to his reputation.

Shaw was also ready to do almost anything to ensure Shoaib was able to hit the ground running and readily acceded to Shoaib's request to pick up as many people as he could from the wreckage of Daudzai. As for Tariq, he says he still has no idea how he succeeded when there were so many other better qualified candidates. Stumped when asked if he knew anything about the work he would be asked to undertake in the Northern Areas, the only thing he could think of saying was that he did not know anything about the job but he was a fast learner. *That must have done the trick* Tariq laughed, *it was Shoaib's way, he picked people because he trusted them; he wanted fast learners not people who thought they already knew everything*. Shoaib also believes in the importance of intangibles such as character, and he believes firmly in intuition.

Dazzled into approving staff growth, two years later some members of the Board began to worry and grumble when they found how rapidly the number of employees in Shoaib's AKRSP had grown. But again, they found they had already been outflanked. Shoaib had done his homework.

After the first decisive meeting with the Aga Khan at the State Guest House in Rawalpindi, held there instead of Gilgit because bad weather had meant all flights were cancelled, Shoaib's position became for a time unassailable. Distressed because of the first ever deaths from inter-communal riots in Chitral, the prince asked Shoaib to go there. Shoaib had done so with his customary alacrity, and then with that done *the administration, the district council chairman and the religious leaders of Baltistan all got after me. The Council Chairman even handed over what*

little money the council had to help out. Shoaib moved swiftly, too swiftly for the Board, *they were very unhappy that I had gone there without their permission* he laughed. In any case, Shoaib did not think he needed it because the prince's three conditions had been met. Even Shaw and his boss, William (Bill) de Speolberch, both of whom Shoaib said were *always very, very supportive, and close to His Highness, were a little concerned.* However the prince quickly shut down all complaints. Asked if it was all right to extend into Baltistan, His Highness replied quite shortly that he thought AKRSP was already there so why waste his time asking for permission. *And that was it* laughed Shoaib, *Bob and Bill were a little bit red-faced about it all.* The Board was left out in the cold and again some members were far from happy.

But in fact, going into Baltistan was not quite as quick and easy as Shoaib portrays.

Bustling into the Serena Hotel, *no time* he said *no time, can we be quick* he was on his way to a funeral in Baltistan. Haji Fida Mohammad Nashad was clearly a man in a hurry and sat poised on the edge of his chair distractedly sipping his tea. In 1983 he had been the chairman of Baltistan's District Council and was keen, he said, for Shoaib to take AKRSP into his district as soon as possible. But Shoaib was reluctant—*he asked me to write directly to His Highness* said the Haji. This he had done *straight away.* And then he settled down to wait. A few months later Shoaib met the Haji again and told him His Highness had agreed on one condition—total concord between all religious leaders. Now Shoaib knew all this even before he asked the Haji to appeal directly to the prince, so whether he was simply hedging for time or making sure the Aga Khan really meant what he said is perhaps unimportant. What matters is that Haji Fida Mohammad Nashad quickly set about guaranteeing the agreement of all religious leaders, and Shoaib then took AKRSP into a majority non-Ismaili district with all guns blazing. Of the Council funds he provided the Haji also has a different version. Having explained to the gathered religious leaders that AKRSP dealt only with social and economic development Shoaib then added an additional requirement—the District Council would also have to provide some financial assistance. Again, whether Shoaib was strapped for funds, as he almost certainly was at that time, or whether the provision of funding would really show everyone that the Council was fully behind AKRSP's entry into Baltistan is history. Although he described it as 'very difficult', Fida Mohammad managed to divert the entire funding for two tehsils—over two million rupees—to support AKRSP's village works programme. The Haji smiled his politician's smile when I asked if it had all been smooth sailing in Baltistan. *It can be a very tricky area he said, twice AKRSP's managers had to leave because of personal and sectarian differences within the staff, but in the villages it was a great success. There were many projects and people learned a lot abut unity and savings.* And this, in the long run, was what Shoaib had aimed to achieve for the villagers of the north—material advancement,

unity, and money in the bank. Fida Mohammad rose to leave but then paused. He had one more thing he wanted to say, *you know we trusted him* he smiled, *he was unique.* And then gathering his cloak about him, Haji Fida Mohammad Nashad swept out of the hotel.

In Gilgit, Shoaib had instituted a weekly management meeting of all senior staff where anything could be discussed. Shoaib said he was not at all keen on having an establishment code because he thought it would put everyone into an administrative straitjacket and limit ideas and actions, but he did establish a number of working principles that focused on responsibility, on meeting promises at all costs, and gave primacy at all times to village people—every staff member was to have an open door to villagers at all times and their needs and requirements came first. This meant village people were never turned away from the office, and meetings at villages, once agreed, were sacrosanct. *Another bone of contention* said Shoaib was this—the Board and the local Aga Khan Foundation bureaucrats believed in hands-on micro-management, particularly for staff appointments and financial powers. Shoaib's view was that once the Board had approved the overall annual budget, he was free to manage as he saw fit. Karachi immediately challenged, demanding all requests for expenditure be pre-approved by them.

Shoaib picked up the gauntlet. *I suppose it was a bit rash on my part, but I thought it was better the matter was settled straight away so I wrote a letter to the chairman of the Board asking him to please find another general manager because this is not the way I can work,* adding *for good measure,* that although it was quite right for the Board to require him to meet the agreed targets regarding overall cost and number of projects, he was certainly not about to submit each project for approval, nor was he going to consult with Karachi over staff recruitment. He had been given a budget and would stick with it and was happy for everything to be rigorously audited, but no, he was not going to ask for permission.

And that was it again laughed Shoaib, *the Board simply caved in.* Shoaib's dramatic ultimatum must have been quite a shock to them all. It was, Shoaib agreed, *but they were all very nice people. They did not understand because they were just not used to this kind of management.* It was not only Shoaib's style that was an issue, it was also his independence and that he was not at all beholden to the local or national Ismaili hierarchy. *Yes, agreed Shoaib, his smile a little wry, they were used to controlling everything from Karachi, especially the finances.* A few of the local Ismaili leaders were also a bit put out, *not many* said Shoaib, *only a very few.* But they were nevertheless there.

Subedar Faraj Khan is proud of the fact that his village of Ahmadabad is regarded as a 'model' village. *I was a leader in the army and then in my village*

he had pronounced proudly, but for him, Shoaib changed everything. Previously, Faraj Khan had worked only with the village elite but it was slow going. *Shoaib Sahib said listen to the silly people and I did and I felt the change immediately.* With Faraj's enthusiastic involvement, the village mobilised. After a suspension bridge and a jeepable road had been built the people decided to build a channel to bring water to an area of previously barren land. After the second dialogue when the details of the partnership project had been agreed, Faraj Khan said the young men who would do most of the work had second thoughts. The alignment took the channel across a sheer cliff face. This, the young men decided, was a non-starter—far too costly and far too dangerous, although danger was not the main issue. So a cheaper realignment was agreed and approved by AKRSP's engineers. However, this caused another problem—the new alignment would serve a lot less land.

When Shoaib arrived with some Canadian guests to present a cheque so the work could start Faraj Khan raised the matter again. Shoaib listened seriously as he always did when village activists raised an issue, and then reminded Faraj Khan that once an agreement had been made, everyone was supposed to stick to it. We all thought that was that, said Faraj Khan, but then Shoaib had smiled, since this was a model village he would add another 65,000 rupees— *the young men were pleased,* Faraj said, shaking his head and smiling as he remembered the day, in fact they were jubilant. The channel would be taken across the cliff face. This was why villagers loved Shoaib. There were rules, of course there were, but Shoaib Sahib would not let a rule stand in the way of good sense. It was the very sort of instant flexibility Shoaib knew he had to have if he was to make things work in the Northern Areas, the sort of instant flexibility the Board wanted to deny him.

Well, so far they had failed, but they had not given up trying to assert control. The next issue was the helicopter.

The Aga Khan had a very good idea of the physical challenges Shoaib faced. Yes, the amazing Karakorum Highway had reached Gilgit, but few villages were connected to this tarmac spine, and these were little more than narrow, steep, dangerously unstable tracks. During the first three months, Shoaib and his small team held meetings at almost every village they could get to, often having to push their way through deep snow on foot for several hours, spending nights camping out in isolated rest houses. Despite Shoaib's amazing energy and his determination to press on at all costs, four months into the programme it was clear that it would either soon hit the wall or drastic reductions in pace would have to be made. No way did the Aga Khan want this to happen—so he sent a helicopter.

The arrival of a gleaming jet-powered machine with its great drooping blades left everyone a trifle open-mouthed. Only extremely important people in Pakistan had a helicopter at their disposal. Gobsmacked, the businessmen in Karachi and the Aga Khan Foundation functionaries in Islamabad were reluctant to let the machine slip out of their hands, out of their control. And because they did not really understand what the prince had in mind, they were extremely frugal in permitting its deployment especially in the Northern Areas. Using such a machine to fly into some of the ultra-poor mountain villages seemed an utter waste to them. Shoaib was also unsure about the helicopter. He and his team knew what they were getting into when they signed their contracts, they had a jeep and legs and thought they could manage just fine like all the other mountain men. *Oh yes,* said Shoaib, *I admit I was a bit sceptical at first but it only took one trip of a few minutes instead of an exhausting ten hour slog with me lying prostrate at the end of it to change my mind. But the Islamabad people said no, it is very expensive equipment and rationed out its use. I had to beg even when I had to get to some truly inaccessible place.* So it was an impasse; but not for long.

In May of 1983, the prince flew up to Gilgit in the helicopter. Visibly stung by the whispers about the costly flamboyance of sending a helicopter, and the fact that it had been little used to date, he summoned his Ismaili dignitaries and challenged them. He was fully aware, he said, that most people thought he had a 'bee in his bonnet' and that the helicopter was a 'complete waste of money', but he had bought it and if it was not used, he would lose money, and of course look rather foolish. Chastened, the dignitaries did not know quite what to say but Shoaib did, quietly pointing out how his requests had been repeatedly refused and that he for one was quite prepared to see if the helicopter really did make a difference. Was this a set-up, because the prince had smiled, and in full hearing of everyone, told Shoaib to use it for a year and if he then decided it was a waste of money he would be quite happy to withdraw it. And, if Shoaib had so far been refused for technical reasons or because the existing helicopter was fully utilized, well, he would buy another helicopter. Were there any questions? No? End of story.

So Shoaib laughed, *the helicopter came from Islamabad to Gilgit* and the programme was away and running. Half-a-dozen villages or more could be visited in a day and government officials were more than eager to go along. The helicopter was also an enormous if unsought boost to Shoaib's prestige in the area and also, inadvertently perhaps, opened up the programme to the world. Diplomats and their international guests could be whisked up to Gilgit on this 'magic carpet', lifted to a succession of breathtaking mountain villages, inspect and be moved to tears by the incredible achievements, and be back in the comfort of the Serena Hotel in Gilgit each night, or back again in an hour or so in almost any weather to host an evening cocktail party in Islamabad. It was totally irresistible.

The Ismaili hierarchy in Karachi and Islamabad had been effectively silenced, no more so than when the Aga Khan had said in the presence of the Board's chairman that he wanted Shoaib's new programme to succeed or why else would he have sent the helicopter. Shoaib vividly recalls the prince saying, *I want to make it very clear that you have absolute carte blanche to come to me for any matter you think you need my approval* and to cap this by adding *I don't want anyone coming between us.*

Now with all that said in front of the Chairman of the Board and here Shoaib had to stop talking while he laughed until there were tears in his eyes, *I never had any need to ever go directly to His Highness; I just never had any need.* And then he had laughed happily again. And of course Shoaib had no need. Ramzan had received his orders and knew what he had to do. *But really, he was a good old man, we used to have our quibbles of course but it was some of the local directors, especially in Chitral* and here Shoaib started to laugh so hard he had to stop talking while he pulled out a large coloured handkerchief and dabbed at his eyes *if you have ever met Afzal, the first local director, you will know what I mean. They thought they were the bosses of the whole thing and knew what should be done.* However, Shoaib's defence was hard to beat. He would simply say, *look, we will go and ask the people. If they get organized and if they want what you say to happen then we will do it.*

But still some insisted they knew best. One such was Latif, the chairman of Gilgit's District Council. A friend, he had stamped into Shoaib's office one day demanding to know why he was supporting a specific project in a village. Shoaib had patiently explained that the project was the result of many dialogues and this was their priority. But Latif had been angrily adamant, asking if Shoaib thought he knew more about the area than he did. Shoaib had replied of course he didn't, he was only doing what the people wanted. But Latif's dignity had been affronted so he staged a tactical retreat, muttering that he thought a man in his position would be given more importance and not just be over-ruled. Now Shoaib knew he was entering dangerous ground, and at the risk of mixing metaphors that 'ruffled feathers' had to be smoothed, quickly, before the matter got out of hand. He used the helicopter. *Look* he had said, *we have a helicopter sitting there, let's fly out there together and put the matter to the village. I will accept whatever they decide.*

A clever move, it was one that Latif could not refuse without losing face. Arriving by helicopter would also do no harm to his prestige. So, a message was sent to the village and next day Shoaib and Latif landed in the usual cloud of dust and debris. The whole village was waiting. Shoaib smiled, *so I said to them all, look, at the second dialogue in front of the social organiser and our engineer you discussed the project impact statement and how many people would benefit and then gave the go ahead and now the Council Chairman has another story. So, which project do you want?* Shoaib says there was a bit of shuffling of feet, but then they said, well no, we have not changed our mind. Then Shoaib had asked, well, was Latif totally wrong? And again there was a bit of foot shuffling until the villagers *sheepishly admitted* they had been playing the old game of seeing how many projects they could obtain by working the system. However, if only one project was on offer, it was the one they had discussed at the second dialogue. Whoever said village people are simple folk.

Shoaib admits to being *vastly amused* and that like Shahzada Mohiuddin of Chitral who said he had also been extremely sceptical—*well, you know what outsiders are like* he had said to us in his office one day, *they just do not realise what conditions are like here and what people want and just come and initiate any old project that is of little use at all*—Latif became a good friend and went on to participate in many dialogues.

Shahzada Mohiuddin was a busy man but he welcomed us without question to his 'glass office' in his new hotel fronting the river, a replacement for the old hotel burnt down in one of the communal riots. The office is modern with big, deep faux-leather chairs and reproductions of old European masters on the walls. The whole building echoes as only new concrete can and you find yourself hoping you will not be in it when the next earthquake strikes, although perhaps appearances are not everything and it is as tough and resilient as Shahzada Mohiuddin. In the corridor there are a throng of supplicants and Mohiuddin's man has to clear the office of those who had already gained access so we can chat. They leave with good humoured grace. We are given tea and unusually superior biscuits so I add a few more to my plate.

In 1983, Shahzada Mohiuddin was also a district council chairman and firmly believed that the construction of main roads was the one thing that would lift Chitral out of the past and into the present. Puzzled by Shoaib's insistence that the best way forward was to educate the people and let them identify their own projects, he decided that he had better find out just what this interesting man was really up to. In very short order, he says, he concluded that Shoaib was absolutely right, that it was no good if the people just sat and waited for the government to do everything. A businessman and a politician in his own right, he knew that government simply could not. If everyone waited for government to act, Chitral might well remain stuck in the past. A man of action, Shahzada Mohiuddin decided he would support Shoaib as best he could. So he took to the field, began to participate in dialogues, this was when my eyes were really opened he said, travelling with Shoaib into the deeply conservative Sunni areas where, incited by religious leaders who were not ready to do things themselves and who did not want the Aga Khan's involvement, mobs assembled to throw

rocks at the helicopter. He was very brave said Mohiuddin, high commendation indeed from a man who has many times fearlessly faced the mob himself. If not a lot of headway was made at the time, it was not through lack of trying, and perhaps as the Shahzada said, seeds were sown, who knows when they might germinate. The men of the mountains are patient.

While we talked, sitting in my shoulder bag was Christopher Kremmer's book, *Inhaling the Mahatma*. I remembered Kremmer's description of sitting down and really listening to the wisdom of his would-be wife's father, a man whose family had been immersed for generations in the ways of the Indian bureaucracy in the new, and the older Delhi. Considered an 'experienced India hand' by the Western news corporation he worked for, Kremmer writes, *I swallowed my arrogance and listened to him.*

And this very thing is what Shahzada Mohiuddin and Latif, and so many others were to do when Shoaib spoke to them of his ideas because they were honest men who wanted to do well for the people they represented—they recognized the truth when they saw it.

Pleasantly Insane

When Shoaib finally agreed to take on the ambitious rural development programme envisioned by the Aga Khan and the prince's man on the ground Robert d'Arcy Shaw, most of his friends and former colleagues, whether in UNICEF or the Civil Service of Pakistan, shook their heads and wondered if the jungles of Sri Lanka had perhaps cooked his brains and made him a touch insane. After all, Shoaib was nearing fifty or thereabouts, an age when many of his former civil service batch mates had already made their mark or were firmly entrenched in their careers. Some were even starting to think of retirement. And what was Shoaib doing? Well, he was about to embark on a task that would wilt the enthusiasm and tax the bodies of many younger, supposedly much fitter men. He would set such a frantic pace, work such long hours, climb so many mountains in a day and yet have time to clear his desk, read and annotate every report, every field note written by the most junior of his staff, that some wondered if he hadn't sipped from the mythical fountain of youth of Shangri-la, found some wondrous spring in a hidden valley he had chanced upon one day.

Shoaib, however, saw the circumstances of his return to Pakistan as a quiet triumph although he agreed, smiling, that there were probably many others who thought him rather mad. Shoaib himself was not without doubts, and if his friends were not quite sure what he had got himself into, nor was I he laughed. Nor was

Musarrat, quietly admitting on one of those London nights that she really had not wanted him to leave the UN. It was so very hard to get such a job she whispered. Musarrat believes she helped Shoaib obtain that first vital assignment in Japan, oh yes, she laughed, I got him a small assignment in Japan and they liked his work and then the move to UNICEF meant that the future of her family was assured. Now, she would have to return to Pakistan, a move she attributed to the other most important person in Shoaib's life, Akhter Hameed Khan.

Musarrat said she remembers it all as if it were only yesterday, remembers the old man counselling Shoaib saying, if you want to do this work you will have to give up everything else. You must think only of the work and you will not have any time to think of your family. Can you do this? It was quite a question.

And so said Musarrat, her tiny voice concealing the steel will beneath, not long after, *Akhter Hameed Khan came to see me.* Never a man to mince his words, he told Musarrat that if she wanted Shoaib to do the job to the best of his abilities then she would have to let him go. The children would be her responsibility entirely as would every other family and household matter.

What a question to ask. Could she do it? Musarrat says she was very upset at first, very unsure and told the old man that she was unwell and needed a few days to think, to wonder *can I really give my husband to the poor people of Pakistan. Do I have the strength?* Afshan tells a slightly different version. She describes her mother as 'looking furious' and of 'storming out of the room'. She says she does not know what happened after that except that by next morning *my mother agreed to let my father do this work.* Afshan believes Musarrat knew she could not, and should not stop Shoaib, but if he was to go she would have her own contract with the prince, a contract that in Afshan's words, would amongst other things, provide handsomely for her children.

Musarrat shrugged away the idea that the matter had sparked off one of her famous temper tantrums and spoke instead of the many thoughts that went through her head including money and the good life a UN career offered. But she had always dreamed, as she said wistfully, of *making a heaven on earth in Pakistan.* She also says she thought about how short life really is and what she would be giving up. And while all these thoughts went round and round in her mind Musarrat said *I could not help asking him* (Shoaib), *who is your family, how much can you do*, and in her most despondent moments *do you think you can make a moon*? Then she smiled, *it was a silly question because I knew perhaps he could.*

It took not one but two days, Musarrat said emphatically, but her father's daughter, she had always known what she had to do, what she would say and it was this; *for the sake of the poor people of Pakistan I can do this.* The phrase

became her mantra. However, her peace treaty had some non-negotiable strings attached which the prince would have to deal with, so she took herself off to see Robert Shaw. If he was at all taken aback by this diminutive bombshell of a woman we will never know. What we do know is that Musarrat's terms and conditions were accepted without question.

Why was this 'contract' so important, I asked? I did not want special privileges she said emphatically, but I also did not want to have people whispering, I did not want them saying 'look, she is misusing Aga Khan things', and I did not want to have to rely on AKRSP vehicles or allowances, I wanted everything to be clear and separate. And then, said Musarrat, smiling at the memory, one small woman up against the might of the Aga Khan Foundation, I said if you will agree to all this then you can talk to him. And agree they did, handsomely.

And so there was the famous Toyota Crown with its plush velvet seats, still alive today, a driver and running costs. From the prince's point of view it was small change—Musarrat could have asked for a lot more.

She is proud that she set Shoaib free—did not ever deflect him from his work, quietly got on with the business of looking after her four daughters, and never exceeded her allowances. *No lavish hotel receptions* she laughed—*and I never asked for more, not a single rupee*, she said sternly and then she laughed again, *all those years ago, what a funny thing to say.* But it wasn't really funny—to Musarrat, a deal is a deal.

As for Gilgit, Musarrat said she always liked it very much but she could not live there. Musarrat crinkled her eyes and shuddered dramatically and then laughed, says her skin and eyes reacted badly to the dust. And in Gilgit it is indeed dusty, summer or winter a fine abrasive grit seems to seep in everywhere. There were times in winter and in spring and even summer when it was tolerable but not at peak heat. In July, Gilgit becomes an oven, heat radiating in shimmering waves from the giant black rock walls of the surrounding mountains. *I simply could not tolerate hot places any more*, she says apologizing for her weakness, *I tried* she smiled again, *once I tried for Falaknaz, but after a week my eyes were so sore and I was so ill she took me straight back to Islamabad again.*

And although she may have been an infrequent visitor, for all that, Musarrat was always the Queen of Gilgit and she knew it, sometimes sweeping into staff meetings and whether she meant this or not, immediately commanding Shoaib's attention. And when she wanted help with the useful magazine she inaugurated, or with the other mini-projects she involved herself in, everyone sprang to her aid. After all she was the GM Sahib's wife. *Yes*, she said, *I liked Gilgit, the people were so nice and there were only small shops and no cars; just the commissioner's car and Shoaib's jeep.* And then she chose to speak of other things, being as changeable as an English summer's day, *you know His Highness is such a nice man* and then she laughed, *I met his father once, much more of a party person, oh yes, a real party person,* but other than to smile mischievously she would say no more.

Mohammad Abdullah Malang announced himself in no uncertain terms. Waving aside my attempts to start the ball rolling, he already knew what he wanted to say and said it. Another of those fine old men the mountains seem to breed, the inevitable pakhol perched at a jaunty angle on his head, unusually for a people more often clean shaven that not, he sports a neatly trimmed white beard. Perhaps it is because he is a poet. The quintessential activist, he glows with the assumed charisma and persona of those who have joyfully imbibed as if it were the elixir of youth the message Shoaib brought to the mountains. In the crisp chill of an autumn day it was good to sit out in the sun. Rakaposhi glistened in the distance and the clatter and racket of a machine thresher, unheard of when Shoaib first arrived, meant we had to raise our voices for a time. I have no idea how old Mohammad really is. He looks indestructible, as if he could live forever, good health glowing through the walnut brown of his sun-lined face. He would be one of those who would hardly puff on a climb that would leave me winded.

So we sat patiently—we had little choice—while he worked through his repertoire of attributes we were to hear so many times, of Shoaib's courteousness and punctuality; how he would listen patiently to the silliest of people; how he never told a lie and how, if he caught someone out in a lie he was sad rather than angry; how he would shake the muddiest hand, hug the dirtiest villager; how he would never turn away a villager from his office; how if other staff members did not give a villager priority, Shoaib would want to know why; how he could climb nearly as well as any hill man, a huge compliment; and how he would sit down with the people for hours without complaint. *If I sit down in the sun for four hours I begin to yawn, I begin to wriggle, and yes, my bottom gets uncomfortable, but not Shoaib Sahib. He had an iron bottom,* he said, laughing at his joke but impressed forever by the sheer application of will it all required. And then he sprang his small surprise, a surprise because few others ever talked of her—*to me, Musarrat is my stepmother,* he said seriously. And perhaps she was, perhaps Musarrat had swept this small, vital poet of a man into her family—she had admired his poems and published them in *Ujalah* (light), the magazine she founded, and for a poet there can be no higher praise.

At the same time as Shoaib and AKRSP had become the talk of the Gilgit bazaar, plodding along in the background at a pace dictated by its government

agency counterparts was a useful but fairly unspectacular project supported by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation. Of the two expatriate 'experts', the quiet Peter Whiteman was one of those unassuming Englishmen who spent most of his time exploring the high valley systems, winning the respect of the mountain villagers and writing one of the best but little known reports on the agricultural systems of the Northern Areas. Frank Saunders, the project's administrator, a tall, spare, former British Army colonel, took a frosty view of Shoaib and AKRSP, irritated at the instant admiration and praise heaped on the newcomers who in his view were 'taking credit for some of the things his own project had done'. Choosing to be 'territorial' was a mistake. Had Saunders chosen the no-strings partnership that was available instead of becoming a backwater his project could have ridden the same wave that took AKRSP so far and so fast.

And then at a party and perhaps with a whisky or two under his belt and forgetting that the days of the Raj were long gone, Saunders was heard to say that the Northern Areas were 'not really a part of Pakistan'. Part of the disputed territory of Kashmir and with a bitter war of attrition being fought on the Siachin glacier, a bleak wilderness of snow and ice where one of Shoaib's favourite nephews, Sohail's son, was killed, the Northern Areas were regarded as extremely sensitive by Pakistan's intelligence agencies. And they were, so whatever Saunders meant, when the statement filtered through the labyrinthine by-ways of the intelligence services and finally slid onto a desk in Islamabad. Saunders was as good as gone.

Afshan, Shoaib's capriciously artistic daughter, blithely wrote of her father in Gilgit *as usual, I went and joined him*. This was always a mixed blessing for Shoaib; Afshan could be relied upon to be different, and as do all fathers, Shoaib worried about what Afshan would do with her life. He also soon heard about Saunder's foolish indiscretion through his own old boy network but chose not to tell Afshan or counsel her not to visit the Saunders family, whom she had befriended. Although he had a poor view of the so-called 'intelligence' network and its secret informers, and regarded the whole matter as a storm in a tea-kettle, he also knew how wilful and unpredictable Afshan could be. To Afshan's distress, not long after, Saunders was politely requested to leave. He was very definitely *persona non grata*. Ripples in a pond, the 'Saunders affair' took time to settle. Later, at a party in Islamabad, to her surprise Afshan was asked by 'Topsy', a friend of one of Shoaib's former probationers and one of the top Intelligence officers in the country, what she had been up. She was shocked to find there was a file on her activities in Gilgit including a note alleging that she and Falaknaz had smuggled rubies and emeralds out of the north, and that Afshan had been an agent for the Chinese, the Russians, and the Americans. *Good grief* she writes in her still unpublished book, *all because I sometimes*

waved to the tiny aircraft that flew high overhead while I was out riding Moti. The uneducated informer always gets the better of us; where do these people come from and what have they done to Pakistan?

To the local informer network, AKRSP was a wonderful windfall. It was all too easy to spin information so that innocent activities could seem vaguely suspect. There were also whispers about the real intent of the AKRSP programme, some of which originated from the hard-line Sunni valley of Chilas in Gilgit or over in Chitral in the town of Drosh, men who feared their own power base might be undercut, but there were also some disaffected local Ismaili notables secretly angered at being eclipsed by Shoaib and his staff.

Forged letters sent to Islamabad newspapers, secret reports to one or other of the nation's intelligence agencies, lies circulated in the valleys by shadow people, all of these and more kept niggling away at Shoaib and AKRSP like a swarm of impossible to eradicate mosquitoes. Sometimes, someone would go too far. At the end of 1983, provoked by intelligence reports citing him as a CIA agent, Shoaib asked the President, General Zia ul Haq, to direct that such reports should stop. Zia had been visiting the north at the time and impressed by what he saw, promised to act. That did the trick for a time, but the problem remained and every now and then would resurface. Rumours and reports became one of those facts of life that Shoaib just had to put up with.

But there were many lighter moments. When a delegation arrived at his office and wanted help to take ice from a specially chosen place, and position it high on another glacier so that mating would ensue that would have spectacular results—more ice and so more ice-melt water to feed their all-important irrigation canals—where others might have dismissed this odd request as superstitious nonsense, Shoaib of course immediately agreed. Not only did he agree, he called up the helicopter. And in so doing, in flying a group of villagers and a few buckets of ice and landing them high on a glacier, Shoaib perhaps won far more hearts, put more smiles on villagers' faces than many a solid new bridge or a couple of jeepable roads? Perhaps he did. But whatever Shoaib thought at the time, it was not so much that he had taken part in a folk-lore play, he was on his way to becoming a folk-lore hero himself.

A problem solver *par excellence*, Shoaib once remarked that there were two that he was never quite able to solve in all the time he was in Gilgit. One of these was how to implement and manage a specific women's programme, and the other was transport. No matter how many vehicles he had at his disposal, there never seemed to be enough. *It was difficult when we had only one vehicle, but I think it was even worse when we had one hundred* Shoaib said with an air of amused exasperation.

They also needed drivers. Shoaib sheepishly admits he considered himself a pretty fair sort of a driver and has always had a love affair with one car or another—there was once a much loved red Mercedes Benz—and so during the first few weeks in Gilgit, he and his colleagues resolved that they would pilot the jeep they had liberated from AKF's Islamabad offices. However, they had badly underestimated the state of the few so-called 'jeep roads', and overestimated their own skills and endurance. They had many close escapes. One old activist tells how during that first hectic month on the narrow and dangerously unstable road to Ghizar, Tariq, who had taken the wheel from a driver hired in the bazaar whose skills had not matched his boasts, had then scared them all witless by dropping a wheel over the edge. As soon as he could Shoaib had taken over the driving. Then during that first December on the way back from Hunza on the truly horrendous section through the narrowest part at the mouth of the valley, Shoaib admits to sweating with fear as the jeep slid on the ice. All he could think about was the deep dark gorge yawning on one side and the river rushing far below. It was then he says that he thought *my God, we need people who really know what they are doing, we need skilled drivers.*

Skilled mountain drivers are far from ordinary men. Not only does driving carry with it the prestige a vehicle represents, negotiating the extraordinarily dangerous mountain roads requires a very special type of steadiness and skill. Such drivers are also privy on a daily basis to the top people in an organisation. Very often they are characters, sometimes outright scallywags. One problem is that they not only occupy one of the best and most comfortable seats in a vehicle, they are also 'extras' who spend a lot of time sitting about waiting for their passengers to complete their business. Shoaib solved this problem in his usual unconventional manner, a way that would characterise his modus operandi in the North. There would be no idle hands in his organisation; rather than sitting about in the background, drivers would play as active a role in any meeting as other junior staff.

Would this work? It would, far better than anyone had imagined. AKRSP drivers became men of all seasons; proud of their position, men who could do anything. As for being scallywags, well Shoaib was a master at managing rascals and *prima donnas*. And scallywags the men he chose as his personal drivers may have been, but they were also loyal to a fault, and would happily obey his quiet requests no matter the hardship or long hours involved. They knew Shoaib never asked more of them than he asked of himself; they respected his consistency and the way he always treated them as if they mattered, never for example berating them for speeding or some risky manoeuvre until there were just the two of them and he could do so quietly. As had his grandfather, Shoaib did not give orders or cutting rebukes, he issued quietly polite requests and he spoke openly of his thoughts. No one was excluded; even drivers felt

themselves to be an important part of what was going on. They repaid him in kind. And more—it did not pay to make insulting comments about Shoaib when one of the drivers could hear.

Drivers such as Dino and Naib Khan often know more about the man whose life is in their hands than his wife. They know his likes and dislikes; they see him tired and exhausted, elated and happy, fretting and distressed, cheerfully optimistic, all these and more, the emotions a man like Shoaib might experience in a day as he moved inexorably from village to village. They are privy to intimate and personal matters that may escape others, even quite senior friends and colleagues, about the man who is in their care; because he really is in their care from the moment he climbs into the vehicle until he stumbles out again at the end of yet another long but satisfying day. It was Dino for example who spoke of Shoaib's susceptibility to altitude sickness. No one else mentioned this, certainly not Shoaib. He kept it a secret from all but his personal drivers, Naib Khan and Dino. They knew and they worried when he would take the lead on steep energy-sapping climbs, when he worked for long exhausting days, sun up to sun down and more often than not, went back to the office, read reports and annotated the margins well into the night while Naib Khan was sent off to get his dinner, or to his home if Shoaib decided he did not know how long he would be and so would walk back to the Chinar Inn when he was finished. Dino remembers begging Shoaib to rest or slow his pace on many occasions and Shoaib just smiling and saying too many people were relying on him from His Highness down, so he could not stop, could not slow down. As Dino said, *Shoaib Sahib worked long hours without complaint and so we would do the same.* And while he did they would do what they could, fussing about like anxious maiden aunts, trying to ease the load they knew he carried.

Naib Khan described Shoaib as 'being quiet for awhile' when they first set off on a journey, until he had gathered his thoughts and then he would initiate a discussion or hold a meeting heedless of the fact that a driver was listening. Shoaib might even seek Naib Khan or Dino's opinion. Time was too valuable to waste just sitting snoozing as the jeep jolted along or indulging in unproductive chatter, or even worse, in gossip. Shoaib, said Naib Khan emphatically shaking his head, never, ever gossiped.

Always hovering at Shoaib's right shoulder, they fussed and worried when he made dangerous crossings on unstable bridges or climbed slopes *even shepherds thought about before traversing*. Naib Khan nodded when one old activist spoke of Shoaib leaping like an ibex while donors and staff followed slowly and of how their faces paled when Shoaib slipped and fell. *Luckily, he stuck on a boulder* the old activist had said seriously while Naib Khan grinned *and then he had to go by rope but he wanted to see the channel.* Traditional foot

bridges were also notoriously dangerous, very dangerous, old Subedar Faraj Khan said, *many of them made you tremble—only strong young people used them with ease*. Slung high over a raging torrent with rickety wooden planks a yard apart and a slippery rope on either side more of a hindrance than help, dipping and swaying in the slightest breeze, the footbridge over the Hunza River to the northern villages of Nagar was the stuff of nightmares. On one occasion when the helicopter was unavailable, determined to meet the villagers waiting on the other side, Shoaib had arrived at the bridge. *He was afraid and so was I*, the old man had grinned *but we got across*. Unafraid to show fear, Shoaib's determination only strengthened the bonds. Mountain men knew all about fear and how life had to go on anyway.

That day it was the final dialogue and the villagers gave as their priority a jeepable suspension bridge and two kilometres of passable access track to the main highway. Shoaib signed the partnership agreement with a smile. Today, in the northern Hunza valley there is a long sweeping suspension bridge just wide enough for a small Suzuki jeep. The deck ripples as you cross and the whole structure sways if there is any wind at all, and when you finally bounce clear you feel the elation of having somehow cheated death, that is until you hear Subedar Faraj's story and then you realise you have only been playing a game.

And so it was that the people around Shoaib, villagers, activists, drivers, all loved him for his eccentricities, even his mild ones such as his unfailing habit of being dropped off at Hasanabad on the way back from Hunza so he could walk back to the office and 'get some exercise', or always stopping at a particular view point where he could sit and eat his sandwiches beside a stream fed by one of Rakaposhi's glaciers. So we stopped there too, and with Naib Khan, clambered down to the cluster of rocks that Shoaib Sahib had made his own. Above us on the road were a cluster of scruffy chaikhanas and dubious looking clapboard hotels. As we climbed back to our vehicle after quickly munching down our sandwiches we noticed that behind us, just above the stream, was a seedy, broken-walled latrine. Naib Khan assured us that twenty-five years ago there was nothing there at all except the boulders, the wind and the iced mass of majestic Rakaposhi. For Shoaib it was a place he could sit and think and for a brief moment, be alone.

And so it went. Those irrepressible rascal drivers loved Shoaib also for his kindness, for being unfailingly thoughtful and courteous to junior staff, for his punctuality because so many others might keep a driver waiting endless boring hours and not think to tell him what they were doing. And if Shoaib Sahib could do without food, could work an entire day on a single cup of tea, so could they. So they hovered at his shoulder worrying if he had taken on a bit too much. would over-extend himself whenever he went out of his way to please the

villagers or his field staff. Naib Khan smiled at the memory of Shoaib once suffering an excruciatingly uncomfortable saddle *for an hour there and an hour back* when the road to a particular village had been blocked by a landslip because the Social Organiser had gone out of his way to hire a horse. *And* rumbled Dino joining in, *in 1988 during 'the troubles', people threw stones and set fire to all sorts of buildings but they left AKRSP alone because of Shoaib Sahib, nothing else could stop them* and he nodded his head, this mini-sumo wrestler of a man as if to say, 'not even me'. Just then a government official plumped himself down in one of the cane chairs that were scattered across the lawns of the Serena Hotel, called for tea. *Hah*, Naib Khan said, grinning his rascals grin *see that official, he is what we call a 'bottle black'*. And yes, fresh from his weekly 'barbering', for his age the man was remarkably free of any trace of grey. *Shoaib Sahib was never a bottle black* Naib Khan said dismissively, never someone who pretended to be anything other than what he really was; and he never called imperiously for tea.

Naib Khan is one of those men who chuckles when a landslip misses us by a whisker, who vanishes in the dust-shrouded darkness, and twenty minutes later emerges from the gloom with a team of villagers to lead us over the quaking rubble of a second totally impassable landslide. A thin, silver ribbon of water gleamed hundreds of sheer metres below, but it was all in a days work for Naib Khan. And there on the other side stood a battered mini-bus he has conjured up. It will take us on to Chitral, rattling through the night to the comfort of the Hindu Kush Heights hotel. Next morning he arrived at the hotel cheerfully whistling, handed our bags to the porter and left with a wave and an impish grin to drive back over the Shandur pass and down to Gilgit. Somehow during the night, the landslip had been cleared, enough anyway for Naib Khan to drive over.

Naib Khan is still an AKRSP employee because after all a job is a job, but he will be Shoaib's driver for ever. He was proud to be our guide, take us on a tour of the past because we were Shoaib's guests, but we also knew without asking that he was one of those men whose spirit was forever free. The favour was all his, not ours.

The rooms at the Inn

When Shoaib arrived on a winter's morning in Gilgit with Tariq Husain, both chilled to the bone from the 'coldest night ever', a night where they had made do on the frigid roadside in the liberated jeep because there was nowhere else to stay, he immediately took himself to an establishment called The Chinar Inn. Owned by the government's Tourism Development Corporation, the Chinar

Inn was pure Raj, a pattern that can still be found throughout the subcontinent. Built in 1965 of stone and concrete blocks, the high-ceilinged rooms that echoed as only such rooms can, small-paned wooden windows that a local carpenter can still make in a day, and verandas of course, as all bungalows had to have, even when winters are frigid. Shoaib settled into a pair of rooms as if he were donning a familiarly favourite pair of well-worn slippers. And of course he was. Many were the nights he had slept in such bungalow rooms while on tour with his grandfather.

In any case the rooms were a short walk away from the office and as most of the visiting bigwigs checked into the more prestigious Gilgit Serena his rooms were an escape hatch. Any time he wished Shoaib could have arranged to move into one of the larger villas that began to spring up in Gilgit but he never did. The rooms became part of his legend, a gesture to the austere life he sometimes felt he should lead, and really they were enough, *more than enough* Shoaib always insisted. Shoaib also felt instantly at home. The beds were warm, the water hot in the cold and cavernous bathrooms, and in any case, what more did a man need, a man who was constantly on the move, constantly away, what more than a convenient and comfortable place to rest, as he once grinned and said, away from the madding crowd. But still the comparative austerity of these rooms, the narrowness of the closed-in veranda extension surprised some of his old colleagues. But they accepted his choice because after all, they already knew he was pleasantly insane.

Three months earlier, when he had travelled to Gilgit with Bob Shaw to see the area and meet various officials, he had stayed in room Number 8. A man of habit, once Shoaib found something that suited him that was that. *Yes, he had admitted, the room was quite comfortable for me and when I came back in December I took Number 8 again, and its neighbour Number 7.* These two rooms became Shoaib's home away from home for the next ten years. Nearly thirty years later they are still as they were, under lock and key, retained for the exclusive and increasingly rare use of the mythical GM Sahib. They are more than just a residence. *I would like to die in those rooms*, Shoaib once said, but then he had laughed, *but I am not dead yet.*

To the people of the Northern Areas these rooms speak that Shoaib is still alive, is still with them, and that perhaps one magical day he will come back and all will be as it once was. Izhar Hunzai, the current general manager, the cheerful village boy he once had been still evident, one of Shoaib's 'bright young stars', spoke laughingly of how every year the accountants in the Karachi office pointedly questioned the line item in AKRSP's annual budget for the rental of the rooms and grumbled but did nothing. *What can they do* he grinned, adding, as if to rub salt into the bean-counter's wounds, that he had just

approved the laying of new carpets. *Of course we will keep the rooms*, he had laughed again, *what would we tell the people if we didn't? We keep them as a spiritual reminder so that whenever we face a problem we can wear his 'hat', think his thoughts and try and see things through his eyes.* Izhar's mantra, one that he must often say to himself, so easily did the words tumble out when we met again in the winter-chilled dining room of the Serena bungalows at Karimabad, surrounded by a group of amusing and erudite young men fresh from a planning conference, a mantra he thought so important he later wrote of it more fully *I always say I have three fathers; one spiritual, His Highness of course* (who has shaped my humanitarian values); *one professional, SSK* (my great teacher, who taught me my trade); *and one personal, my father, an author and a poet* (to whom I owe my heritage as a northerner). Now this is powerful stuff in any language, but for all his university training abroad, his experiences working in other countries, Izhar says for all that *I am just a former Hunza herd-boy.* And he smiles his charmer's smile and adds *ancestors are important to the people of Hunza, SSK has become an idea, a sort of 'mystical ancestor'. We use him to see if we measure up, compare our own behaviour.* And so, while the rooms remain as Shoaib's domain the final separation is kept at bay and who knows, maybe the GM Sahib will once more walk the valleys of Gilgit.

The people of Hunza seem to make a habit of taking eccentrics to their hearts and remembering them.

To a man, and a woman too, everyone at the table that night—and these bright young people all hailed from one or other of the valley-villages of Hunza—agreed without reservation that SSK, the GM Sahib, was one of the few outsiders, and perhaps of even more significance, the only 'Pakistani', the only 'down-country' man the people of Hunza remember as 'one of their own'. Hopkirk and Keay and many other authors have written of the wonderful eccentrics the Northern Areas seemed to attract. *Yes*, our table agreed, *there are a few Englishmen, some famous scholars such as Lorimer and of course Schomberg*, these men have become a part of the folklore of Hunza. Some have even entered the lexicon. For example, compared to Hunza's small, tough and agile mountain men, the well-set Schomberg was an imposing figure. His fame is thus—if someone in Hunza remarks of another he is getting Schombergered, it means he thinks the fellow is getting fat! This was never the case for Shoaib of course whose stamina, like Schomberg's girth, has become the stuff of legends.

Izhar speaks of himself as being a brash young graduate of the London School of Economics who really 'didn't have a clue' and who could not write an entire sentence in English! He was amazed to find his new boss Shoaib taking the time to correct his notes, often staying up late into the night to do so. From Shoaib, Izhar said he learned the value of hard work and of the importance of

delivering complex messages in a very simple manner. He also describes travelling in the helicopter and landing in village after village, six or seven in a day, where Shoaib, with a seemingly untiring consistency would deliver his exact and unchanging message. *He would send away the smart sofas* Izhar laughed *and sit on the ground and so would we.* Young and impatient, Izhar said that at first he became bored with Shoaib's unvarying message. Why did Shoaib have to repeat himself again and again? It was not until much later on, he said, that he realised how important Shoaib's consistency had been, that he had been in the presence of a master of communication and that Shoaib's message was something the villagers relied on. *SSK's unchanging conviction created a reality for the villagers they could believe in* he said, adding that rather than telling people what to do and assuming that outside experts would best know what should be done, *he was allowing the people to develop their own ideas.* And then Izhar had added a final curious comment, *sages like SSK are rare; but they are also like a huge walnut tree under which nothing grows* he had said, grinning boyishly, *none of us comes even close to being his real protégé. One day we will be a clan without a leader.* But then again, maybe the comment is not so curious. As AKRSP's General Manager, Izhar has to work in the shadow of a giant, and as they have done for others, the villagers have weighed him up and found him wanting. Does this worry Izhar? The question still hangs because just at that moment Shandana and Khaleel burst into the room and bounced about, juniors again in the heady days of Gilgit.

Extremely bright, perceptive and direct, sitting curled on a chair, Shandana now heads the network agency for all of Pakistan's many rural support programmes, while the cleverly amusing Khaleel with his barbed throw-away comments works as her lieutenant. *Development is too important to be taken seriously,* Khaleel shouts and then laughs uproariously, *the entire country is failing but we continue to do what we can.* When things have settled a bit there is a little more talk before we all go our separate ways, but not before one more thing is agreed. *None of us,* said Izhar while the others nodded in agreement, *none of us have the same patience, the same focus and consistency, the same extremism. None of us are magicians. All of us put together cannot do what SSK can do. None of us has the contacts or the guts to cut through the horrible bureaucracy of Pakistan—he uses all his Machiavellian wiles to get his way.* Machiavellian wiles? Now that is an interesting idea? Could Shoaib be described as scheming, as elaborately cunning, as unscrupulous? Perhaps the way he used his contacts, the way he would wait patiently until it was exactly the right time to act could be described as scheming; but unscrupulous, never. And then Shandana adds, *but have you ever thought how it would be to be greeted everywhere you go with poems of praise. How would you remain humble?* But somehow, as Shandana says, somehow Shoaib has indeed remained humble and this has only added to his enigma.

In 1984, one of the managing directors of the tourism corporation who of course, laughed Shoaib, had been one of my Assistant Commissioners in Kohat, flew into Gilgit on an inspection tour. The fuss his one-time junior made had obviously amused Shoaib; but really, the managing director had said, Shoaib was not living in a style fitting for a former commissioner. But if Shoaib insisted on living in the Chinar Inn for God knows how many more years, the least he could do for his senior was to make him as comfortable and secure as possible. He would immediately arrange to have the two rooms converted into an apartment and the veranda closed in to provide more space and privacy. And not only that, as had been done for the eccentric old Justice Cornelius who lived out his life in Falleti's Hotel in Lahore, he would fix Shoaib's terms and conditions at the current discounted rate for as long as Shoaib held the rooms. And in the way of such things in Pakistan, the agreement still stands and will do so ad infinitum.

And so we have this set of unlikely and unpretentious rooms that no one else may use, fiercely guarded by the same man, Mohammad Shah the 'keeper of the keys', who served Shoaib for all the years he spent in Gilgit. Once our bonafides had been established—yes, we had Shoaib's express permission and yes, we knew the GM sahib well—a smile spread slowly across Mohammad Shah's face and we were granted the honour of a guided tour. No one, not even a succession of hotel managers, has a second set of keys to Shoaib Sahib's rooms. If by chance he must be away from Gilgit for a time—once he went to Makkah he said proudly—like any other royal gatekeeper, the keys are entrusted to Mohammad Shah's son or Nazir Khan, the second trusted 'keeper of the keys', men whom he knows will not give up the keys to anyone but himself. Access is granted to a privileged few, and of course to any of Shoaib's immediate family. Yes, Mohammad Shah had said, pride showing in the way he stood, *I keep the keys and no one but Shoaib Sahib may use the rooms.*

This was true even in the hectic hey-days of the 1980s. Except for emergencies, or for special friends, or for his small team in the early days who sometimes gathered there at night and talked headily of what they might achieve, the rooms were one of the few places where Shoaib could simply be himself. There were few who really knew that this 'man of the people' was essentially a very private person and the rooms were the place where he could be just this. Otherwise, he may simply have burnt out.

Ahmad Din or Dino as he is known, a man we have already met, is a short stocky powerhouse of a man with a gravelled voice to match, one of Shoaib's rascal drivers. *Shoaib Sahib,* Dino said *always arrived early at the office so we*

thought, well, if he is early, why shouldn't we be early also? Sometimes villagers from far away would arrive and sit on the lawns outside his rooms and he would not turn them away but would come out, talk with them but hardly anyone was ever taken inside. Perhaps this was because inside was another world, a sanctuary of peace, where the various scattered knick-knacks and photographs reminded Shoaib that in another life and in another time he was a simple family man. Perhaps the rooms were a connection to his personal life, a connection he did not really want to share. He had given the village people so much perhaps he needed to keep some small thing just for himself.

Sundays *I luxuriated in bed sometimes until two-thirty in the afternoon* he admitted with a laugh, *but most often I would get up at eleven.* It was a way he could escape the world, where his privacy really was sacrosanct; a way of recouping some of the enormous amounts of energy he put out during the week. Rather like the war-time Winston Churchill and his cigar, Shoaib's Sunday morning lie-ins became a tradition, an eccentricity that everyone respected; one of the eccentricities that made him special. Such as his hat, always purchased from Austin Reed in London, an establishment Humayan had introduced him to in their Cambridge days, eccentricities that made people love him all the more. Dino, said Shoaib, was more careful of his hat than his body; *he wore it all the time, even in the car, and rarely took it off,* said Dino.

So, to Shoaib Sahib's growing list of affectionate names was added in the languages of the valleys 'the man in the umbrella hat'. The universal headgear of the north was the flat wool cap or pakhol. Shoaib's snappy hat from Austin Reed of London had a brim.

The hat, and Shoaib's unvarying habit of a tweed jacket and a roll neck sweater in winter and a short-sleeved safari suit in summer, emphasized the unchanging message he delivered time after time to village people. They did not give a jot where he bought them. Shoaib's admiration and affection for the ways of an English gentleman were first learnt at his grandfather's knee. In the famous rooms at the Chinar Inn is a fading photograph of this man who had so influenced Shoaib's life. It shows us a slim middle-aged man, erect but not aggressive, sure of himself. He wears a grey suit whose Edwardian cut hints at Saville Row, hair brushed flat and parted, in every way a gentleman officer of the Raj. In the footsteps of this man, except as casual wear at home, Shoaib did not feel truly comfortable in a *kurta* or *shalwar-kameez*, and as many of his generation still do, continued to wear western-style clothes despite increasing pressure not to do so during Zia ul Haq's new Islamic Pakistan.

To the people of the Northern Areas accustomed to the famously eccentric behaviour of some of the legendary agents of the Raj, a man who sported a tweed jacket and an 'umbrella' hat, who chose not to sit above them in a chair

but who sat down with them as an equal, cross-legged on a carpet or the ground, and who refused to take the food and drink the villagers felt they were honour bound to offer any guest, this man created his own legend, and they loved him all the more for it. His unvarying summer and winter uniforms projected a message of consistency, of reliability—people always knew where they stood. As one old village activist said, if Shoaib Sahib had ever changed the way he dressed people may have started to think he was not sincere.

These simple acts projecting steadiness, constancy, simplicity and thoughtfulness and a willingness to share the hardships of village life may have been innate, the actions of a natural gentleman and not in any way a deliberate and calculated affectation. However, once Shoaib recognized how his outward appearance had become embedded in AKRSP myth in the minds of villagers, no matter the subtle pressures of the day, change was out of the question. In any case, it simplified Shoaib's morning dress decisions. And yet, make no mistake, despite his old-fashioned Englishness; Shoaib is very definitely a subcontinental man in the very best of senses. He is not afraid to weep openly, not so much for his own sorrows but for those of others; his hospitality is old-world Indian; and he believes in the importance of family and friends.

There is a slim volume penned by a long-forgotten American adventurer telling of his two years spent living as a guest of the Mir of Hunza in the very early 1950s. Hunza was still an isolated valley, inaccessible to the faint of heart. This book provides a matter-of-fact but fascinating insight into the times, none more so than the annual famine of spring when everyone suffered, when food scarcity was the norm. Perhaps because of this and because travellers did indeed face the prospect of dying of hunger, the hospitality of mountain villagers became legendary, and the more important a visitor, the more lavish the hospitality, something that on occasions caused a household, or even an entire village, subsequent privation. And although most deny it, a few villagers whom we came to know well during our many winters in Chitral admitted there were times when they resented having to deplete their precious stores of winter supplies to serve official visitors to whom their offerings meant very little.

Determined to be different and to demonstrate that AKRSP would never be a burden to the villagers in any way, Shoaib established the habit of 'honourable abstinence'. Other than water, neither he nor any of his staff would accept the hospitality even the poorest villagers felt they were duty bound to offer. Once they grew accustomed to it and realised Shoaib's polite refusals cast no slur on their deeply felt duty as hosts, it all became a matter-of-fact affair. However, as Shoaib intended, it placed AKRSP in a league of its own.

In times past when visiting delegations arrived at a village, a few village notables would present a long list or siponestra which would be duly noted by

the leader of the delegation and then filed away by a subordinate. Then the visiting delegation and the notables would settle down to a feast to which every household in the village had contributed. More often than not this meant the villagers had to do without precious food and the rare luxury of tea and sugar. Shoaib broke this pattern and once the villagers were sure Shoaib meant what he said, the custom sank with barely a ripple.

On some rare occasions, however, the rule was broken. Abdullah Baig, one of Shoaib's 'old reliables' told of one. He had been recruited as a field accountant in 1983 and in his eyes, Shoaib was only one step down from His Highness—one of his proudest possessions was a letter from his Imam, *all due to the GM* Abdullah had declared, *and we always stuck to the rules, that was what we did.* In the early days, Ishkomen, a valley to the north-west of Gilgit, was one of the remotest of places. The helicopter helped but could only get them so far—they still faced a three hour trek over country so steep and rugged it almost defies description. Cold and tired, the party arrived to find the entire village waiting. They had also prepared a modest tea. Abdullah admits to having groaned at the idea that he would not be able to take *even one cup of tea.* However Shoaib, he said *had glanced at each man who had made the trek with him and then accepted. Thank God* said Abdullah, *the GM Sahib knew when to keep to a rule and when not.*

Numbardar Tawalud Shah was waiting for us at the Serena Hotel. A serene old man, his benign and smiling face had darkened when we told him we had been visiting the AKRSP offices. He had no time at all for AKRSP now, he said; he would not visit their offices, and clearly not a man who minced his words, said he thought most visitors left disgusted at what they now found. Did he mean disappointed I asked, but no, Numbardar Tawalud, friend and fellow business associate of Syed Yahya and a leading Ismaili, had meant what he said—disgust was the word. *I do not visit their office,* he added, gravitas in his voice, *they do not follow the path of Shoaib Sahib. But,* he said, his face lighting up, *it had been very different in Shoaib Sahib's day, very different.* Did he have any stories he could tell, I asked? He had smiled again and said, 'many'. This is one of them. Asked by Shoaib to find villages in Ghizar, those *most likely to be receptive,* Phandar sprang to his mind straight away. So they set off without delay. Along the way were stacks of firewood. Never happy to dally, Shoaib wanted to press on saying he had reserved a government rest house and was sure everything would be available but Tawalud says he insisted they stop and fill up with wood. Shoaib waited impatiently while it was loaded and then they drove on. It was pitch black and snowing when the party reached Phandar. Good, said Shoaib, let's find the rest house. The rest house was locked. Shivering on the roadside, Shoaib had asked Tawalud to fetch the *chowkidar* (watchman) as quickly as possible and to ask the man to bring a chicken and some eggs.

Kitchens were usually separate from the main building and finding this one unlocked Shoaib and the others had entered and lit a fire with Tawalud's wood—there was no other wood in the kitchen. To Shoaib's relief the *chowkidar* appeared out of the icy gloom and was presented with the chit. There was a bit of foot shuffling and then the *chowkidar* gave the dismal news. The rest house had nothing—no blankets, no diesel for the generator, no firewood, not even a single egg.

Silence. A bit of throat clearing. Well, thanks to Tawalud's foresight Shoaib had said, making the best of things, and because they had some sleeping bags, at least they would all be warm. But it was better than that Tawalud had said laughing—*I had also packed a box with food supplies.* Delighted, Shoaib asked for volunteers to act as cook, ruling himself out as being utterly incompetent in that department. Tariq ruled out the *chowkidar*—too dirty to be a cook— and said he would make a curry while Tawalud made chapattis. The old man had laughed heartily then, *luckily we were hungry because I had never made chapattis before. And even with the wood and the sleeping bags we were very cold,* and then before I could ask, he launched into another story.

They had gone to the village of Chalt taking Syed Yahya with them, *a pious man,* Talawud said smiling. And then ensued the famous fracas that had so disconcerted the deputy commissioner; stones were thrown, chairs and tables overturned and everyone *had to beat a hasty retreat.* Shoaib had been entirely philosophical about the event Talawud said *he told us all that such things happened in development; that it was better to let the people sort things out themselves; that trying to help generally only made things worse.* As a result of the uproar *they had taken only one cup of tea all day.* On the way back to Gilgit it was dark and cold and of course *everyone was hungry.* In his usual way Shoaib said 'chin up chaps'; villagers faced such hardships all the time. But when Talawud produced a carton of fruit and biscuits he had hurriedly grabbed while the riot was at its peak—but before the table had been overturned—Shoaib had laughed *out loud* and said to Talawud's enduring pleasure *that is the sort of man I need to be with me.*

Shoaib's insistence on refusing all food and tea except under special circumstances created an immense impact in the villages. AKRSP staff, Shoaib said, would take nothing from the villagers—they would only give. He wanted his teams to feel free to visit a village at any time and not hold back because they did not want to be a burden and take tea and food most villagers could ill afford. But it was not only this; Shoaib did not want to create even the slightest hint of resentment. He knew how quickly resentment could grow or be exploited. The other side of the coin of course is that not having to deal with the time-wasting rituals of waiting for a chicken to be killed, tea brewed, not only

saved Shoaib an enormous amount of time, it also helped remove the sometimes hours of indigestion that can follow a hastily eaten dish of eggs or bread swimming in slightly rancid butter, the best a house can offer. Sometimes the offerings were even more difficult to deal with.

Syed Yahya Shah tells of once visiting the village of Hopar on a bitter-cold December day. It was the 20th, the traditional day for people of the area to marry—sharing of food and other costs makes each ceremony less costly. The ceremonies were not as they had been. Once tied to a specific village by the rajah's edict, the lower caste people, many families of blacksmiths and tanners who were also musicians, had left to open businesses in Gilgit so there was none of the music and dancing that had made weddings a truly joyous affair. However, one specific tradition had been maintained. Sharbat is butter tightly wrapped and sealed in bitter spruce bark. Buried at the birth of a child, the pungent package is disinterred when the child marries. The delicacy was of course offered, and as this was a special occasion, and as Shoaib was in the company of a man honoured in the area, Shoaib accepted. Syed Yahya still finds the memory vastly amusing. Yes, he said laughing heartily, *Shoaib Sahib took a little, looked at it for quite a long while, and then using the fingers of his right hand as a fork, he ate it. His face was very strange.* Of course there are other dishes that are absolutely delicious such as thick cakes of wheaten bread stuffed with spinach and crushed walnuts, or perhaps a mix of dried nuts, mulberries and apricots, the wonderfully thick Chitrali soup and much more. But there are also delicacies of the region that take a bit of getting used to, such as sharbat and even tea, heavily laced with salt, a concoction my own grandmother sometimes threatened us with—it was an effective emetic.

One day we sat in deep, comfortable chairs in a Gilgit secondary school, an unlikely place to find such comfort, guests of Abdullah Beg, a beautifully mannered old man whose deeply lined face was one of those creased by a lifetime of welcoming smiles. Joining as a field accountant in 1983 he had laughed and agreed that yes, the early days were tough, only one vehicle and a lot of hard walking. He also said that although Shoaib Sahib had been very emphatic about his ideas, he did not simply give orders but took pains to explain in detail *how something should be done*. Abdullah also loved his simple analogies—*Shoaib Sahib would explain credit and debit in this way* he said and his smile-creases deepened, *when you give grass to a cow it is credit; when it has eaten the grass it is debit; but when it gives milk this is income which you can use to repay the credit and keep some for yourself.*

The possessor of a deft touch for reaching out to people, Abdullah smiled again as he remembered how Shoaib always seemed to be interested in people's problems, even the poorest person in the village. He said shaking his head

Shoaib Sahib would remember his name and the problems of his family, and he would never ask any of us to do anything he would not do himself, and then this lovely old man had sipped his tea and sighed, *oh yes*, he said *Shoaib Sahib was a 'pukka' man*, and then he had sighed again, *we are told many reasons why he left us but we have our doubts; he should never have gone because we lost our way without him; he was one of us.*

MohammadSirat is a Wakhi speaker who in 1983, lived in Khyber village. Recruited as an activist, he speaks as if he had a personal connection with Shoaib, his personal mentor, always accessible, always ready to listen. The room where we sit has the stone-chill of rare use. There is a bowl of apples on a low table, a hand embroidered table cloth, bright rugs scattered on the floor. I am ushered to an enormous over-stuffed armchair while Mohammad's serene, grey haired wife seats herself on a pile of cushions. Felicity slips easily down beside her, and she smiles her lovely smile. A man of quiet dignity and warmth, Mohammad is another one of those mountain men who wear a pakhol as if it is part of them, as if they might have been born wearing one.

On the mantelpiece, below an elaborately framed letter from His Highness, is a photograph. It is Shoaib surrounded by a group of cheerful villagers, a half-smile on his face, eyes shaded by the famous hat. During the next few weeks as we wandered through the Northern Areas in huts and houses, on walls and mantlepieces, in pride of place, countless cherished photographs. Shoaib framed by a soaring mountain, beside a jeep, standing with a commissioner, a police inspector or a village notable; and more often than not, standing somewhere in the background would be Shoaib's shadow, the gentle smiling Hussain Wali Khan, looking out over an amazing bridge, a precipitous road, a canal snaking across a huge cliff face, and always with villagers smiling, crowding in to be as close as they can without smothering Shoaib, posing, proud to be at his side, the magic and the magician.

Mohammad talks of how surprised his village had been when on his first visit Shoaib ignored the chair they had taken great pains to provide and sat down with us on the floor like a simple man; we were very impressed, in part because word had gone out that they were to receive a visit from a man who had held high office in government service, and everyone knew what government officials were like. As we sat talking that day a small child tip-toed in. Mohammad Sirat's wife hugged the child with soft affection and whispered in his ear. The child smiled a wide-eyed smile and scampered off. Then there was a sudden chaos of happily shrieking children. Mohammad's son staggered in festooned with children. The manager of a Gilgit branch of an international bank, he had taken time off to talk with us. And of course the old lady's whispers to her grandchild meant that a small feast quickly followed; tea, fried

chicken, potato chips, spicy cakes of chilli and spinach, and bowls of fruit. *This is nothing* protests Mohammad's son as we remonstrate, *just a little tea and anyway, it is my lunch and I cannot eat alone*. So, as we talked about how Mohammad and his fellow villagers had been doubly impressed when Shoaib politely but firmly refused the food they had prepared and which they knew government officials expected, we enjoyed our feast. It seemed churlish to refuse but I could not help a twinge of guilt as I munched on a deliciously hot spinach flat-cake.

A warmly confident woman and supremely serene, nevertheless Mohammad Sirat's wife remained un-named. Perhaps her name had been forgotten, perhaps she had never had one, or perhaps her given name had been out of use so long that it was irrelevant. As was the custom, she had been known as the wife of Mohammad Sirat for perhaps half a century and this was how she saw herself. Conversant only in Wakhi, she needed a literate interpreter. Her bank manager son would do. As she spoke, her husband Mohammad had smiled and nodded. Theirs was clearly a marriage of equals. She spoke with obvious emotion of how her generation believe Shoaib Sahib to be still one of them and of how, even though he has been gone for more than fifteen years, before starting anything, they stop and think—would Shoaib like this thing to be done, what would he think of it? Of the managers of AKRSP since Shoaib, except for Hussain Wali Khan she spoke dismissively, *they were just managers* she said with a toss of her head, *they did not love us; they were not one of us*. Mohammad Sirat moved to support his wife as he had obviously done many times in the past, *if you do not believe then you cannot go, if you do not have the strengths of your own beliefs you will weaken*. And this is how it is to so many in the north.

But whenever we questioned the bright young people who now fill the schools and play cricket on the ridge tops, belting 'sixes' into the nullah far below, or who gather at meetings in their clean white shirts and well polished shoes, they would smile and shrug. Some had not even been born when the giants of AKRSP strode the mountains, when Shoaib first brought his messages of hope. To them he is a legend, the stuff of myths, a super-Schomberg—how can a legend, a myth, ever come back?

Mohammed Shah, the 'keeper of the keys' was a senior servant at the Chinar Inn when he was asked to serve Shoaib. *It was an honour*, he said with pride, *the only thing he really demanded was punctuality*. To a man to whom time was an enemy, punctuality would have been important. So a sharp word occasionally but never anger, always great compassion. Mohammad Shah said Shoaib was a *rare man*, someone who cared for the small people. *I never saw Shoaib Sahib with rage on his face*, he had said gravely, *not even when I*

knocked his radio to the ground and it broke. He told me 'don't worry, in this world people are dying; a broken radio is not important'.

And yes, we know anger rarely featured in Shoaib's emotional repertoire, or if it did he kept it to himself. To a man of his era and upbringing, to display anger was unseemly, a lack of self-control, ungentlemanly. So rarely was he visibly angered that most people echoed Mohammad Shah and said Shoaib just never seemed to get angry. There were however two matters that would always spark a reaction—slighting a villager or making a joke of religious beliefs. To the normally super-tolerant Shoaib, a justifiable complaint from a village about a staff member's behaviour meant an instant reprimand, and on at least one occasion, the offender was sent packing—but not of course, empty handed. It was of course different for the villagers. As Abdullah Baig, one of the earliest of field accountants had said, *even if emotional people came to the office from the villages he did not show anger in return.*

As for religion, Shoaib knew that the differences between the four main Muslim sects, quiescent during the feudal era, were a powder keg ready to blow. Shoaib had seen it happen during Partition and he knew it could happen again. In the super-charged sectarian atmosphere of the 1980s, religion was not a joking matter. Syed Yahya believes Shoaib was one of the few people who could command trust from the non-Ismaili sects. Had Shoaib left in the early days he believes none of the other non-Ismaili areas would have come in—relations between the four sects in the Northern Areas are not good—and that once Shoaib left, AKRSP gradually became a mainly Ismaili organisation. It had been very different in Shoaib's day. In answer to the belligerent harangue of a particular Sunni mullah who demanded to know why only Ismailis had been appointed to the AKRSP management group Shoaib had calmly pointed out that of his seven managers, five were non-Ismaili. That silenced him, *he could hardly believe his ears*, laughed Syed Yahya.

Religious divisions were always there, always close to the surface ready to emerge. Syed Yahya's friend, the now aging *numbardar* Tawalud Shah, spoke with mischievous schoolboy glee of a meeting in a village called Nomal early in 1983, *a mainly Shia village* he added, making sure I would get the point of his story. The village was not at that stage one of Shoaib's success stories, the meeting had been rowdy and most people had refused to form an organisation. What they wanted they had demanded rudely, was a metalled access road to be built by contractors, adding that if Shoaib would not approve this request they would go straight to His Highness. *So I said* laughed Tawalud, *if you want to beg for money why don't you beg from your own spiritual leader, why don't you ask Ayatollah Khomeini?*

Tawalud says this shut them up all right but Shoaib was not at all amused. It was, he added ruefully, the only time he had ever seen Shoaib even mildly angry. Shoaib knew that the plank he was treading between the various religious divides was extremely narrow and precarious. It was also still early days when the slightest hint of intolerance, the smallest mockery could topple everything. An Ismaili, but one of those men whose circle of friends was wide, Tawalud said he had often passed on messages from other sects that Shoaib's life was in danger. *But* said the old soldier, *he would just smile and say 'man is mortal, when his day comes he will die'*. Some years later though, Tawalud added, *Shoaib Sahib admitted I was right about Nomal*. But by then the plank Shoaib had trodden in the early days had become a wide and stable bridge that linked AKRSP to all but the brooding valley of Chilas.

When a small kitchen was added to the rooms at the Chinar Inn a young boy from Baltistan arrived. His name was Ishaq; he never left. Shoaib preferred simple meals of local vegetables and unleavened bread, and drank milky tea with sugar. As was his habit of a lifetime, Shoaib ate lightly when he could, and during winter often missed lunch. Later he would forego dinner, taking fruit instead. Mohammad Shah describes a man who liked bed tea served punctually at 7.30 am, breakfast at 8 am, a simple lunch, or otherwise he might eat in the office. During the summer months it was different—Shoaib had to preside at the many official dinners given for important visitors. And then another small, personal window on Shoaib's life opened when Mohammad said Shoaib simply did not enjoy music. No one else had told us this but Mohammad was quietly emphatic, *if Shoaib Sahib was invited to music shows he always refused. He only watched the news on television and some dramas. And also*, Mohammad said seriously, *Shoaib Sahib might laugh at dinner with his guests or his family, but not with me. He was very correct and did not make jokes with me*. Nor would Mohammad expect him to. *He was a high profile man* he had added without a trace of resentment, *people in Shoaib Sahib's position do not make jokes with people like me*. And no, in the world in which Shoaib grew up, servants were to be honoured and respected. To joke with them might put them at a disadvantage and that just would not do.

But best of all, Shoaib had a photographic memory for people, for their names and faces. Shoaib had literally thousands stored away. He could retrieve these in an instant, and to everyone's amazement, greet a villager in some remote valley by name, even if he had not been to that valley for a year. It never failed; you could literally see people's faces light up when Shoaib hugged them, called them by their names, asked after their families. Dino, a chauvinist to the core, whose name Shoaib has never forgotten, added as if this was a truly impressive feat, *he could even recognize a woman by her face, years after he had met her*. Her name would have been another matter. Many Northern Area women do not know their own names.

They are simply the wife of a man and take his name, 'wife of Dino the driver'. That Shoaib bothered to remember a woman's face was, to men like Dino, who nonetheless loved their wives, truly remarkable.

Shoaib won the hearts of those who served him by never forgetting that they too were people. He visited Mohammad Shah at home, paid the hospital bills of a sick daughter, and when Mohammad fell ill during the Haj, arranged his flight back to Islamabad and then took the time to telephone, and invited me to his house to make sure I was all right. And whether he intends this or not, it is the succession of small, thoughtful kindnesses that wins the lifetime loyalty of men like Mohammad Shah. There was no bad thing about Shoaib Sahib, he said, nodding his head in emphasis, he was humble and sympathetic and lived very simply. But there was far more to this fine old man than he let on. Afshan writes of the many long talks they shared on topics as diverse and deep as religion, nuclear wars and the political situation in Pakistan. The 'keeper of the keys' was a man of many parts.

The rooms are as they were when Shoaib finally and quietly left Gilgit in 1992, fifteen years ago; a living museum full of the accumulated bric-a-brac of a man and his family, here a travelling clock, there a throw rug or a pretty vase. It all looks like he could have left a week ago, except that it is a little dusty. We stop beside an evocative almost sepia-tinted photograph. Our eyes are taken by a very pretty, bejewelled and very young Indian girl wearing a gorgeous sari, and then we see, standing at her side a handsome, smooth-skinned and strong-faced young man, a hint of what he will become, a moustache on his upper lip, gazing out at life and all that it might offer to the young and privileged of India.

On almost every surface there was a clutter of other family photographs, silver frames slightly tarnished but obviously cared for, but few of the 'remembrance' photographs that fill the house on Aga Khan Road, photographs of Falaknaz vitally alive, as if she might surprise everyone, walk in through the front door that very day. Even without the warmth of occupation, a smelly kerosene heater or two, these concrete-cold rooms echo of the time 'before', the time when Shoaib was 'king of the mountains', and all his daughters were happily somewhere else, doing the sometimes expensive things that daughters did. And it gladdened Shoaib's heart that they were and that he could afford to pay for it all.

By the time Afshan arrived in Gilgit Shoaib was well established. Electricity supplies were still intermittent so the office had a back-up generator, but water was plentiful and there were gas-fired stoves and heaters as well as the ubiquitous, smelly kerosene heaters—Chinese-made if you were frugal and did not mind the smell, Japanese if you were not.

In her unpublished manuscript, Afshan enthused *my father was given two rooms at the Chinar Inn which my mother made beautiful and comfortable. If you gave her a shabby little tent* Afshan writes admiringly, *she will turn it into a comfortable and beautiful place...it is one of her qualities.* Was this accomplishment so exceptional? It was after all, the traditional task of a civil service wife to create a home out of a newly emptied government bungalow wherever her husband might be posted. But Musarrat the artist we are told, would add very special touches, so perhaps it was. So, despite saying she could not stay in Gilgit, Musarrat had stayed long enough and often enough to make a home for Shoaib. *We had a spacious two room apartment* Afshan wrote, a little over the top as always, with the closed-in veranda serving as a narrow dining room. The rooms were also large enough for Afshan to convert her dressing alcove into a studio and the larger room into a spacious bed-sitter, *and the beautiful lawn out front* made for quite comfortable living.

Tariq Husain and his new wife, the softly spoken Maliha, had moved into nearby rooms and 'shook their heads' at Afshan's habit of turning up for dinner at the Chinar Inn with 'stray foreigners', hungry, but quite well behaved young men. Maliha did not really approve but it is hard not to be drawn into the ebullient Afshan's life, a person very easy to forgive, so Maliha is still a friend. She lives now in a beautifully crafted and appointed rambling red-brick villa on her garden-farm just outside Islamabad; a highly regarded and sought after development consultant. Birdsong in the background and the murmur of conversation, as we sat around an elegant garden table while servants bustled about preparing food and Maliha talked of Gilgit in her quiet and beautifully modulated voice.

One of 'the chosen', and a rising star in the foreign service, in 1983 her career hit the wall. As President Zia's Islamisation policies took hold, women were no longer eligible to serve in overseas diplomatic posts. Vexed and very disappointed, Maliha looked about for alternatives but as she said, *it seemed very difficult as I was not really trained to do anything else.* However, the network of extended family connections began to hum, and if Maliha was at a dead end, so was Shoaib. He needed high profile women on his team to take the lead in an aspect of the programme he still found mystifying. As he later said with a laugh, *recruiting Maliha served me well in many ways. Not only was she a first class person, I was also able to say to the world, 'look, people are even leaving the foreign service to come and work in Gilgit'.* Shoaib rarely missed an advertising opportunity.

I was so desperate anyway said Maliha, *trying to find something to do now with my life that I decided to go up there,* here her eyes widened and she smiled, *so I did and to my absolute surprise found it absolutely fascinating.* She

surprised me with her passion as she spoke of the heady pioneering spirit that pervaded every aspect of life in those days, of learning almost everything anew, of the astonishing new ways of looking at the villages, of the excitement of seeing the awakening of village people. *It was a whole new world, the way he did it, and I knew I never would be able to hold a normal or a steady job again. The type of freedom, the level of trust Shoaib Sahib gave us was totally unique and you got to meet people*—the great and good of the world, diplomats, heads of state, famous correspondents and so on—*on a daily basis you would never meet elsewhere.* Maliha smiled again and in her low melodic voice added, *he gave you enough rope to hang yourself and if that is what you ended up doing so be it, but you learnt so much, and you grew, you grew so much,* and here she suddenly stopped and shook her head, *I have never held a full time job again.*

In Sri Lanka, Shoaib had seen how effectively UNICEF used the medium of film to sell its projects. In Geneva, Shaw was also an enthusiast and so a film crew was recruited. The setting was a movie makers dream; all that was required was a script. Shoaib looked about for volunteers; the older hands scurried for cover. A firm believer in the old maxim that a civil service officer can turn his, or in this case her hand to anything, Shoaib blithely handed Maliha, fresh from the ranks of the 'heaven-born', and also the most junior of his staff, the job. And so the film 'Valleys in Transition' was born. Maliha coined the title and the film went on to sell the programme in the north to the world in a way that few international donors could resist.

It was Maliha, quietly bitter about what she called the 'stifling environment' of Pakistan that forces the brightest and best to go 'offshore' to realise their full potential, who said *we always seem to hear about our best from outside sources about what they have done 'elsewhere'*, Maliha who provided one explanation why AKRSP's star burnt so brightly. Many of those who plodded along in other jobs had been transformed when they joined AKRSP because they were suddenly free—the Northern Areas were as new and as fresh as another country—the stifling environment pervading the rest of Pakistan had not yet reached the north. It is an environment, Maliha believes, that silences argument, and denies full and equal rights to women. It also creates a male dominated society where although there are some marvellously outspoken and educated women, more often than not such women invariably operate under the protection of powerful families and have spent their formative years outside Pakistan. Tolerated rather than encouraged, such women are regarded as exceptions.

As the programme grew, Maliha described how specialized positions evolved. She worked first in Tariq's monitoring and evaluation section, but when they married, Shoaib placed her in charge of the newly formed women's programme. What to do about women was a subject that never failed to send

Shoaib running for cover. He simply had no idea what to do except to argue that village organisations generally selected projects that benefited entire families, so women were of course covered by default. Nevertheless, Shoaib began to encourage the formation of special Women's Organisations in the same way and with the same incentives that applied to Village Organisations in part because these latter were generally run by men. Was the women's programme a success? Maliha was ambivalent, *yes and no*, she said, *you can have a women's programme that looks at women's issues but it is not easy because there are so many limitations.*

In Hunza there were genuine women's programmes complete with projects such as vegetable growing and poultry, and with their own microcredit schemes, and overall, by the mid 1990s, nearly 30 per cent of the more than 2,600 village social organisations in the Northern Areas were Women's Organisations. But Maliha was absolutely right; Woman's Organisations were always secondary affairs. It was not until much later when as a Senior Adviser to the United Nations Shoaib began to work in India in the State of Andhra Pradesh that he began to fully comprehend how to unleash the power of women, and the incredible outcome when this is achieved. He now takes the somewhat radical position that women may well be the future for rural support programmes, although he admits in Pakistan it will not be easy. Not easy at all. Even in the Northern Areas in the far more tolerant Ismaili villages, there were those who, for their own reasons, kept watch on the sidelines ready to pounce at the slightest hint of impropriety.

We had to be ultra-cautious Maliha said in a resigned tone, *when we started the women's programme some were local women so the neighbours were all watching, friends and family were all watching to see how we would treat these young women. We had to be absolutely sure nothing untoward happened.* When one of the girls came back from a trip and whispered that one of the drivers had 'misbehaved', Maliha knew she had to act. *We had to nip it in the bud*, she said, unaware of the way she shared the use of wonderfully dated English with Shoaib. To complicate matters Shoaib was away on one of his interminable public relations trips, but supported by Shoaib's ever-steady lieutenant, Hussain Wali Khan and one other staff member, it was decided the driver had to go. This was a huge decision because landing a job in the Northern Areas is like winning the lottery, but although there were some rumblings that was about all. However, as soon as Shoaib returned most of the drivers staged a protest strike and noisily petitioned for the reinstatement of their co-worker. This placed Shoaib in a quandary. Should he placate the drivers or support his staff, and was a women's programme worth this kind of fuss? *He was under a lot of pressure* she said, *I thought we had done the right thing and I knew I would resign if he overturned our decision which for him would have been the easiest thing to do.*

But, after talking to everyone and grumbling a bit about being placed under a lot of pressure, he stood by his staff's decision. The protest faded away. *My point is* Maliha had said smiling her quiet smile, *any other boss would probably have caved in to that kind of pressure from the men, and then taken each one of us aside and asked us not to resign, and honestly, if he had done that I do not know what I would have done.*

But Shoaib had not shirked from taking the harder path and so commanded a level of loyalty that Maliha believes was totally unique. She put it this way, *everybody there felt they had a special connection with him, it is quite amazing. You can talk with anyone and they will all say the same thing, he could make you feel special, and he never ever played anyone off against another person, never.* And once you have entered the magic inner circle of Shoaib's life, you become not only special; you become one of the family. It is the same for Musarrat who, as we already know, one night in London said without a trace of guile and with absolute sincerity to Felicity and I, *you are part of the family now. Do not forget us because we will not forget you.*

Absolutely, said Maliha, *he never forgets and if he can ever help any of us he will come running*. And Maliha should know; her marriage to Tariq fell apart in the long run and she had turned to Shoaib as the one person she knew she could rely on to help unravel a complicated and emotion-charged situation. *And he did it beautifully* she said, *solving each and every issue and acting as an arbitrator that everyone would listen to.* But of course he was hurt by it all. Although Maliha insisted marrying Tariq was totally her own doing, it had happened under Shoaib's watch, and he used to joke about having first given Maliha a job, then a husband, and then an education as the Aga Khan Foundation had part-funded her subsequent Masters degree, *but now he does not talk about it much at all.*

And as life has changed for Maliha, so it has for the Northern Areas. At the upper end of the Hunza valley, high in the mountains near the Khunjerab pass lies the remote and inaccessible village of Shimshal. When Maliha returned enthused from her studies in the US, although Shoaib was sceptical, he allowed her to set off for Shimshal to undertake a case study. Her subsequent report *excited everyone* in part because the study gave a *snapshot preview* on which to build the dialogue process, rating the urgency of need, and listing the issues that might confront a visiting team. The report also meant that Shoaib added Shimshal to his list of things that needed to be done right now. Today Shimshal is no longer a forgotten corner of the world. The room next to ours at the Karimabad Serena Hotel contained the gear of a hunter who was away seeking a rare trophy with a guide from Shimshal, and 'curiouser and curiouser' as the Queen remarked in *Alice in Wonderland*, a group of overweight, and as we

discovered, overwhelmed young people had just helicoptered into Shimshal as part of a British 'reality' show. How they coped without instant internet access, chocolate-coated mars bars and fish and chips, and whether a diet of apricots and unleavened bread would magically manifest a bunch of leaner, fitter youths with vastly enhanced longevity and the mentality of a junior Dalai Lama would be filmed in detail. The Shimshalis had lived in their village for centuries, suffered its hardships and survived quite well, but could a bunch of English TV nerds suffering acute hamburger withdrawal symptoms hack it?

Back in Gilgit I gave up the hotel's computer to a slim, attractive young woman who introduced herself as the TV show's resident doctor. She needed to urgently contact the head office in London. Cheerfully quartered in a tiny stone room attached to a Shimshali house once used to over-winter animals, she had been obliged to call in an army helicopter to evacuate a young contestant, a boy of subcontinental origins who sullenly complained of illness. Whether it was giardia or altitude sickness or that he simply wanted home and mummy was uncertain. The doctor didn't really mind, she would be paid whatever happened and she loved the area, although she did say that the show's producer was *freaking out*, something that seemed to be a regular occurrence. Next day the doctor and her charge had vanished. You will have to watch the programme if you want to know what happened next.

That night we had dinner with Muzaffaruddin, an exuberant young man, and his softly spoken wife, Yasmin. A Shimshali shepherd until the age of nine, but now with stints at Oxford and other universities under his belt, Muzaffaruddin's current job was as AKRSP's Gilgit Programme Manager. He laughed when he spoke of how his mother, who now lives with them in Gilgit, was shocked to find he and Yasmin did not keep a flock of sheep because no one would survive in Shimshal without the wool from their flock of sheep, and she could not believe her eyes when Muzaffaruddin had cut down six mulberry trees in his Gilgit compound because they were messy. How could he cut down these trees, she had cried, trees whose fruit, the first fresh food after the long dark winter and the hard hunger of early spring, would be met with joy and eagerness a mere generation past; how could he? *Well, I had* he laughed, *times have changed*. And so they have. I remember an early spring day in the Kalash valleys of Chitral twenty years ago when the drums thundered a heartbeat call and the brilliant green canopy of the giant mulberry trees shook as if alive. And in fact they were alive, children clinging to the upper branches swinging and shouting, while down below the women spread great cloths and squatted with the smaller children, stuffing handfuls of mulberries into their mouths as if they had not eaten for a century.

Mulberries, fresh in spring or dried and added to a wonderfully sustaining nut and dried fruit muesli, or planted along tracks close to villages so that travellers did not have to beg for sustenance, are an indivisible part of the past. Now the past vies with the future. Muzaffaruddin tells of a delegation of elders from Shimshal who came to see him in Gilgit. After they had eaten, hospitality is still a given, they told him why they had come. 'We have done all that AKRSP asked' they said, 'we got together and worked hard and now you ask us what next and we say this—all we want is for our young people to come back and visit us in the village for we have been abandoned. We are a village of old men and women'. Of course not every village has been abandoned and who knows, Shimshal has a magical high mountain beauty all its own in the summer months. Maybe Muzaffaruddin laughed, when we young men of Shimshal are rich we will build villas near our village and take our children there for summer holidays.

Is this really what Shoaib envisioned all those years ago, the hardscrabble villages of the past metamorphosing into holiday resorts of the future? And what about the young man who had stood and answered truthfully when asked about the future, thanking the fathers and the mothers of the previous generation for working so hard so their children could be educated; thanking God and the Aga Khan and Shoaib Sahib for giving them so much opportunity; and then asking for understanding because he and the other children who had been educated no longer saw their future in the fields, nor did they want to build roads and bridges with their hands as their fathers had done. No, they wanted to become businessmen, compete with the Chinese now flooding into Hunza, become doctors and lawyers, teachers and bankers, to be all those things their fathers could only dream about.

And you know, I doubt Shoaib would have been uncomfortable with any of this; I doubt he would have minded. After all, he set out to improve the economic standing of the village people, and above all to let them decide what it was they wanted. But does Shoaib, like so many older men, regret the passing of an era, the vanishing villages and the sturdy mountain people, the 'first footsteps' feeling of it all; and is this why he is sometimes silent when the young recount their dreams? They are not the dreams he remembers, nor are they the dreams that we remember, the dwindling band of those who once took their own 'first footsteps' in a world that was at the same time less equal perhaps, but a lot more innocent and isolated than it is today. What in fact is anyone to make of it all? Nothing; it is not our task. It is, as it always has been, the task of the next generation.

A Man Driven

From day one he drove us like a maniac, said Tariq Husain. Well spoken and pleasantly opinionated, urbane and educated, professionally

respected but by no means everyone's ideal, known to Robert Shaw and facing an impasse with his Chicago Economics PhD, Tariq had written to Shaw and ended up as one of the six 'originals' who set up for business in that shop front in the Gilgit bazaar in December of 1982. *He just wanted to get the job done but it was as though there was never enough time*, Tariq added, setting out snacks and drinks on a low table in his comfortably furnished part-finished farm house. Except for Shoaib's indefatigable secretary Rauf who is still with him, who sat out in the cold wrapped in a shawl banging away at his old typewriter, Shoaib would pack Tariq and the other two into the jeep he had commandeered from AKF in Islamabad and head out for the villages.

A man in a hurry, in Gilgit Shoaib had grabbed the first available secretary he saw. Unfortunately the man already worked for another Aga Khan organisation. He also demanded a higher salary to make the move. The first but by no means the last time Shoaib was to ruffle Ismaili institutional feathers and cause a minor uproar in Karachi that he was poaching staff; this was one occasion where Shoaib backed off. *The man was fairly useless anyway*, Shoaib said, *his shorthand was poor and he hadn't a clue about how I worked.* The answer was to seek out a man he trusted, someone who had worked for him before. Shoaib was not just about to employ a secretary; he was taking on someone who would become an institution in his own right.

Rauf smiled shyly, not one to boast of his exploits and said *yes, I watched them go and I worked like that, outside on a small lawn for more than a month and luckily there was no rain or snow.* Shoaib has an amazing memory for people and having worked briefly for him in 1975, he had filed Rauf away as someone to remember. *He sent me a telegram from Gilgit* and here Rauf smiled shyly again, *it was a good offer and so I went.* In fact, all of Shoaib's offers were good, more than good. Tariq for one agrees, saying that he was almost certainly the highest paid young professional in the country at the time. *We were all in very privileged positions* he said, *and we were trusted. The 'boss'* as Tariq refers to Shoaib, *was undoubtedly also one of the best.*

Still with Shoaib today, Rauf recalls buying the first typewriter in Gilgit, and because it had no ribbon he would take the carbon copy to another shop in the bazaar to be photocopied, and this became the 'original'. *Then we would have to make stencils and there was ink everywhere and red correction fluid—we had to re-use the ink*, a world apart from the busy AKRSP office complex with its computers and linked printers a mere ten years later. *But in those days I did everything* Rauf said, so quietly I had to strain to hear, *the filing system,*

mail, vehicle pool, protocol, guest movements, everything. We disregarded time and would often work until late at night by the light of a kerosene lamp, Shoaib Sahib would write the first of his famous 'notes for the record' (NFR) *longhand*, a lifelong habit, *and I would then type them out.*

Packing everyone else in the solitary jeep and firmly believing that the only way to start was to begin talking with village people, Shoaib set out. Tariq shook his head then and spoke of how, in a whirlwind of travel and talk, they visited twenty-six villages in December. Then, as he was to do so often over the coming years, Shoaib sat down and dashed off a letter to his mentor, Akhter Hameed Khan, telling him what had been achieved and what the people had said. Tariq said the old man had taken his time as he always did, and two months later in March had sent a thoughtful reply. The letter suggested that a good start had been made and that the next logical step might be to select a few villages and develop and test some pilot projects. The letter was too late. Shoaib and his small team had already been to eighty-three villages; there was no stopping now.

Many of those closest to Shoaib believe the lesson of Daudzai had burned itself deeply within his mind. In Daudzai, acting on AHK's advice, he had expanded at a steady and measured pace, had established pilot projects and worked within the system. It had all folded when he was forced to leave. This time it seemed he was determined to go so fast and move so far that before anyone started to sit up and take notice it would be unstoppable. And this is exactly what happened. Tariq smiled and said in his high, clear voice *absolutely, after one year you could not have rolled back that programme even if you had been Zia ul Haq at the height of his powers.*

With the wistful nostalgia of a man who is not yet old but still remembers the great times of his youth, times that will never be repeated, Tariq talked of how *there wasn't a minute to spare between February and November, there wasn't a minute we could call boring, and remember, when I first got to Gilgit I thought the place to be 'dead'. Now it hummed with life. We would work all day and at night we would talk. I do not know where the energy came from* he added laughing. Tariq talked on of months where each day was packed with events, how there was just no let-up, sometimes inching along dangerously iced narrow mountain tracks, sometimes climbing to isolated areas on foot, taking out the message, recruiting villages, *getting in the money, bringing in donors* and then of course having to deal with the growing flood of bureaucrats, scholars, journalists and diplomats, *anyone who had anything remotely to do with development or the area*, cameramen and writers scenting the story of the decade, *all of them would just walk in and we would have to find time to deal with them.* It was not a complaint, it was too exhilarating for that, but everyone felt like a circus juggler who never knew how many balls it was that he would

have to manage in the air at any one time. *Weeks would go* by, Tariq said, the memory of it all still vivid, *weeks when there was a dinner out for some visiting person or other every night. There was just no time for anything else.*

And this was exactly how Shoaib wanted it to be. He had recruited the best and most talented people he could find, paid them salaries that were the envy of the country, and in return, he expected them to give every waking hour to the programme, to the villages. And he led by example. Tariq believes that the speed at which he took the programme left many people bewildered and bemused, including the Board of Directors in Karachi. *He also believes that there were some who kept their knives out ready for him* (Shoaib) *to stumble, that some in fact wanted him to stumble but he hadn't.* Not in those early years.

Of course mistakes were made— picking the wrong people or following an idea to a dead-end, *but* added Tariq, *he went so far so fast that nobody could trip him*, his mistakes were left behind and so quickly eclipsed by successes that they meant very little; *we were all lifted by the people to achieve things beyond our wildest dreams. I learnt that people matter more than experts.*

It is easy to drive past the village of Japuka on the way to Hunza without noticing much for there is little that sets it apart from any other village in the District of Gilgit, but it does have an importance that belies its appearance. It was the very first village. Shoaib's first real task when he reached Gilgit was to find people who could introduce him to the villagers. Without that he could go nowhere. Casting about, Shoaib quickly discovered a possibility. *Yes*, he said, *the people in Karachi had been supervising a programme called the 'farm information centre'. They had two people, one in Chitral and one in Gilgit, so I went to their shop.* There Shoaib found Tawalud Shah and Mohammad Yar. As many others were to find, Tawalud says he suddenly found himself plucked out of his sleepy schedule and dropped head first into a whirlwind of activity. *I literally barged into the shop*, Shoaib said laughing, *and told the poor fellows, 'look, I have to go to a village; one of you had better take me there and help me hold a dialogue'.*

Shoaib clearly recalls it started snowing as they arrived and of being taken to the house of the Mukhi or religious leader, for Japuka was an Ismaili village. And of course the Mukhi received them and said that he would be happy to tell Shoaib all the problems of the village. In the beginning, this was to happen time and time again but Shoaib would not lose his temper, never. Instead he would quietly ask *can you speak for each and every one of the villagers?* The answer was invariably 'of course not'. So he would sit for however long it took and explain how he needed to talk to *everyone* in the village, and that if they could not agree to work together then that was that. Shoaib smiled then because what happened next would be typical of many of his early encounters—*the Mukhi*

thought for a bit and then knowing the Imam, His Highness was behind it all said, 'right, the whole village will agree to whatever you propose'. Again Shoaib patiently explained that no, he had to speak to all the villagers all together, no secret meetings, no committees of leaders, everyone together at one place and one time. So he asked the Mukhi to set a date and a time, and of course the answer was 'any day, any time'.

Shoaib however wanted to start in the way he intended to continue; he also wanted to teach the villagers the value of time so he insisted on a date and one was eventually agreed. A week later Shoaib returned and was again taken straight away to the same house where a few more people were seated. After a few pleasantries Shoaib remembers standing up and saying *it is very nice to meet you but where are all the village people?* With that, the Mukhi and the others stood up and said, *they are all waiting for you in the Jamaat Khana.* And they were; all one hundred and twenty households. And so it all began. And if it had been a test, Shoaib had passed. He was really serious. He really did want to talk with everyone and would not be satisfied with just a few village leaders.

More often than not, it was the savings element of his 'package', Shoaib believes, that won the day. *The traditional leaders knew they needed everyone's agreement for this aspect, that they could not guarantee this alone* and so there was nothing for it but to assemble the people and hope for the best. And in Japuka, the best did indeed happen. What the people wanted was a road, about two miles of road. Enter now that famously modest engineer and Shoaib's right hand man, Hussain Wali Khan. A truly lovely man who died tragically of cancer in 2002, before we could accept his offer to stay at his beautiful bungalow built on Karga Nullah just outside Gilgit, before he had time to enjoy it himself. HWK as he became known throughout the Northern Areas was a one-of-a-kind engineer, a man who was prepared to rewrite everything he had learned and practiced in the Public Works Department so that villagers could get on with their projects. A Giligiti who loved his mountains, a man who always seemed to have a smile on his face and a solution for any of the extravagantly impossible schemes the villagers proposed, content to stand just outside the limelight, to avoid the fuss and commotion, the extravagant accolades the world focused on Shoaib. Quietly spoken, funny and intensely loyal, Hussain Wali was one of those who stood behind Shoaib's promise to the villagers—he made things work. Convinced that Shoaib meant what he said, he threw himself heart and soul into re-engineering the villages of the north. Nothing was impossible.

Dismayed and disheartened when Shoaib's ouster was finally accomplished in 1992 Hussain Wali reluctantly stepped into the position of general manager. He would not however, change his office, the 'rooms at the inn' were retained and he made no secret of the fact that he was not in any way stepping into

Shoaib's shoes. As far as he was concerned Shoaib was still the boss. There were rumblings in Karachi and irritation in Geneva. Yes, Shoaib had been sidelined but a Gilgiti and a Shoaib loyalist had stepped up to the plate. As a northerner, Hussain Wali owed nothing to the Karachi elite, he was not an Ismaili, nor had he ever been involved in local power games. The local Ismaili elite was miffed, the Karachi clique gritted their teeth, while the technocrats in Geneva wondered if Hussain Wali was up to it. So the sniping began again, a war of attrition mounted by men who were experts at the game. Hussain Wali was pointedly relegated to acting general manager; decisions were constantly questioned; demands made; slights enacted. For this quiet, plain-speaking, honest and dedicated man it all became too much. Utterly disheartened and disgusted, in 1994 Hussain Wali stepped down.

When eventually he was forced to take himself to Islamabad for treatment an incident occurred that perhaps says all that is needed to be said about the way in which Shoaib's AKRSP operated compared with the views of the Karachi power-brokers. Appalled, distressed and in tears when he found his old friend sick and weary, Shoaib says he had immediately ordered fifty thousand rupees to be sent to Hussain Wali's account to cover his mounting medical costs. It was the least he could do for a man who had given so much to the north. Although Shoaib had no executive power, the order was acted on. A proud man, Hussain Wali would never have applied for help

Later, Shoaib said, the chairman of the Aga Khan Foundation grumbled that Shoaib had no need to have acted so precipitately. Had Hussain Wali needed any help, the chairman said, he could have applied to the Foundation. And there is little doubt that the response would have been anything but generous, but that was not the issue nor is it the point of this tale. In his dealings with the villagers, in the way Shoaib simply sent funds to Hussain Wali's account, straight away, the villagers pride, Hussain Wali's pride, was never undermined and it was done on the spot, no begging, no delays—and not at the pleasure of bureaucrats or boards. This was the way of it. Right from the start.

But back to Japuka—the villagers had a problem. Government contractors had built a bridge over the river and then left it at that. Jeeps could now cross the river all right but then the loads were dumped and had to be packed into the village on people's backs.

It was a tantalizingly frustrating situation.

Confronted with the problem of how to help a group of uneducated villagers build a road from the bridgehead to the village, *Hussain Wali just threw out all the usual tedious engineering costing exercises* said Shoaib. *He simply made a cost estimate, threw into this an estimate of materials cost from his own*

experience and told the people to get on with it. All they had to do was to stick to the technical specifications. Shoaib was quite explicit about the help he was offering. There was no question of AKRSP providing money for land compensation. The villagers would have to manage that matter themselves; and while he did not expect people to provide totally free labour, AKRSP was not able to pay like a government contractor. An AKRSP grant was meant to be a supplement, something to keep the wolf from the door for those who gave their time until the job was finished.

Hussain Wali thought the road would take about three months to complete.

To everyone's amazement, and in a scenario that would become commonplace in the future, the villagers came back fifteen days later and said they had finished and would the team please come and inspect the work.

We were all totally amazed said Shoaib. What had happened was simple. It was the villagers' road and they had taken ownership of the project. Husain Wali had based his estimates on twenty people working eight hours a day but the village had mustered more than a hundred people and they had worked while there was light, fourteen hours a day or more.

Nobody had ever seen anything like this before laughed Shoaib delighted still at what had happened, *it simply proved the theory of what can happen when you unleash the potential and power of the people. They wanted it; they organized it; and they worked at it, some of them for nothing, so that there would be money to compensate those who lost land, issues that would have taken any outsider years to resolve.*

Shoaib and his team had been on the ground for a bare two months and already they had one village project under their belt, signed, sealed and delivered.

After Japuka it went like wildfire Shoaib laughed again, *we went from a buyers market to a sellers market—villagers started coming to us to hold a dialogue. I was not surprised* said Shoaib, *others were, they were always surprised.* The Board of Directors for one; and the Aga Khan Foundation people for another although perhaps not Bob Shaw; perhaps not the prince.

There was simply no stopping now, Shoaib said, his face alight with happy memories, suddenly the villagers realised they were free of government contractors and even more importantly, they were free to do things as they wished. And amazingly, there to help them was a new organisation led by a very strange, very different man who was willing to help them. The prince was on this man's side too. No wonder some people thought Shoaib might be some sort of angel.

The Board of Directors may have been thoroughly confused when Shoaib tried to explain just what he had in mind early in 1983, in part because it is only

the truly converted who seem to understand what Shoaib is talking about when he explains his three famous principles.

They just don't get it, said Vijay Kumar in his office in Hyderabad, India, talking of the development world's supposed elite, World Bank's staff; it is little wonder that a group of Karachi businessmen also did not get it. But at least they put up their hands and voted to let this astonishing and perplexing man have his way and get going with the programme.

By the end of the summer of 1983 more than 200 village organisations (VO's) had been formed, and this was only the beginning. A measure of the pace Shoaib set is that the formation of each village organisation involved Shoaib and his small team sitting down to at least three, very often long and protracted meetings—the famous 'dialogues'—with the entire village. Most people wondered where his energy came from.

There are a vast number of reports and publications detailing the physical achievements of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme. Suffice it to say however, that on the 7th of December 1982, AKRSP had two staff members, Shoaib and Tariq Husain. By 1987 there were 233 when regional offices were opened in Chitral and Baltistan; by 1993 there were 354.

They were needed.

Building on those fifty-five initial meetings, by 1986, 345 self-governing village organisations were fully operative. By the time Shoaib relinquished the position of general manager in 1992, there were more than 2,600 including over 700 special women's organisations (WO's). The network of village organisations meant that AKRSP was beginning to affect the lives of over 80 per cent of the entire population of the Northern Areas; more than 75,000 households. Was AKRSP cost-efficient? Some say no, but the last evaluation report the World Bank carried out listed total programme costs of $52 million which translated to a modest $690 per household. The Bank was impressed because this was half that of the projects they funded, most of which also 'lacked the (vital) human capacity-building element so important for sustainable development'.

But back to the beginning—the World Bank evaluation report of 1994 recorded in almost hushed tones how the village organisations and women's organisations had also saved an incredible 209 million Rupees. A worry; one of the few chinks in Shoaib's almost impenetrable armour, at the same time, the combined borrowings of all village organisations were a comparatively miniscule 27 million Rupees. Yes, the villagers' multi-million rupee savings were earning a good interest but the money was not being put to work in their service. The commercial banks in fact were sitting pretty.

The role of government was also one of those 'tight-rope walking' issues that continually exercised Shoaib. Despite the travails of his own civil service career, and his mentor Akhter Hameed Khan's low opinion of government, Shoaib remained forever hopeful. However he also believed that while a good government has the responsibility, role and capacity to undertake large scale projects, its various departments rarely have the resources or capacity to deliver services to individual villages or minor localities. They also lacked the will.

The courteously old-fashioned gentleman who had joined us to take tea at Lahore's Intercontinental Hotel introduced himself as Riaz, 'Doctor Riaz', he added, smiling the warm slow smile of a man who has achieved most of what he set out to do in life. Formerly Punjab's top animal husbandry officer, Riaz had put in seventeen years in government service in Gilgit in the days when it truly was one of the most isolated posts in the country, before being tempted back again in 1987 by Bob Shaw.

Up in Gilgit, the runaway successes of village access road and canal building projects had led to a second-level chorus of requests for assistance to maximize the sudden access to markets and the appearance of new irrigated lands. The hunt was suddenly on for the best agricultural advisors available. They had to be special people, willing to go out to the villages, instead of sitting in an office waiting for villagers to come to them. Of equal importance, they had to share Shoaib's conviction in the existence of a moveable but invisible working interface, a 'line in the sand' if you like where government's technical agencies and rural support organisations such as AKRSP would meet and interact. It was a reasonable theory but as is so often the case in real life, its working was a bit wobbly.

Take our poultry programme, for example, Riaz said in his quiet steady way, and told us how chicks were hatched and grown out in large expensive government hatcheries; but then, how unaccountably, government had no way to deliver the chicks to isolated villagers, and contractors had a bad reputation. Riaz's answer? *Well, we took the chicks to the villages. And if we had promised a delivery we kept our word.* And then his eyes lit up, *an avalanche* he said, *there was an avalanche blocking the road to remote Ishkomen, two cases of fertilized eggs had been promised. I was going to send a message saying we could not deliver the eggs but Shoaib stopped me, ordering up the helicopter. All that way in the helicopter just for two cases of fertilized eggs* Riaz had laughed, *but Shoaib said to me the expense is a small thing compared to our word.* Would the Board's hard-nosed money men have quite seen things that way? But if a few dozen fertilised eggs seem a minor matter think again. Try supping in a village where there are no chickens. The meal will be lean indeed. A shortage of protein has always been an issue in the mountains. So the helicopter flew in a

few boxes of chicks, the villagers were stunned but as a result the word went out—AKRSP kept theirs. And who was it the villagers thought of when they saw their new, fat egg-laying birds pecking up their feed? Not the government. They thought of the GM Sahib and his organisation. *Sometimes this led to jealous feelings*, Riaz said, and he should know. He has been on the other side.

Once, when Akhter Hameed Khan was on one of his investigative missions he had posed this question. *Look Riaz*, the old man had said, *we have been working on this poverty matter for fifteen years or more, do you think there is any improvement*? Riaz admits he made the mistake of replying jokingly that while he was not sure about the poor, after working for AKRSP he knew that poverty would not reach his own family for at least three generations. A civil servant, Riaz had been flabbergasted at his salary offer and the accompanying fringe benefits such as generous allowances which meant he could afford to live in Gilgit while his children continued with their schooling in Lahore. *Shoaib Sultan Khan*, he said, *was the first person in my entire career to be so considerate*. Riaz remembers Akhter Hameed at first laughing uproariously at his answer, and then, as if he were lecturing a foolish student, the old man had collected himself and harrumphed, *yes, this is what happens when you make it into a business. This Shoaib has given you such a high salary you have all forgotten the poor; you have become fat and have forgotten the real mission.*

This of course was very unfair and later when the old man bearded Shoaib about his conversation with Riaz, saying sniffily that *a very noble cause had been commercialized*, Shoaib was stung. Perhaps Shoaib was over-sensitive but there had been other grumbles, the Board included, at the salaries he paid his staff, up to four times the rate they could command down-country. So for once Shoaib had bitten back.

He wanted it known he said, that he had searched high and low but had never found anyone like his ultra-ascetic mentor, someone who would work for nothing. Then, still hot under the collar, he asked a question whose answer he well knew—how long had it taken the old man to establish his model in Orangi and how quickly had it taken off? Totally unruffled at the upset he had caused, Akhter Hameed had smiled fondly at Shoaib's outburst as a father might to a favourite son, *in Orangi I have opened the shop*, he said with a mischievous smile, *it is up to customers to come and choose whatever it is they think they need*. The old man knew very well that Shoaib, whom he considered one of only three true people-leaders he had ever found, had a very different approach. Not content to simply open a shop, Shoaib set out to deliver its commodities to the villagers, and he paid people like Riaz to be the delivery men.

Shoaib was not ruffled for very long. Echoing the sentiment of nearly every person who worked for Shoaib, Riaz made a point of saying time and again, *he*

was not like any bureaucrat I had ever met. He was polite, always and spoke in a soft and friendly way, and as others had also said, in spite of Shoaib's apparent mildness of manner, Riaz, who said he is normally bluntly spoken, always felt shy in Shoaib's presence, *and you know*, just a little embarassed that he, a grown man could feel this way, *I never wanted to make him displeased with me.*

A believer in the vital importance of teamwork, although there was no question of Riaz's technical competency, Shoaib knew if he did not get on with the rest of the team he would not be able to stay. The amiable and unassuming Riaz passed the test as almost invariably did the many very bright, often prickly and sometimes eccentric people who served out a period on the staff of AKRSP. Individuals in almost any other setting, in Shoaib's Gilgit, each somehow saw themselves as part of a brilliant whole, part of a marvellous family, part of a world that was full of excitement and incredible achievement.

In 1991, acting on Shoaib's advice, Riaz accepted the offer of the highest position he could ever hope to achieve in Punjab's division of animal husbandry. But it was, as Riaz said wryly, *an empire with very little satisfaction.* A few years later, when Shoaib offered Riaz a position in one of the new rural support programmes that Shoaib was then establishing, he happily accepted. When he accompanied Shoaib on a return visit to Gilgit he found that although much had changed, one thing had not. In the villagers' minds, Shoaib was still the much loved and greatly revered 'king of the mountains'. *Everywhere he went* Riaz said, his admiration absolute, *he would address them by their names and they loved him for it, every one of them believed he took a personal interest in their lives; and you know, he really did.*

Rarely unhappy or angry with his staff, there was only one aspect that upset Shoaib—a complaint from a village.

Riaz tells of being surprised the first time Shoaib abruptly exited an official meeting to be sure to arrive at a village at the promised time, and of taking everyone with him to the meeting including the driver who could, if necessary, rattle off Shoaib's essential principles.

Unheard of, but Shoaib had done it.

However, no one is perfect. Riaz believes Shoaib disliked confrontations with his staff, and even more, hated telling someone they were fired. This small chink in the armour of an almost perfect man does nothing to lessen him. Instead it makes Shoaib seem just a little more like you and I—it makes him human.

Although Shoaib's aim was to encourage and build a strong sense of self-sufficiency in each village, to provide that first vital stimulus, he decided to offer a 'sweetener'. Termed Productive Physical Infrastructure (PPI) projects,

these were practical development works— roads, suspension bridges, canals— chosen by each village, that would create immediate economic gains. Unlike government who decided on a project with the area's elite and then employed contractors to carry out the works, each of Shoaib's projects were implemented by the villagers themselves under a partnership agreement hammered out during those first few all-important meetings—the famous 'dialogues'.

It was one of the first occasions when Shoaib and his mentor would differ. *Villagers should stand on their own two feet* the old man counselled; providing grants was not a good idea. For once Shoaib ignored his mentor's advice. Most villages were so resource-poor and so socially depressed, so suspicious of change that radical measures were required. Never afraid to change his mind, Akhter Hameed eventually came around and agreed that Shoaib had been right. In the Northern Areas, grants had been essential.

However, Shoaib knew he was walking a very shaky tightrope.

Give them too much and the villagers might sit back and expect everything to be done for them; too little and nothing would be achieved and villagers would lose heart. Somehow by intuition or by listening to the advice of men like Hussain Wali, time and again Shoaib got it absolutely right.

Most often, AKRSP provided a modest cash grant to cover the costs of materials and some equipment as well as engineering and technical support, while the villagers provided their labour. On occasions, in very poor areas, the grant also provided small amounts to be paid to village workers. The initiative was wildly successful. By 1994, more than 1,500 projects had been initiated, many of them incredibly daring feats of engineering, mind-boggling marvels of ingenuity. Visitors were incredulous. Donor representatives, aid agency staff all reached for their cheque books. Ambassadors rushed to hang photographs in their reception rooms. Aid agencies too. 'Just look', they all chorused, 'this is what our funding has achieved'.

They had never seen the like. Everybody from President Zia downwards began to queue up to ask what they could do for the project.

And the people too, were astounding. So poor and yet, look at what they have done. Whoever would have thought they had it in them. Ambassadors asked their aid officers, 'will we give them more? Great. We will then. Send a note to the second secretary. See if we can squeeze in another visit. The helicopter, of course. Yes, you can send my Pajero ahead, it might be useful. Oh, and my wife wants to come too'.

In Sri Lanka, working for UNICEF, an organisation adept at selling its projects and ideas in the highly competitive world of international development,

Shoaib, as we already know, had learnt the value of visual imagery—one good photograph is worth a thousand well written pamphlets, a cleverly shot movie is worth its weight in gold. Not a slow learner, in time he became a master publicist himself, and would never travel without photographs or a copy of one of the two films that 'sold' AKRSP to the world. In Shoaib's day, a visitor to any AKRSP office could fill in a happy hour or so browsing walls filled with photographs, hundreds of them, of fantastic, scarcely believable, daringly imaginative feats of field engineering, some so bold and dangerous that you knew sacrifice had been involved, injuries, a foot or an arm blown off by an improperly prepared charge, or worse, men dead. And it happened.

But still villagers cheerfully went ahead, slinging great steel siphon pipes across gorges, building bridges across raging torrents, cutting narrow roads up sheer mountain sides, slicing into cliff faces to bring canals from high in the mountains, from a spring or a glacier, down through a seemingly impossibly difficult landscape to the waiting newly terraced land around a village. In some stood a smiling man, sports jacketed or safari suited, face half-shaded by a hat, surrounded by villagers, faces alight.

If a village group happened to be in the room with you their eyes would brighten, one might point, 'GM Sahib', another whisper 'Ah, yes', the reverence in their voices unmistakable.

Those were the days.

Throughout the most hectic of his years in the north, Shoaib never forgot the lessons that Burgess had drummed into his probationers all those years ago in Lahore, in particular the importance of keeping a meticulous daily record of events that might seem mundane at the time, but which in sum, would tell the story of an officer's achievements—and of course his failures.

An accurate diary was one of the best legacies a good officer could leave for those who were to follow.

Ever an avid 'pen-man', Shoaib took Burgess's admonition a step further. He initiated a 'public diary'. Termed 'Notes for [the] Record' (NFR), during the first five magic years hundreds of NFR flowed from his pen to be re-typed and copied by the faithful Rauf. Sometimes boringly mundane, sometimes amusing and even foolish, sometimes of incredible events recorded as they happened, NFR chart the amazing energy of the man and his views on what was happening around him.

Perhaps more than anything else they tell the story of a man driven. They begin, quite hesitantly, in December 1982.

The first few are written as Burgess might have instructed, in formal reportese. Then, as if he can no longer contain his enthusiasm, Shoaib breaks

out, *a heartwarming response*, he writes when his jeep trundled into the first non-Ismaili village. There were fifty-nine Shia households and one hundred and twenty Sunni he notes, adding that AKRSP intends to focus only on those schemes with the potential of providing immediate improvement to the incomes of the majority of village households. *What is the use of building a school* he asks, *if a father cannot pay the fees or buy books for his children*?

He also has a couple of worries—the first; are the Karachi businessmen on the Board of his new organisation really interested in helping the poor?

Well, of course they. They are philanthropists of a kind but they expect to be in control; expect recognition; and gratitude of course—they are only human and gratitude warms the soul; and they did not for a moment like being sidelined.

UNICEF was the second. Gratitude and recognition were not issues for a UN organisation, but as Shoaib was on deputation he was still to an extent their man: they also expected him to listen to what they had to say, take note of their views; even act on them. And so Shoaib was gently chivvied, in as much as a UN agency ever chivvies anyone, to appoint a woman as a programme officer for example; include a women's programme in his plans for the future.

Able to shrug away UNICEF's diplomatic prodding in the hectic early months of 1983 as something worth considering if things panned out the way he hoped they would, in later years, whenever the question of what to do about women was raised, Shoaib would adopt his helpless male act, throw up his hands and ask for help.

Even Shoaib's ultimate ideas man, Akhter Hameed Khan had nothing much to offer to sooth UNICEF's concerns suggesting, in an uncharacteristically vague way, that perhaps disease prevention might be an entry point before hurrying on to the firmer ground of a Persian poem as a parable to show what AKRSP should, or should not do—like think about a second supra-village organisational tier right from the beginning, or leave road building to Local Union Councils, the first of which Shoaib left until it was almost too late, and the second which he wisely ignored.

Although glad to have the UN as a safety net, Shoaib could also afford to quietly downplay the organisation's advice. UNICEF was never going to provide funding—a UN organisation rarely chooses to be a bit-player in someone else's production. Shoaib also hoped he would never have to invoke the UN safety net. Really, I had no intention of going back to UNICEF he said when we were talking about AKRSP's early days, and by 1985 I believed I no longer needed an umbrella to do the kind of work I was doing. The prince was safeguard enough. When Shaw suggested he take a contract with AKF, Shoaib was ready. His seven years of service with the UN entitled him to a pension which meant he had once again done well for

his family and as AKRSP was by then a sell-out success, Shaw's offer made a lot of sense. Shoaib became the prince's man.

Curious, and perhaps a trifle nervous about what he had started, perhaps worried at the speed at which the organisation was growing, and knowing the ways of the Ismaili elite, His Highness weighed in, making two visits in 1983. Apart from closing the door firmly on the potential mutterings of certain Ismaili factions about using Aga Khan resources to benefit non-Aga Khan areas, and expressing extreme distress at the sectarian violence and first-ever killings in Chitral, on both occasions the prince was all business. On his first visit he was unable to reach Gilgit—there were storms in the mountains—so he invited Shoaib to take breakfast with him at the State Guest House in Rawalpindi.

While the bearers hovered in the background, the prince, Shoaib later wrote, noted the swift response to *certain intelligence agencies attempting to present AKRSP in an adverse light*; was *vigorous in support* of Shoaib's belief in the power of capital—his own hobby horse was for the eventual emergence of one or more apex banks, which Shoaib happily and as it turned out, unwisely placed well at the back of his 'things to deal with' list. Finally, His Highness wanted to make sure that a *rigorous monitoring programme* was initiated.

The prince had also done his homework so there was lively talk about replicability, the technical capacities of villagers, the issue of funding, or not funding, volunteer labour, and whether Village Organisations will run out of steam when the first astounding, and socially cementing, projects were finished. Good breakfast questions; Shoaib's answers must have satisfied because eventually they all ordered eggs and settled back into an exchange of pleasantries.

If 1983 had seen a storm of activity, the next year was a whirlwind. There were fund raising and public-relations trips abroad organized by overseas Ismaili groups; in America Shoaib tried to pass the ball on *what to do about women* to the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations who were however experienced in the art of dodging tricky issues; back again in Gilgit there were local power niggles like this one: *Mr. Yafi Ali, an Ismaili councillor from upper Chitral proposed that all AKRSP funds should be placed under his control*; and all in a day's work, having flown over a *handful of yaks on the Shandur pass—God knows what they could find in that bleak and desolate place* Shoaib noted, while in Chitral, during a heated interchange between intra-village groups over a project, he *acted to save a protester from being lynched* leaving it to our imagination how the saving was done. Winging down to Karachi to sooth 'ruffled feathers'.

The Board had been fed disquieting rumours that AKRSP's staff in Gilgit were telling everyone how they were doing a favour to the businessmen of

Karachi by implementing such a successful programme. Shoaib reassured everyone this was nothing but a rumour spread by *mischievous troublemakers*.

Among the least-loved, the hard-nosed businessmen of Karachi who sat on the Board knew the rumours were more than likely true. So did Shoaib, although in his innocence he would never believe they had been made in anything but jest. But he knew how damaging rumours can be so he would sooth the Karachi's Ismaili elite, caution his staff and get back out to the villages. It made life easier if Board meetings were not too combatitive and if other Aga Khan organisations, such as those working on health and education issues, did not feel dwarfed, overshadowed by the new baby giant. But whatever they felt, they were not slow to use the new village organisations as entry points. Understandable—the other Aga Khan organisations worked in structured, controlled and hierarchical organisations. They provided services that people of course wanted—who would refuse schools and health centres—but rarely did they seek the opinion of the mainly Ismaili villagers they said they served. They were not embedded in the villages as was AKRSP.

Ruffled feathers settled, Shoaib noted, and then *everyone repaired to a lavish luncheon* at Ramzan Merchant's vast new house in Clifton. Did any of the Board stop to think that bicker as they sometimes had over a peasant farmer's canal-building wages, that day and without thinking much about it, they would consume the equal of his entire year's income, and more, in a single sitting? Probably not. But then again, why should they?

As the year wore on Shoaib would need to draw upon his seemingly bottomless reserves of positivity, reserves however that were being continually replenished by the amazing success stories beginning to emerge from the villages of the north.

Donning his old civil service cap, he dealt swiftly with an acting commissioner who had suddenly realised that the seventy-nine village irrigation canals already underway with AKRSP support would mean the sudden appearance of new productive land which would be distributed without a trace of government intervention. Official land registration formalities, which often took years to complete and which made the fortune of many a lawyer or government clerk should surely be followed, he argued. And so he set out to do just that. He was beaten before the game began.

'Very well', Shoaib had said, 'if you insist on bringing development to a standstill with bureaucratic procedures I will just have to go back to the president's office in Islamabad and tell them I have had to stop the programme'. There was suddenly a flurry of back-pedalling, the orders would of course be rescinded, and any outstanding cases would be processed within a month. Very

aware of the word 'acting' in front of his title, the commissioner pleaded that all he had been trying to do was avoid future problems with the revenue department.

You could almost hear the gales of laughter from field staff and the villagers.

The ownership of land held by villagers for centuries had never been regularized—so what was the point of trying to do this for the so-called 'new lands'. The villagers would do it for themselves, or in some cases not. As Shoaib noted cryptically, 'opposition by one family meant the project did not go ahead'—agreement by all was for Shoaib a *sine qua non* for all projects.

Out from his English university, Shoaib's academic friend Guy Hunter gives the programme a resounding 'A', but because they are piqued at being upstaged by AKRSP, the United Nation's Food and Agricultural country representatives smile but elect to reserve their judgement. When their project leader is thrown out for a political indiscretion they suddenly discover that their best and only option is to join in the applause for AKRSP. They do, but their project somehow never provides entirely wholehearted support. United Nations organisations do not like playing second fiddle to anyone but government, and even then they often do so condescendingly.

In the villages there is a sudden flurry to build helipads.

Villagers are not fools. It takes them no time at all to realise the significance of a helicopter—fewer delays in getting their projects up and running; even eggs in a snowstorm.

Die-hard opponents in Chilas and over in the Drosh area of Chitral begin to muster. The Union Council member for Diamer throws up his hands and says he can do nothing to combat the *sentiments being fanned by religious elements in Chilas*. Shoaib accepts with grace. He knows a brick wall when he sees one, hurrying down to Islamabad and then on to Peshawar to advise the chief secretary to rein in any of his keener officers who might plan to take punitive action to halt the vitriolic anti-AKRSP booklets and leaflets circulating in the Drosh bazaar. It would only serve to worsen the situation. With no fuel Shoaib thinks the fire will burn itself out. It fades, but will not entirely go away

With funds already stretched to the limit, Shoaib begins to hunt for more. So does Shaw in Geneva. Shoaib flirts with the National Development Finance Corporation. Worth a try, it turns out to be the first longterm loan of five million rupees interest free, courtesy Shoaib's friend and erstwhile colleague Chairman Zafar Iqbal. If he could have looked into the future he may not have bothered because soon a trickle will become a flood as donors throng to open their wallets but not before Shoaib has to figure out how to say thanks but no thanks to

USAID whose money as usual comes with strings—they can fund anti-narcotic activities, a complication Shoaib can do without. There are villages in some of the high northern valleys where poppies for self-medication have been grown for centuries, the only way to ease the pain of hunger or of illness in winter.

There are also other complicating factors, rumours that drugs were being funnelled into Afghanistan to corrupt Russian conscripts, that the American CIA and its secretive Pakistani counterpart, the ISI, are involved. The most sensible thing to do is to stay out right away from this sort of thing—Shoaib signals a polite no.

The helicopter is coming into its own to Shoaib's delight, back in action in July with a new rotor. A wolf is shot by a villager near Ishkomen, a summer flash flood washes away two houses, an event that occurs quite regularly, and the Pir of Chatorkhand gives the programme a nod.

The formation of village organisations is proceeding famously but as people are involved it is not always plain sailing. Frustrated, Shoaib writes of 'factionalism and intrigue' in Gupis. The village is 'riddled with it' he fumes, and the original organisation has fragmented into a number of smaller groups. He hopes it means a new start but has his doubts. He is buoyed when after making a 'rather steep and treacherous descent' he arrives at the astounding Soust tunnel, 'seven feet high and five wide' vanishing into the mountain. The experts had said it could not be done and there were Shoaib's 'amateurs' proving them wrong. More on this later.

Contrary to his standing instructions, an elaborate lunch had been arranged. Irritated, Shoaib left Soust's village elite looking a bit foolish muttering that he was short of time. They knew however that Shoaib normally had all the time in the world for his villagers. They would not make the same mistake again.

Located in a border area government considered 'sensitive', most foreigners were unable to visit the Soust tunnel. The prince of course flew in and made the climb but was he a foreigner? That day, back in Passu, Blackton, the USAID representative of the day, was waiting. He was not allowed to make the climb. USAID may not have been an overt contributor but it certainly paid to keep the Americans on side so Shoaib would take him onwards, show Blackton other amazing sights.

So the party crossed the Hunza River and entered the Shia enclave of Nagar. A surprise awaited—over five hundred previously reluctant households waited in joyous clamour. There is nothing like seeing your neighbour succeed. Shoaib gave his usual upbeat address followed by Blackton who 'spoke Urdu quite well'.

In the helicopter heading towards the Shandur pass they flew over fifteen villagers heavily wrapped in their hand-woven woollen cloaks and puttees, their

yaks loaded with snow-muffled bundles. Such a 'huge contrast' Shoaib wrote in his notebook, the villagers and their yaks trudging along through the deep snow towards the village while he and his guests whirred overhead, arriving at the tiny enclave like visiting gods, warm from the heated cabin of the helicopter. Greeted only by a few hardy yak herders who over-winter in the village of Barsat, summer is a very different story. Then the high country is thick with the herds and flocks of lower villages fattening on the sweet alpine herbs and grasses.

Flitting from village to snow-bound village, Shoaib threw himself happily into the minutae that was of vital concern to a village—the reorganisation of the high and very remote Dar Balkalti village group to make sure no one missed out on water from the proposed new canal, talking about savings plans with another, reassuring a worried group who could not agree, telling them that AKRSP was happy to wait until they had settled their disagreements; so it all went.

His own staff had seen it all before, but foreigners never failed to be astounded. Bundling Blackton and a couple of auditors from Karachi into the helicopter again, Shoaib took them high into the remoteness of the Daramosh Mountains to the village of Dassu.

Dassu—wrapped in the past, totally isolated in the modern sense of the word—walking was the only other way to get there—the helicopter landed in a small, flat, icy field dwarfed by the immensity of the surrounding mountains. A small tent served as the primary school. No one ever came here, the villagers told the stunned visitors, no one had ever done anything for the village, not the Maharajah of Kashmir, not the British, and not the Pakistanis. If AKRSP did nothing the villagers were honoured—no one else had ever bothered to visit the village—but there was something, their spokesmen said a little tentatively, and with little hope of success, said perhaps they could be helped to build a new channel. They planned to bring it across ten kilometres of this impossibly rugged terrain, but if that was out of the question, a link road would be good.

Could they really do this, Shoaib had asked? Yes, the hard worn people of Dassu replied without hesitation, with a little help they were capable of either project *we can do either one easily*, they said again and there was no hint that this was just a hollow boast. The villagers were deadly serious. Of his guests Shoaib wrote afterwards *it was an eye-opener for them all*. He did not need to say anything else.

There was more to follow—women and children at Haiderabad Paeen perched at vantage points and presenting a colourful picture, and a dodgy precision landing at Hamuchal, where a marvel of local engineering waited. Shaken by the landing and perhaps gasping in the thin air, the auditors stayed with the helicopter. The climb was just too steep, unfortunately, Shoaib diplomatically noted, the auditors could not

visit the channel, but to his credit the American did. Once his breathing had normalized he could only stand and wonder. The Hanuchal channel did that to people, even world-weary aid officials.

Wherever the helicopter landed villagers crowded to meet Shoaib. He was fast becoming 'the king of the mountains'. At the village of Shoota children held a large welcoming banner. While Shoaib looked on benignly, Blackton was once more astonished to see what the villagers had accomplished—five kilometres of 'jeepable' track cutting across the incredible mountains, hacked out in just a few months. Then having 'dropped in' on at least ten villages, the helicopter landed back at Gilgit.

It was 1600 hours Shoaib noted in the manner of a man to whom time is an enemy. The exhausted guests were dropped off at the Serena Hotel. Shoaib took himself back to the office. There were field reports to read, to annotate.

Future funding begins to occupy Shoaib's mind. His Highness's seven hundred thousand dollars will not go very far.

Then there are the Dutch. How to gently divert their interest from the social sector to the point where they will fund productive projects, or deal gently with their suggestion that village organisations might use their savings for social welfare when that is not at all the reason why you have encouraged villagers to save. Shoaib 'racked his brains': how could he do these things in a way that did not upset them, would still retain their interest?

A sudden road block—empty coffers. So rapidly had villagers taken up Shoaib's challenge that in April 1984, the implementation of village projects had to be halted. Shoaib's coffers were nearly dry. It was one of the many occasions when Shaw rode to the rescue—a vital injection from Canada's aid agency CIDA put AKRSP back on the road again. John Martin was in charge of CIDA's non-government agency 'window' at the time. Shaw arranged a visit. Martin's jaw had literally dropped when he saw what was happening in the villages. *He was just totally amazed about what had been done, says Shoaib, smiling a small secret smile of triumph, it was probably John who went around telling everyone else what he had seen.* In a remarkable demonstration of the power of faith, despite the temporary drying up of funds, in the villages it was business as usual—not one village organisation faltered during the stoppage, savings continued to be collected and banked, and people continued to work on projects already underway. They believed Shoaib Sahib, their GM, would not let them down.

Shaw's *sleeping giant* has been awakened and will not go back to sleep.

By June, the villagers had amassed a staggering three million rupees and by October, two hundred and fifty-four Village Organisations had been formed.

Nearly 90 per cent of all households in Gilgit District are represented by a village organisation.

Not everyone is happy.

Mutters of discontent about all the attention AKRSP attracts can be heard in the offices of government's cash-strapped technical departments as tea is drunk and newspapers read. Even the economic planners in Islamabad are peeved because AKRSP has left them floundering—their ideas and methods are seen to be fatally flawed.

Shoaib rushes from one office to another, a band-aid here, a handshake there, but just so long as the commissioner and his deputies are included on the passenger manifests of helicopter flights, just so long as they are seen by the villagers as sharing in the programme, then as chairman of most committees, one of the elite, the commissioner can easily cope with the grumbles of his technical department chiefs, smooth 'ruffled feathers'.

The irrigation channel the Gulmit villagers aimed to build, the Chamangul Khul was another one of those projects that would astound future visitors. In their heart of hearts even most Gumiltis doubted it could be done.

So difficult and dangerous was the terrain that at first the villagers, who were no slouches when it came to negotiating dangerously unstable mountainsides, held back when Sambal Khan, the master mason, called for volunteers. Sambal Khan already had two difficult channels under his belt. He stood his ground, arms folded, waiting, asked 'what sort of mountain men are you?'

Two 'truly brave men' had stepped forward. Nine others followed, men *who would not be shamed*. The other one hundred and seventy members heaved a sigh of relief and added a few hundred rupees more to their already impressive savings. Mind you, savings were no small thing. Villagers everywhere are proud of their savings and eagerly tell Shoaib how much their accounts now hold. They have built channels before but they have never ever had money in the bank. Now they do.

They find it astonishing. So is the channel.

Halted by intense December cold, the crew of 'human spiders' went back to work in February. They aimed to finish by July. They did. Standing in the near completed channel that snaked along the cliffs of Gaucher nullah Shoaib found himself dwarfed by 600 feet of sheer perpendicular rock wall towering on either side. It was awe-inspiring and overwhelming, he wrote, a marvel of engineering. There were tears in my eyes, Shoaib later told me; how they did it I will never know.

This was a phrase taken up by many others, time and again—how could simple villagers achieve so much, achieve such astonishingly dangerous and complex engineering feats? Ask Sambal Khan. Ask 'the eleven'; they might be able to tell you. Then again, more than likely they would just smile shyly, shrug and say, *it was nothing.*

Little escapes Shoaib's notice as he tours 'his' district. He shows some visitors the site of the massive mudflow of 1974 that dammed the Hunza River and submerged the Friendship Bridge built by the Chinese and then points out a line of school girls crossing the Shishkat Bala balancing precariously on two narrow planks while 'the nullah raged below'. The incident is worth a helicopter whistle-stop—the villagers are hard at work on the foundations and buttresses for *a much needed suspension bridge.*

Seemingly inexhaustible, Shoaib is everywhere, judging some of the works in progress as excellent, while others *leave something to be desired.* Jot down a quick note—Hussain Wali Khan's attention will be required, seldom are mistakes or sloppy work irreparable, at least not for Hussain Wali. Inspecting another site perched on a steep slope three hundred metres above the nullah floor there is an urgent shout; the mountainside has decided to fall off. *This activated an energetic scramble to safety,* Shoaib noted which is one way to describe the panicked scurry as Shoaib, his guests and forty villagers sought safer ground.

It was just one more entry to be made in his daily log—*channel length estimated at 8,800 feet,* but there was an unforeseen problem—*a new landslip of 700 feet had to be bridged. It would be accomplished,* he notes precisely, *with eight inch pipes, each ten foot length to cost one thousand one hundred and fifty rupees.* Shoaib approved the add-on amount on the spot. Sometimes he didn't.

The village of Ghulmet Bala Khal once protested that the amount AKRSP had included in the partnership agreement to cover labour costs was too low. Shoaib patiently explained that the labour grant in no way should be seen as a wage. It was instead a sort of subsidy, something to help offset the time a villager might otherwise use to earn money elsewhere. The grant was not meant to be anything like the amount a contractor might negotiate with government. AKRSP did not work with contractors, *we enter into partnership agreements* he had patiently reminded them, *it is then up to you as a village to implement your own project for your own benefit.*

Shoaib had brought along the deputy commissioner as he often did. DC Sahib stood up and told the people in so many words to get on with it because there were no better offers on the table, none that he knew about anyway. So they shuffled a bit, grinned, and did. For the villagers, it had been worth a try

and had Shoaib caved in at this early stage the word would have spread quicker than the echo of an avalanche—AKRSP are a soft touch, always ask for more than you are offered. In the future, Shoaib will make occasional exceptions, but the occasions will be rare and the reasons will be pretty good—a near miss from a landslide will do.

Then there is the village of Charpursan which was, he notes, until last year *one of the most inaccessible valleys west of Soust.* A dirt and gravel road has been built, its surface in places *hanging grimly on near vertical rock faces by gravity alone. It is not recommended to people with weak hearts or vertigo* Shoaib notes.

His own heart still beats strong and sure.

He walks all morning and into the afternoon from the Ishkuk glacier— its melt waters have been trapped by three village organisations who have worked together to direct the flow into a channel twelve kilometres long. Along the way there are more channels, suspension bridges, roads and flood protection walls, and the waves and cheers of the villagers who are building them just because he said they could.

One village organisation, Shehrsabz, is hard at work on a suspension bridge to connect the village with the lands they farm on the other side of a deep gorge. The span will be exactly 105 feet Shoaib notes with satisfaction. Having just crossed the old bridge, one had to be adroit as an acrobat he informs his daily log.

The suspension bridge at Kirmin is a puzzle. How did they manage it with so little money, he wonders? Did they take any shortcuts? Is the quality up to standard? Shoaib cannot have one of the His Highness's bridges falling into a rushing nullah due to poor cement. He will ask the doughty Hussain Wali to make discrete enquiries. Meanwhile he agrees the *Kirminites* can use the money saved on the bridge to build a link road and another channel.

By 1800 hours Shoaib writes, *we were back in Gulmit.* In just two days he had visited eleven of the seventeen projects in the surrounding valleys, walking for many hours each day over rugged mountain terrain, ascending and descending thousands of feet.

Shoaib still had enough energy to be polite. The mir had sent an invitation to 'drop in' so he would. It was neither the first time nor the last that Shoaib would *drop in to sample the mir's hospitality.* More often than not it was a simple affair of a former ruler and present day political representative wishing to be informed about what was happening in his former kingdom, what were his voting public up to.

There were also occasional *lavish lunches laid on for visiting dignitaries* who were helicoptered into the mir's personal pad. Who paid for such events is irrelevant. In all probability the mir did himself. He would consider it all in a day's work, part of his natural duty. He would, however, have liked the helicopter to touch down more frequently on his pad, occasionally ferry his family down to Islamabad. That this did not often happen was an irritant. And mirs are not in the habit of forgetting irritants.

I suppose two hours drinking tea and munching biscuits and politely discussing AKRSP's projects in the Hunza and Gujal area with the mir, with Hunza's attendant assistant commissioner looking on, might be relaxing for some people, but stopping at the office of his Social Organiser in Aliabad on the way back to Gilgit was not. *But I simply could not just drive past* Shoaib writes.

When he finally reached Gilgit, for once Shoaib spent only a brief time at the office. Bundling up a pile of reports he left for his rooms at the inn. A bath awaited, and Shoaib loved his baths.

Pressed by the Canadians, by the Dutch, even by the British who seemed to have forgotten it was a matter they carefully avoided when they held the reins of power, Shoaib calls for a brainstorming session to see if anyone can tell him what to do about women.

For the moment, Shoaib can divert the donors' attention by talking about the three thousand members the forty-five women's organisation have already recruited, hoping no one will ask the question, well, apart from having an excellent savings record what else have they done? Luckily few ask because the answer is as yet, very little.

To Shoaib whose days are filled with trekking from one astonishing engineering feat to another, raising chickens or vegetables is just not in the same league. Do women need a special women's bank; or maybe someone could look at ways of reducing the drudgery of a village woman's life? Not even Akhter Hameed Khan is very helpful.

Surely one of his 'bright young people' will think of something.

In the meantime, as most of the donor visitors are men, they seem willing to settle for the argument that by definition a village organisation represents everyone including women, that economic improvements benefit entire households and not just men. What else can he do, he wonders? Give me one good idea and I will throw everything behind it, he challenges his staff. But there are none. Even the donors are silent.

Oh well, there were now over one hundred and thirty amazing projects underway, eighty-two of which are new irrigation channels. More land means

more food or more fruit for sale or vegetables to eat; surely a better diet is good for women and children.

A group of Ismaili ladies from the UK are full of praise so perhaps the whole 'woman thing' is not quite so bad. The good news is that a former high-flying Foreign Service officer who also happens to be a woman, has joined the programme. It is Maliha, mentioned earlier, whose film 'Valleys in Transition' proved to have just enough pathos and poverty without making a viewer squirm, and went on to show how the valleys were being transformed by an amazingly unifying idea, that people who live in the extremes of poverty could not pull themselves up by their own bootstraps unless they had bootstraps to pull; and how the simple partnership agreements between villagers and AKRSP has blown out of the water the theory that villagers cannot organise themselves. No doubt about it, they are exciting and exhilarating times. The film puts over this message, hits viewers right between the eyes.

Shoaib continues to set an almost impossible pace; sometimes he bites off a little more than even he can chew.

Oxfam have been in there from the beginning. They share Shoaib's vision that every person counts, that even in the poorest person there is latent power waiting to be released. All that has to be done is to find a way to release that power. Easy to say, hard to do. Oxfam's people don't know how to do it themselves. But they have heard that up in the Northern Areas it is really happening. They send their man, young Nick Gardner, to see if it is true and how they might help.

This is the story of 'Gardner's epic'. It starts benignly.

A basket of delicious apricots at the village of Singal, a chat with the Social Organiser at Punyal, and then, after a long day on the road, Yasin rest house. Tucked away, high in the valleys of remote Ishkomen, the same Yasin where Hayward met his end in 1870 for daring to delve too deeply into the affairs of that devious ally of the Raj, the Maharajah of Kashmir; there is absolutely no danger of being murdered now. Those who arranged the grisly deed are long gone, their antecedents ousted.

Shoaib and Nick Gardner arrive at half past six in the evening. It is summer but at a little over eight thousand feet, Yasin is cool. It is an ideal evening for a stroll.

Next day they will walk to Nooh canal, Shoaib announces.

The Social Organiser Sartaj Khan coughs discretely; it is quite a tough four-hour walk, he cautions. Shoaib wave's aside the advice, *a good chance for a brisk walk* he laughs, he will go by himself if everyone else is tired. They aren't. Sartaj Khan for one would not dream of letting the GM Sahib wander off alone.

Nick is also young and up for anything and Naib Khan, well anywhere his boss chooses to go, so will Naib Khan.

In good spirits they leave the jeep at Morkha suspension bridge and Shoaib is right, the walk is brisk and pleasant. An hour passes and everyone is still smiling except Sartaj Khan. He advises they take a break. They do but wonder why.

They are soon answered; on their hands and knees and climbing so steeply Shoaib is gasping and Gardner starts to think there is no way he will make it.

Hazir Shah, a fine old man and on his way back to Yasin finds time to take tea with us at Gilgit's Serena Hotel before he leaves. He is rather deaf.

We have to shout. *Thank you for coming* I say. He looks at me as if I am a fool. Something is not quite right with the translation. He hasn't just arrived; he is about to leave. We try again. Get it right this time. He thinks Nick Gardner was foolish too. But yes, he also agrees, how would a visitor know what it means to climb a hill in Yasin?

Hazir smiled then, a wonderful smile, leant forward in his chair. He can remember everything. *It was a very dangerous canal and high, thirteen thousand feet* he says, not too high for a Yasin man though, *Shoaib Sahib got very worried. I took his pen and glasses so he wouldn't drop them and pushed him up*, Hazir chuckled, a deep rich sound.

So they make it, dragging themselves over the parapet of the new canal an hour or so later, totally drained, hungry as hunters. Hazir agrees the two guests were also starving. Luckily for them, for Hazir too, the Village Organisation's new field accountant was fairly young; a strong shepherd in disguise laughs Hazir.

He sent the strong young shepherd-accountant galloping back down the mountain.

A short rest. Too short. Nick and Shoaib exchange a glance. Who will get up first? Shoaib does and with Nick staggers along to the headworks. When they get their breath back and their vision ceases to cloud they can hardly believe their eyes. A gorgeous cascade of deep green water explodes over four successive artificial falls each of ten to thirty feet, and beyond lay a stunningly beautiful alpine valley dressed with the deep green spires of scattered pine and other trees, a rare treat in this land of rock and snow whose trees, once protected by the strict edicts of their feudal lord, are fast falling to the woodsman's axe.

Back along the channel three school boys were waiting at the top of the rock-strewn climb, hardly out of breath. Any excuse to escape the classroom. they held plates of green salad and a jug of watered buttermilk. Guests first.

Hazir Shah held back. Shoaib and Nick fall upon the offered food. *I have never enjoyed food so much*, Shoaib wrote. *I was touched by their concern.*

Fortified by the simple food, a good sweat or weary legs did not stop Shoaib making an entry in his log even if his hand shook. He carefully notes the details of the work.

The canal whose climb had nearly finished them was three kilometres long, had cost an estimated forty-eight thousand rupees, and had taken forty people from December to July to complete, he noted, adding for good measure the amount of new land available to each family—six *kanals* of hillside and ten *kanals* of 'wasteland'—more than enough to make everyone happy, more than enough to send a shepherd bounding down the mountain, to have three schoolboys make the climb balancing platters for the leg-weary guests.

Climbing down took its toll on knees and thighs. Even young Gardner would ache and cramp in his rest house bed that night. The Social Organiser Sartaj Khan seemed little affected. It was all in a day's work. Softened by the offerings carried up so easily by the three village boys, Shoaib found it hard to refuse the tea and fruit the village manager offered at his nearby house.

In any case there was a guest to consider.

The mulberries were sweet, the plums insipid, but with a mug of *lassi* and some fruit under his belt and the resilience of youth, Nick was ready to proclaim he had at last seen Shangri-la. The villagers were not sure what he was talking about. To them, Thoi Nullah was far from mythical. It was absolutely real. It would give them life.

But they were glad their guest was happy.

Revived, the party trudged back to the suspension bridge and turned to see where they had been. *I could scarcely believe what we had done*, Shoaib wrote. Sartaj Khan was correct on all counts. It pays to take notice of a mountain man when he says a walk is tough—Shoaib had just experienced four of the hardest hours he could remember.

But it was far too soon to entertain such thoughts; harder hours were to come. When Shoaib and his younger Oxfam colleague slumped happily into the jeep they were not to know that the climb to Thoi Nullah was not the end of their day. Far from it. There were still some daylight hours remaining. Shoaib would not waste them.

Hazir Shah said they next drove to see another channel twenty kilometres away. Somehow it seemed sensible to inspect the channel from the road. Night fell as they rattled back past the strong shepherd's village, the man who had sent

three food-laden schoolboys scurrying to the rescue. A short hour and they should see the kerosene lamp on the verandah of the Yasin rest house, grins Naib Khan pushing the jeep along.

They come to an abrupt halt, headlights shining on a mess of mud and rock. A landslip had taken out the road. Gardner and Shoaib squelched warily through the mess, in the dark each potentially treacherous footstep a worry.

All was not lost. *The Raja Sahib and the Tehsildars went ahead to round up a jeep* Shoaib wrote. They trudged on in good cheer, rescue imminent. Dash it. The would-be rescue jeep only had three wheels. The fourth was a twisted mess. No spare. It had been sent away for repair.

Nothing to do but walk wearily on.

Assured there were only five miles to go to the rest house Shoaib wrote in his diary next day *I knew it was actually eight.* He kept this to himself. No need to dishearten Nick. Hazir Shah says it was more like sixteen kilometres but he did not want to dishearten the others.

An hour more of trudging. Spirits flag.

In the gloom they come upon a tractor parked on the edge of the road. *Shoaib Sahib said send someone to find the driver's house, offer the driver anything to take us* Hazir Shah laughed. The driver soon appeared and the tractor chugged into life. In his notes Shoaib makes it all sound like a jolly picnic rather than a muddy slog in the dark, that he at least was enjoying himself, *this was my first ride in a tractor since my school days on my grandfather's farm in the Nainital terai* he writes cheerfully.

The picnic was soon over. A few kilometres later the tractor lurched to a halt. Another landslip. Nothing for it but to walk. Nothing much to say. Just get on with it.

Hazir Shah remembers Shoaib rolling up his trouser legs and tucking his shoes under his arms. The mud was knee deep and full of thorny scrub. *A thorn stuck in his foot* said Hazir Shah, *he pulled it out but did not say a word.* Good man, the GM Sahib, something else to remember, to tell around the fire at night. Hazir Shah says he himself would have roundly cursed the thorn. Hazir Shah says it was very dark, Shoaib writes the moon was up which was fortunate because the track was running with water. Who is right?

They hit the Yasin Nullah, the final obstacle, or was it the Nazbar Nullah? Shoaib cannot quite remember. *I had lost count of almost everything including a sense of direction.*

They managed to creep across the raging flood waters on two slippery logs. Raja Bahadur Khan, a Gulmiti notable, and the polo playing Shah Gul Aziz hover ready to assist. Shoaib Sahib was not going to vanish down one of their rivers on their watch.

The rest house was just a few minutes on. It was one in the morning. *I lay down exhausted and wondered if I should really subject myself to such physical punishment*, Shoaib tells his notebook. *In a couple of days I would be fifty-one.*

While Shoaib lay quietly and questioned his wisdom, while young Nick crashed and slept the dreamless sleep of one who has earned it, the night was not yet over for Hazir Shah.

Slipping quickly across the nullah, threading his way across the two landslips, he covered the twenty kilometres to Barkulti village at a steady lope. Rousting out *twenty or thirty* young men they attacked the landslips with picks and shovels.

They worked singing in the dark.

Those were the days, Hazir Shah's face lit up, *when they heard it was Shoaib Sahib's jeep, nobody complained.* They worked with a will and won. When Hazir Shah climbed out of the jeep at the rest house grinning Shoaib had just finished his breakfast. It was nine in the morning. *Just imagine his face*, Hazir Shah said delighted *he shouted 'how is this possible'.*

There was less joy for Shoaib and Nick next day.

Accidents are rare on the mountain roads but when they happen they can be disastrous. On the way to Phander, Shoaib spotted something red bobbing in the backwash of the river far below. It was a jerry can. A young woman sat *listlessly on the roadside*. A jeep had plunged over the cliff and into the river. Speaking *dully* the woman, a girl really, says the river has swallowed her father and mother, her sister, and all her children. She died shortly afterwards. Shoaib tells of the police inspector, Nazrab, *hurling himself down the slope into the ghastly scene*. Bodies were strewn casually down the scree, one floating in the water. It had been a family outing. A picnic to the health-giving waters of the Barsat spring. Shoaib sends his jeep away with the injured. He and Nick walk on.

What else can be said?

A sombre night but still Shoaib cannot help but enjoy the magnificent view from the Phander rest house; he also curses the ravaging mosquitoes. He admits he did not sleep well.

More bad news.

Work temporarily suspended at Shamaran channel. One villager killed, the manager loses an eye. A faulty fuse. Shoaib shakes his head. Feels fault. Always will. The villagers say it is God's will, no one is at fault. 'Amateurs', the public works contractors mutter. As if the contractors' men are never hurt, scorn the villagers. Condolences over, dead buried, injured to the hospital, the villagers troop back to work. There is a channel to finish. Life must go on.

Then Gardner's briefcase goes missing, passport, *valuables and all*. Wherever it is, Shoaib assures the worried Gardner, the briefcase will be safe, will be guarded as if it were the prince's. *As safe as if you had it yourself*. It is in fact at Gupis rest house. It is, as Shoaib had promised Nick, utterly safe.

Shoaib plans an early start next day.

Bedbugs infest the Immit rest house. Hundreds of them. They creep stealthily from their crevices, swarm over an unwary traveller's neck and feed. Their bites itch, a traveller awakes with a large raised welt. *I couldn't sleep a wink* Shoaib grumbles, scratching the ring of red-raised lumps circling his neck *and got up when the first light of dawn made its appearance*. Gardner had unrolled his sleeping bag on the veranda. He slept soundly.

It was well he had. They were about to embark *on one of the most strenuous journeys I had ever undertaken* Shoaib wrote afterwards, adding dryly, *having questioned this sort of venture only a few days previously, it was a nice way to celebrate my birthday*. But was it sensible? Shoaib neglects to tell us.

There were horses. Shoaib smiled. Horses, well his field people had made an effort so he would accept. But he had consulted his survey map. He would have to talk gently to the Gupis sub-engineer, have a later chat with Hussain Wali. The boy had no need to exaggerate. No doubt the track was difficult—most tracks were—but no way could the trip to the Immit canal take five hours; one way!

Shoaib mounted, stoutly shod, Nick opted to walk. It was a prudent decision.

Led by Muzaffaruddin, Immit village's manager, the group included the local headmaster, the Union Council member and other villagers keen to show the GM Sahib the wonders they had wrought. Half a mile beyond Immit they crossed a nullah and ran into a mountain. It was so steep *I could hardly keep myself in the saddle* Shoaib groaned. Nick preferred weary legs to saddle sores. The second steep climb gave Shoaib an excuse to dismount. *It was just too much for the poor horse.*

For Shoaib too. Nick just smiled.

They took a breather and a cup of tea beside a large rock coated with 'twigs and plants'. It was what you did to ward off fatigue, to be blessed by some ancient arcane spirit. There are djinns in the mountains. Do not argue about it. There are. Shoaib didn't, nor did Nick. Added a few twigs, *just for luck*.

Karim Jan the camera man is famous for his amazing photographs. Except for Shoaib and perhaps Hussain Wali Khan, over the years and through the viewfinder of one of his many cameras he has seen more than most of the mountains. He also has a dog. *A beautiful dog* wrote Shoaib *a sheep dog with the proud looks of an Alsatian*. The dog though, wasn't just a pretty face. Donkeys trotted past buried under enormous bundles of aromatic shrubs and sticks—fuel wood—men with them, children too, and wild shepherd dogs. The 'beauty' challenged. Affronted, the shepherd's pack attacked. Men cheered, children shouted, sticks flashed and Karim Jan, did he leap to save his dog? Not at all. He is a camera man. He flung down his pack and got it all on video. He knew his dog. *None the worse for the fight*, Shoaib tells us, *the dog happily joined the party for the rest of the climb.*

The rest of the climb.

At eleven thousand feet they reach a plateau. The Immitis shout warnings of 'fillies loose in the area' when Shoaib tries to boot his weary flea-bitten village stallion into a bracing canter. *I had been the best rider in those far off days at the academy* Shoaib tells us. The horse had not been told. *My feeble effort soon petered out into a fast trot.*

Did Nick Gardner jog across the plateau too? He was on a horse by then.

At a shepherd's summer hut a smiling old man offered Shoaib a glass of *pure yoghurt, nectar of the gods* Shoaib sighed. Karim Jan snapped a shot and then hugged the man. No mere mud-hut yokel, it was his uncle, up for a week or two to enjoy the mountain air, and a glass or two of yoghurt.

Both Shoaib and Nick dismount *to give the horses a rest*. Not everyone can toss off a glass when in the saddle. If they had thought to avoid the continuing torture of a mountain saddle they were to be disappointed. Too far, shouted the Immitis, it is still too far to walk. Ride, ride!

High now, too high for horses, yaks had been arranged.

Minds of their own, the yaks could not be persuaded to leave their high pasture. Use force? You don't know much about yaks. Gardner was disappointed. *Nick had been looking forward to it* Shoaib wrote. Hadn't Shoaib?

The yaks knew what they were missing. *The last stretch was extremely testing* Shoaib writes *we were flanked by villagers to safeguard against a fall which would have sent us plunging hundreds of feet into the ravine below.*

They hit a flat stretch. Just as well. Young Nick had hit the wall. The gentle hills and vales of England do not prepare a man for a day like this one. Shoaib too, has also almost shot his bolt. 'Look up' cry the villagers, and there in the distance, way up at the top of some impossible slope were the headworks of the channel. *To my great relief* Shoaib tells us, *Nick declared he had no intention of going up there.*

Shoaib could not of course abandon his guest.

The villagers were disappointed. Gardner tried to cheer them up. He now really understood the magnitude of the difficulties they had faced and overcome, he said. They shrugged, but he was a guest and so they told him it was an easy downhill walk to where the horses were now waiting.

Good, Shoaib said but just as they were setting off a message arrived. The chairman of the village organisation and AKRSP's sub-engineer had left Immit at two in the morning. A welcoming committee there and waiting? Shoaib groaned. He would have to go.

Shades of the Raj. Nick would go too. The villagers tell them it is just a short walk and won't take long at all. It won't? No more than half an hour they said. It was a long forty-five minutes. Shoaib remembers every one of them. Even the dog lay down. *Somehow we dragged ourselves up to the Sarband* Shoaib says.

The whole trip had taken five hours all up. The young assistant engineer had been absolutely right. The altimeter's needle hovered above thirteen thousand feet, and there, while Nick and Shoaib panted, sucking the thin air happily into their mountain lungs were thirty to forty people hacking away at the rock. For good measure, someone blew a charge. Look at us.

Shoaib and Nick hadn't flinched. They were just too tired.

A mountain man's idea of a 'short walk back to the horses' turned into a solid hour's slogging back and forth across the rugged nullah. Twice they had to be piggybacked across the torrent by men half their size *who got tremendous pleasure* when Karim Jan unpacked his video camera. This was something the others back in Gilgit just had to see.

Shoaib and Nick were too exhausted to care.

They found the horses and sat *like wretched sacks*, slumped in the saddle. Picking their way down a defile Shoaib's horse stumbled. *For the second time in my life I fell from a horse* he writes. A vestige of pride?

A thicket of wild roses saved him. Shoaib stuck there. The horse's hoof skimmed his head. Scratched and bleeding, with his village escort fussing worriedly, *with great bravado I remounted.* Had anyone noticed? Shoaib had little alternative anyway admitting later to his diary, *actually I was too weak to walk.*

Tarboot was won by one o'clock. A feast awaited.

Shoaib did not hesitate. There were times to keep to the rules—this was not one of them. They dipped hot bread into brimming bowls of yoghurt, dishes of herbed butter freshly churned, goat or cow, it didn't matter. The things a man will eat when he is hungry. All that cholesterol!

More extravagance, *the food of the gods*, Shoaib wrote. Stuffed with bread and butter his system began to work, his brain began to function, he began to ask questions. Was this area a potential gold mine for livestock development? Full marks to Shoaib. He was thinking again even if the whole area was probably overgrazed, already used to the fullest.

A slow and torturous descent.

That was how they spent the next two hours and then, why not, another feast. Karim Jan led a docile Shoaib and the leg-weary Nick into his uncle's house where they were regaled with a Kashgari soup quixotically called *Dodo*. Had a runner been sent on ahead? Again the food was *nectar, absolutely delicious*. Day-old chappatis would have sent our hungry pair into rhapsodies of delight. Well, Shoaib anyway. He had the English literature degree.

While they ate, a mysterious person watched from the shadows. Had he met them in Yasin? He said he had.

Halted by a barrier at the Chatorkhand police station, Nick's details had to be entered in a register. A stranger, a foreigner loose in a sensitive border area? The police apologized. Spies and informers have to earn their keep.

The day had bite left in it yet. Seven hours in the jeep on *one of the worst roads in the world.*

At Singal the rest house *chowkidar* stood, right hand on heart, head slightly inclined, Nick's missing briefcase clutched in his left. 'It is my honour' he said. Not a single thing was missing. Shoaib shrugs, of course nothing is missing. The rest was brief. Were they fools? Why didn't Shoaib and Nick take a break at the Singal rest house? Mission accomplished, planes to catch, reports to read,

visitors on the way, a hundred villages waiting for Shoaib Sahib to admire their accomplishments.

Gilgit at last. The Chinar Inn. Trudge wearily to the rooms, a hot bath waiting. In bed thinking, why? Ten hours walking and riding *over the steepest country imaginable*, seven hours in a jeep on horrible roads.

Reach for the pen.

Write, *a bit too much to compress in a single day. But Nick enjoyed it thoroughly* ... pause...*so did I.* Sleep.

Next day Nick produced the obligatory 'Oxfam list of questions'. Women's programmes; land for the landless; the poorest of the poor. There, that should do it. Carefully notes Shoaib's replies. Women, ah yes, something will be done about women. The landless? Mainly recent arrivals. AKRSP will make sure they are looked after. A clause in the partnership agreements might work. Did Oxfam have any other ideas? They didn't. Not right then. The north looked to be in very good hands. Amazing place. He would be back.

Maybe the yaks would turn up next time.

Happy to climb mountains or negotiate dangerously unstable slopes, Gardner distrusted all helicopters, told Shoaib they were accidents waiting to happen, chunks of untrustworthy metal ready to fall out of the sky, anytime, but particularly when you least expected it, just when you had been lulled into complacency. Helicopters? Not to be trusted said Nick. But Shoaib trusted everyone and everything; loved cars; drove one as soon as he could. Sooner, as we well know. Now he loved his helicopter. God's will if it fell out of the sky. Jeeps could also fall off roads. Gardner had seen that.

See Nick off at the airport. Hop into the helicopter. Heave a sigh of relief. Give his legs a break. Move on to 1985. Busier than ever.

Later in the year Nick's predictions come true—a German helicopter crashes at Gilgit airport, burns. Was Nick right? People hear the impact, see the pall of smoke, rush to the airport in a panic. The telephone lines at the AKRSP office overload. News spreads rapidly. Was it Shoaib Sahib's helicopter? No, it wasn't, the GM Sahib is just fine. Panic subsides. No one was hurt. Thank God, says Shoaib, I was heart-warmed and touched to know that people cared so much.

Back in the air; eight villages in a day including a difficult landing at Passu. The model village Ahmadabad remains so. Intense cold, high motivation, a charge explodes as the GM Sahib arrives. Coincidence? No, just showing off. They are the best and they know it and show it. People working on the channel and women out in full force. Top marks again, smiles Shoaib. Let them show off a little.

Money problems. Good, not bad, but a bit of a worry. Habib Bank holds over five million rupees in village organisation savings. The bank is happy and so is Shoaib. Well, almost, but there is a niggling worry. What next? Can the villagers obtain credit? Not easily.

The Karachi businessman, old Ramzan Merchant, can raise a million rupees as a personal loan *just like that*. He shakes his head. 'Very difficult' he says of AKRSP attempts to obtain loan funds or overdraft facilities to finance production activities. What about a few hundred rupees for a villager? Impossible, sighs Ramzan. 'Not worth bothering with', says the manager of Habib Bank. Shoaib challenges his staff to think of another way. They will, but not just yet.

It is winter still. Icy roads; deep snow drifts; roads impassable. The helicopter is a trump card. Naltar is blanketed with snow; and one member of Shahoot village 'stages a walkout' when the others dismiss his proposal. Animals are polluting the channel, he says. He wants concrete covers. A nut-case, the others say. Heads are shaken, they will persist. Maybe they can talk him around. Shoaib is happy. The system is working.

Medivac. To remote Harschin in Chitral. The boy hops across the helipad on one leg, the other lost in a road construction accident. It was not an AKRSP project but the boy is too young to lose a leg. Tragedy looms, how will his family manage? They will because they are no longer on their own; the village organisation will sort things out, make sure the family does not want. Is there a lump in the GM Sahib's throat?

One more village, he says. The pilots exchange glances and take the chopper down. They keep the rotors spinning. The wind spits snow and smatterings of ice.

Very gusty Shoaib notes, Gilgit gained as quickly as possible, some anxious moments.

One of the most astounding feats by any village. The Soust tunnel.

A hungry village perched high in the Hunza valley. Thrice commanded by the mir to build a canal from the glacier to bring water to enticingly latent land; rock falls, men die, they cannot cut a channel around the mountain's dangerous flanks. There is only so much you can do with ibex horn and hardened wood levers. They try again but more lives are lost, hearts broken when sections painstakingly cut from the living rock with primitive tools simply cleave away, fall, vanish in a tumble of rock and dust a thousand metres below. Men with it.

Then Shoaib and his people arrive. Fired by the realization that they could be masters of their own destiny, a few mad men believe they have the answer—

they will cut a man-high tunnel through the mountain. Luckily Shoaib was not an engineer and had little idea what this meant. If the villagers said they could do it, perhaps they could. Hussain Wali Khan had some idea what it meant and shook his head. The people were crazy—tunnelling hundreds of metres through a mountain was a job for experts.

Maybe there was one.

One of the hard-headed fix anything men Hussain Wali spirited out of a Gilgit workshop, a man who believed he could build anything the villagers wished to build, Sahib Khan rushed into the Serena hotel one evening humming with energy, a mini-dynamo.

Grease stained, restless with happy energy, he was on his way to solve some mechanical crisis at his bus depot, or was it his machine shop. *I work all the time*, eyes sparkle, mouth widens to a grin, *and so do my sons.*

Grins again, *I am a northerner but I am not an Ismaili. Sometimes I wondered if the foreigners realised that Ismailis were a minority in the area, except for Hunza of course.*

Why was it important that I should know this? I did not have to wait long for an answer.

As it had been for his hero Shoaib, to this small mini-powerhouse of a man, alive with energy and already thinking of what it was he would next repair, religion was irrelevant. He wanted me to know this. Just so long as there was a technical problem to solve he would be happy. He couldn't care less whose it was. He was that sort of man. *I am a northerner*, he laughed.

An avid hunter, he shared this passion with Shoaib, said he had laughed fit to burst one December day when Shoaib sodden, shivering, cursing quietly, eyes only for the birds fell into the frigid lake. Sahib Khan swaddled a shivering Shoaib in towels, *but he was happy*, laughed the small engineer, *it had been a great day*, Sahib Khan full of admiration. *Shoaib Sahib was a sportsman, he shot them flying.* In the north they waited hidden in a blind for duck to land beside a decoy. Not Shoaib.

The most amazing project he had worked on? The Soust canal, of course. Why had I bothered to ask? There was a story and he would tell it. Assigned as the field engineer for the Soust project, the villagers had started on the tunnel, blasting rock and digging out the rubble when Husain Wali Khan arrived. For a man known for his humour and calmness, Shoaib's right hand man had been in a fuss, telling Sahib Khan to *stop this foolishness*, that it simply was not possible to engineer a tunnel of this length with simple villagers.

Sahib Khan had not been trained as Hussain Wali had. He did not know it was impossible. Nor did the villagers. *God was with us; who else did we need,* he shouted? Tea slopped into his saucer, a few guests looked our way, who cared, not Sahib Khan.

So Hussain Wali and a few of his senior engineers hurried back to Soust. Brought Shoaib with them, put Sahib Khan through the hoops. 'tell the truth, do you really believe it is possible?'

Sahib Khan said he never had to answer the question because Shoaib would always intervene and say, *why do you want to stop this channel, I know Sahib Khan, you don't know Sahib Khan.* Shoaib also knew his villagers and how important it was to believe in them, to make the impossible possible.

Belief has its limits. Starting from either end, the tunnellers' wobbled, veered off course. So what, said Sahib Khan, so the villagers began again but the grant money was running low. Shoaib signed off on more explosives. But that was it. Shoaib's senior engineers said any more was throwing good money after bad. 'We don't need our prince's money, we will work' they said. And so they did.

How does Sahib Khan know that the far end is where it should be? How does he know that under his guidance, somewhere in the depths of the mountain, the two tunnels will meet?

Sahib Khan says the master masons would call for silence, put their ears against the rock and listen. Find a mountain. Send your friend to the other side with a hammer. Pound the rock face, and again. Can your partner hear you when he puts his ear to the rock face? Can you hear him? Try it. I couldn't but a Soust master mason can. *With God's help*, Sahib Khan shouts exuberantly *only with God's help.* None of the hotel guests looked up this time.

And God helped.

Sahib Khan smiled his smile of boyish innocence, *when we finally broke through, when the two sides met in the middle, I told them,* he said grinning, *yes, it was theoretically not possible to have done what we had done, but God gave us help and I looked from both ends and when the two tunnels came together in the middle they met. If you work together, God helps you.* And then he tossed off his tea, shook my hand and vanished into the darkness of the mountain night.

He was a busy man. He had work to do. God would help him. This he knew.

Rough ride in the helicopter. The pilots, Major Iqbal Mirza, Lieutenant Colonel Younas Bhatti let out their breath. Shoaib, Hussain Wali and the others step out into *a wildly ecstatic throng of villagers.*

They climb to where the canal vanishes into the mountain. Shoaib is amazed, beams, fishes out his notebook. The villagers wait. He writes. Nothing romantic; not at first. *The final tunnel measured out at one thousand three hundred and fifty feet.* Each team burrowed for seven hundred and fifty feet. The tunnel is seven foot high, and five wide. A man does not have to bend when he walks. Looks at the pile of work-worn picks and shovels, the explosives box, a few drills, an air compressor. Is this all they had to work with? *Astonishing; astounding; gigantic*; Shoaib runs out of superlatives. Remembers Burgess' admonition, 'always write with accuracy and discretion'. Adds, *a most incredible achievement*, knows the words are inadequate.

The master masons grin. They want Hussain Wali in particular to *slip down an access hole* to stand at the place he said was an impossibility. Where the two tunnels meet mid-mountain.

Hussain Wali is too good natured to hold a grudge. In fact he is as happy as the villagers. For him, the best news of the year is that he was wrong. Shoaib of course is lowered down too. He professes awe. Just look what the people are capable of he breathes. Hussain Wali agrees. He will help with many more impossible schemes in the years to come. He is a northerner. These are his people. He is proud of them. More than proud, like Shoaib, right then he loves them.

They return to the village. Feet shuffle, throats are cleared, a big *Niaz*, a celebration of joy, has been planned. There is a feast. Do they have the GM Sahib's permission? Shoaib has never before accepted the village's hospitality; he has always walked away leaving them feeling a bit foolish. They understand why and know he was right. But this is a very special occasions so they hold their collective breaths.

Cheers erupt. The GM Sahib has an announcement. To celebrate the completion of this gigantic achievement the people were at liberty to do whatever they considered appropriate. He will be delighted to accept their hospitality.

It was a day they still remember.

Were the djinns of the mountains piqued at the penetration? The helicopter had to scrabble hard to get airborne. *High gales and dust storms* Shoaib noted later *too rough to write*. Shot like a cork from a bottle out of the Hunza river gorge they touch down at Gilgit. *Safely back* Shoaib wrote; *everyone heaved a sigh of relief*. A brief pause, was there anything more to say; there was—*a truly momentous day*.

Another truly momentous day.

If you had been one of the lucky ones, if you had dropped into an AKRSP office in the late 1980s you might have been drawn to one photograph. It is of a slim, fine featured man, clear of brow, hair receding, brushed back. He wears a beautifully cut beige safari suit. His bearing whispers confidence, assurance, leadership. He is standing in a carved rock trough, a canal carved out of a cliff face. Mountains skim the edges of the photograph.

Notice where he looks.

It is into a man-high tunnel vanishing into a mountain side. It is of course the prince, the Aga Khan come to see the marvel that his people have wrought, the Soust tunnel, the impossible made possible because Shoaib had said, *well, if they think they can do it, let them try.*

The prince smiles the smile of a man who has chosen well.

Shoaib also chooses well but not always. A preview of the future. Najma and her husband Anis Dani, deign to visit. They are said to be dedicated 'ladder climbers'—their current rungs are positions at an international study centre in Nepal, and the International Labour Organisation. The whispers say it would be hard to find a pair less likely to care about mountain villagers, about those who labour. But Najma is the sister of Shoaib's good friend Tariq Siddiqi so she is 'family'.

Najma and Anis tour the mountains. They do not walk much but they talk. How they talk. They find a weak point; an easy one; women in development of course. They talk, they write, but what they say is all so predictable, things that have been said before; many times. Lots of words; little substance. Most heave a sigh of relief when they leave. Unfortunately, they will return, and when they do it will not be the happiest of times. As for their report, well, sometimes expert reports are not worth the paper they are written on; sometimes solutions to serious problems can be laughably simple.

In the goiter-plagued villages of Chitral the solution is iodized salt. So simple. Such a dreadful affliction. No more.

In Drosh in southern Chitral, a centre of brooding opposition, the Sunni mullahs scowl. Colonel Murad hosts *a lavish lunch* at the headquarters of the Chitral Scouts. Music is provided by a *Scottish pipe band*. The band marches, plaid cloaks swirl, pipes skirl. Music? Shoaib never listens to music, we are told. But is this music or emotion? Shoaib declines to say. The band plays on. Shoaib smiles again, does not leave. Down in Karachi though a few wish he would. How can they make Shoaib leave Chitral, leave the entire Northern Areas. They rack their brains. Well they might. Shoaib seems immovable.

Sweetness and light in the Northern Areas. Members of the Board of Directors fly up with Guillame de Spoelberch from Geneva. Shoaib writes of

him as 'Bill', as a good friend. Comfortably based in Geneva, Bill heads the Aga Khan Foundation. The buzz of the helicopter is heard in many valleys, one spectacular accomplishment after another.

The Chalt siphon. Four thousand feet of eight inch steel pipes slung across a giant five hundred foot deep chasm. Bill shakes his head. How could simple villagers do this? At Zodklan he asks *did you bring in the army to help*. The channel is seven miles long. The terrain is incredible. The villagers laugh and shout *we are AKRSP's army*. The helicopter soars up to Passu and the Soust canal. What to say? What to think? Bill says *this is one His Highness has to see*. He does of course.

Loaded with garlands of flowers the visitors climb back into the helicopter. There will be more. Where do all the flowers come from, they wonder? The helicopter smells like a flower shop. Over the Shandur pass to Chitral. A mirror image. More amazement, more garlands.

Bill takes notes. His Highness is a numbers man. The Bombagh channel is 26,400 feet long, most of it tough going; 1000 feet truly tough. How did they get across the cliff face? Remind me how to convert feet to metres? Skilled man-days? Seven thousand, right; unskilled man-days? Eight thousand. Increase in water to the village? Seven-fold! Amazing, and all for how much? A quarter of a million rupees? God God; is that all? An extra two hundred and fifty acres under irrigation, nearly six acres for each household? Bill walks away. He has to. He shakes his head. There is a lump in his throat, tears in his eyes.

Shoaib's friend old Ramzan Merchant also sheds a tear. Shoaib hosts a dinner at the Chinar Inn. Afterwards Ramzan writes *I was tremendously impressed with the work done by the villagers...and particularly the GM and HWK....I congratulate all VO's and staff members....Well done*. Spoelberch is a former Ford Foundation man. International bureaucrats do not name names; organisations are staffed by nameless ghosts. He describes the changes in the villages as 'inspiring'; he pauses and then adds *congratulations to all involved*. Dr. Amir Mohammad's emotions are not so shackled. He might be the chairman of Pakistan's peak research body but poetry is in his soul. He picks up the pen. AKRSP's staff are not a faceless group; he names them one by one, adds, *a truly missionary job....Abjectly poor rural communities have been transformed*.

The helicopter flutters back to Islamabad and returns, again and again, ambassadors, visiting ministers, television crews. The villagers of Passu shrug their shoulders. Their lives have changed—it is a wonderful 'Cinderella story'. They have transformed their lives, gone from wretched obscurity to international fame seemingly in an instant. Photographs have flown around the world. Who waved the magic wand? *The GM Sahib* they say proudly, *we only did the work, with God's help of course...and the prayers of His Highness*.

The helicopter is coming. Again? So soon? No matter. Up to the tunnel. Pose; smile. Video cameras hum, cameras flash, superlatives thick in the air. Back in Karimabad, the mir hosts another *sumptuous lunch*. Servants scurry, dishes clash, cane chairs are dragged out onto the lawns. The lunch is just one of so many you almost feel sorry for the mir. Almost, but not quite; he is a hard man to feel sorry for. A gracious host no doubt, but why, after all Shoaib's carefully noted 'courtesy calls', all the 'lavish lunches', all those flights to remote villages, the consultations, why did the mir send a curt message to us that he had nothing to say, knew nothing at all about Shoaib Sultan Khan? Clearly, the mir knew quite a lot. *He is a good fellow at heart*, Shoaib said with a smile, *I am sure he had his reasons*. And that is where we will leave it. No more about the mir's curious reluctance to add to this book.

Summer is over at last. Winter is a blessing because the flood of visitors slows to a trickle and then dries up. Too cold, too difficult. But Shoaib will not slow down, he will not pause to get his breath. No, with the luxury of no visitors needing to be entertained it is into the office, call up the helicopter, summon a jeep, pick up the famous hat, grab a bunch of files, notebook, pen, off on another whirlwind round of 'tours of inspection'. His grandfather would have smiled. So would Burgess. Duty calls. Duty done.

We already know about the village of Shimshal in Upper Hunza, know it is high, cold and very, very isolated. Upper Hunza. There was a long, difficult walking track to Passu, and then down to Karimabad bazaar, the Shimshalis 'lifeline to the world'. It was Shoaib's doing. He had told them to dream. And so they had. It was a wild dream; a new link road and it was to cross forty-five miles of incredibly difficult terrain. It is judged to be an impossible dream.

Four visits later. The villagers will not change their minds. His Highness asks, 'can anything be done'. Shoaib asks Hussain Wali. They talk. Decide. Shake their heads; send an answer. 'With great regret, no'.

The Shimshalis refuse to listen. If the people of Soust can dig an 'impossible' tunnel, they can build an 'impossible' road. Their savings grow and when the Deputy Commissioner Hunza throws in a dash of government assistance, *in sheer desperation* writes Shoaib, they start building their road, the *easier sections*. Even these are unbelievably difficult.

Shoaib can't help himself. He sends in his engineers. They survey the road; find an alignment that shortens it by fifteen miles. But thirty miles is still a lot of road. Hussain Wali costs it out. Eight million rupees. Shoaib sinks into his chair

and thinks. Can his villagers do it for less? So far AKRSP's grants have averaged about one hundred and twenty-five thousand rupees.

Silence. No one says anything.

What about a million, Shoaib says. Hussain Wali grins. He is all for it. With Shoaib, he hurries off to talk to the commissioner and the Northern Areas Council. Conjures up another two million. Now they have three against Hussain Wali's estimate of eight. It will have to do.

The helicopter shuttles in a host of officials. The commissioner (now termed the Administrator), the mir, after all this is Hunza, and a bevy of local politicos and councillors. Shoaib, Hussain Wali, and a few other AKRSP staff. Shimshal village is suddenly swarming with 'important people'. The mir stands. Talks. Others follow. The villagers sit silently, waiting. The money is put on the table. Three million rupees. There is a buzz. Village men turn, talk to neighbours; frown; hands are thrown up; heads shaken. It is more money than they have ever seen in their lives but is it enough? They know their mountains. They know the path the road will take. Thirty miles that would break most engineers' hearts. One hundred thousand rupees for each agonising mile, about fourteen thousand dollars. Where in the world could a thirty-mile road be built for this sort of money?

Shimshal.

When the villagers realise three million is the top offer they exchange anxious looks and then accept. The visitors are relieved. The offer worked. They sip their tea glad it is not they who have to build the road. It was chilly and cold on the flight back, Shoaib notes. Everyone is silent. Lost in thought. He is just a little worried. He hopes he has not asked too much.

He hasn't. The Shimshalis build the road. Another amazing feat to show the visitors.

There is a lot to tell His Highness.

Does anyone ever argue with the prince, question his judgement, tell him he is wrong, tell him to perhaps think that one over again? Did Bill speak his mind? Did Bob Shaw; Shoaib? Possibly, but only with exquisite tact, with great respect. Summoned to Aiglemont, Shoaib writes of the prospective meeting as vital. So far the prince has been an unquestioning supporter. Shoaib though, is beginning to notice cracks in the supposed goodwill of the Ismaili hierarchy in Karachi and Islamabad, forced smiles, laughter a little bit too jolly. He needs the prince to say again 'Shoaib is my man in the north, let him get on with things his way, not yours'.

Idle chit-chat first. Some pleasantries. Not many, and then down to business.

The prince rarely beats around the bush. He makes sure everyone stays on their toes, moves without warning from being *fascinated by the geography of the north and links with Sinkiang*, targets Bill, *when will AKRSP in India start to emulate Shoaib, can the foundation's fund for economic development extend soft loans to Northern Area villagers*? Turns to Shoaib. Bill sighs with relief, *take care about going into Astore* he cautions—has His Highness heard anything that Shoaib has not? *And I think a ten year time horizon better than twenty-five.*

Nobody disagrees. Shoaib knows all about Astore and certainly will take care. As for a ten year time horizon— he is only two years into the programme; another eight seems like a lifetime.

The prince reaches into his pocket. A handkerchief, notebook? No, a calculator. A numbers man, the prince reaches for the summary of achievements. *I was petrified* Shoaib writes; *what if there were mistakes in the figures.* The prince's fingers dance over the keyboard and then he smiles. Everything correct. Shoaib lets out his breath. An astonishing three hundred and five village organisations established. 'Well done', murmurs the prince, 'so much in so little time'.

Oshkandas, says Shoaib. His Highness raises his eyebrows, what on earth is Oshkandas? Shoaib plunges on, no other way to go, says *I promised the villagers of Oshkandas I would take the news to your Highness.* The news? Yes, they have managed to resolve their differences, keep the village organisation alive, revive. A significant achievement. His Highness inclines his head. Ah, a village, my people, please tell them I am delighted to hear it.

More questions. 'How fare the villagers where a project has yet to be undertaken'? Shoaib has dealt with princes and presidents before. He deflects the question, babbles on enthusiastically about 'packages' the villagers have taken up, seeds, vegetables, chickens, searches his mind for other offerings, shrugs, *things like that* he says.

It is not enough. Silence, the prince raises an eyebrow, Ramzan Merchant fidgets.

Shoaib conducts a rapid memory search, and before anyone can speak again, says depreciatingly, not meaning it, *although only one hundred and ninety-six productive physical infrastructure projects are underway*—stresses the 'only'—*the other one hundred and nine were 'happy' to wait their turn.* He hastens to add, perhaps thinking of His Highness's cautionary words and the

implacable opposition of the mullahs of Chilas *nevertheless the people of Jaglote have established organisations in nearly every village.*

There was more, lots more, until at last, the prince glanced at his watch. Time to leave, Shoaib sketched a bow, thanked His Highness, *drew a hearty laugh* when he added, no one but the prince could have persuaded Musarrat to let him live in Gilgit.

Outside, Ramzan Merchant is close to tears, his prince has given his approval, has said 'well done'. He touches Shoaib's arm, murmurs *God bless you*. Little things. Shoaib's world seems a better place.

In London to see his girls. An interview with the BBC and anyone else who might help further the cause. Tears, airports, always airports, and then back to the north.

In Pakistan a few *get the message*. A chief minister asks his staff, what's wrong with everyone, why isn't government working with Shoaib's village organisations to undertake its projects, why do you bother to create dysfunctional parallel committees. A glimmer of hope, but it winks out. Twenty long years pass before the light winks on again, before social mobilisation is embedded in government policy. More about this later.

Most government visitors, federal ministers focus on how much—annual budgets; establishment costs. Few understand how irrelevant this is even if they are open-mouthed by cost-effectiveness, jealous of resources—so many jeeps, a helicopter—they do not hear the heart-beat, social mobilisation, people-power, villagers deciding for themselves and doing it. One does. He says, 'give government departments twenty helicopters and they still won't get anywhere'. From the sidelines Akhter Hameed Khan nods 'correct, absolutely correct'.

The small stuff of daily life.

Fresh apricots from the north for sale in the Rawalpindi bazaar for the first time ever; a secondary prince wings in, Amyn Aga Khan. Arrangements are made, nothing is spared; a quick question to consider—should this prince be taken to see the manager of Minawar organisation? One-handed now, the other blown off in an accident. Note—see that he is well looked after . And best visit Chitral soonest. Field work is at a standstill in the uneasy wake of the extra-assistant commissioner's murder. A niggle at the back of Shoaib's mind, something else he meant to remember—yes, that is it, interest rates, avoid unduly burdening villagers at all costs.

The issue of loans and credit will dog Shoaib's footsteps for years. Microcredit is in its infancy. AKRSP will eventually come close to getting things right but there will be hiccoughs. Savings multiply year by year and are

boosted by rupee-for-rupee donor contributions. The Karachi businessmen start to wonder how to get their hands on it. His Highness has always leant towards a bank. This is good enough for them. Almost a green light. But still it takes twenty years for them to make it happen. When it does the villagers feel betrayed. Another bank? Is that what they had been saving for all these years? Why did they bother?

In the villages Shoaib stays on message. He never varies. *I don't know how he did it* (Izhar Hunzai again), *for someone like me it got totally boring, village after village, day after day, the same thing.* But it worked. Like magic it worked.

Shaw pulls another rabbit out of the hat. He flies in with Isobel his wife—everyone likes Isobel. With them are a bunch of international journalists ready to be bored, ready to be told lies; punch holes in the stories they hear. Shaw's pitch is just too good to be true. After all it is Pakistan he is talking about, isn't it?

An exquisite lunch on the lawns of the Serena Hotel in Gilgit. The journalists yawn. Been there; done that. One discomfort—the 'Maharajah's revenge'. Silver on the *kheer* (rice pudding). Paper thin, it plays havoc with mercury amalgam fillings.

A quick whip around the villages in the helicopter. Journos' probe for a weakness; fire questions. They are not 'polite'. They do not 'beat around the bush'. Shoaib, Hussain Wali and the others are a trifle shocked; this is not the usual gentlemanly chatter; carefully phrased questions; there are no velvet gloves, steel glints straight away.

Why couldn't villagers build channels on their own? Ah yes, *well, actually they tried, for twenty years they tried and got nowhere.* Hmm. Journalists exchange glances.

Shoaib has a moment of clarity. Says—*gentlemen, imagine this, a jeep bogged in a swamp.* A swamp? In the Northern Areas? What about a snowdrift. All right, a snowdrift. Swamp or snowdrift, the villagers are stuck in a mass of apathy. The jeep needs a push or it will never get out. So do the villagers. *All we do is give the push, sometimes only a feather touch; sometimes several shoulders to the wheel.* The journalists nod. Fair enough. Note to file—remember to use this analogy again.

Why didn't government finance the channels? (*Think for a moment. Decide. Skirt around this one.*)

Was the new land important to the villagers? (*Foolish question. Think of something diplomatic to say. Maybe a diversion. Oh, look at that. What a marvellous sight. Hope it is.*)

You are a Sunni village, right? (This to a group of villagers) *They agree.* Are you disturbed at receiving money from the Ismailis? Are we? They look at each other, shrug. An old man says vehemently, *the Ismailis are better than us because they help each other.* The other villagers are embarrassed, think, 'who let grandpa out'?

Hanuchal at sunset. Only a stone-man would not be moved by a walk along the channel as the sun sank in the magnificent distance. Game to Shoaib. Even for the adamantine Elliot of the Financial Times, it was the 'Road to Damascus'. Exhausted by exercise, lack of alcohol, nicotine, and oxygen, sublime in his conversion, Elliot fell asleep in the jeep on the way back, a half-formed question on his lips. But like all converts Elliot burned to be sure. Perhaps he regretted the ease of his conversion. He was a world-weary journalist, certainly no pushover.

Shoaib writes *Elliot was relentless in his probing of the religious dimensions of AKRSP's work.* Perhaps he had done his homework, asked around the newsroom; thumbed through the Encyclopaedia Britannica; read—'the Ismailis of old were masters of subversion, secret agendas'. Surely one was running here?

Smoother than a crème brule, Shaw rode to the rescue, a third-party referee of a sort. Could he be trusted? They listened, took notes, drooped over their pudding bowls as Shaw, erudite as ever, droned on—this the background; this His Highness's role; this the thinker Akhter Hameed Khan's role; this the conjurer, field man Shoaib Sultan Khan; this how they tip-toed through the religious minefields to reach the villagers— what else can I say? Shaw smiles his 'ask me anything you like' smile?

Happy to surrender, numbed by the pace Shoaib set—an easy day Shoaib writes—eager for bed, the journalists subside; wander off to their rooms. Relieved. Shoaib writes by the end of the evening (they were) no longer aggressive, by no means totally sold or absolute believers but definitely not agnostics.

Early next morning, *too early* the journalists groan. Drink coffee, then are bundled grumbling into the helicopter.

Bitterly cold in the villages. Ice solid on the eaves. Huddle around a fire crackling in a 'bokhari', an ice-cold local house. Stone walls ooze moisture. As soon as the guests leave the fire is dampened down. Far too wasteful to burn wood during the day.

Serve tea on the helicopter between Shehrsabz and Soust. Hard decision. Drink the tea or use cup as a hand-held hot water bottle. The helicopter shudders. They are about to be confronted by the *ultimate achievement.* There

are others but not quite so handy. Passu sits just above Karimabad in the Hunza valley. An easy flight unless the weather sets in.

The Soust tunnel. 'Should I be impressed by this place' Elliot is heard muttering. *The Financial Times'* man for once is speechless, the two Arabs throw up their hands 'God is great' they cry, visibly moved by a group of happy singing children. Arabs can be wonderfully emotional. Shoaib writes of them all, *the Soust tunnel started their conversion.*

It is not yet over. The Western journalists have been primed to hammer away at the issue of women. The two Arabs sensibly stay out of it. The talk has been heated. In one village the conversation begins to border on the absurd. Elliot suggests the men might do some of the cooking. I wonder who wields the spatula in the Elliot household?

The journalists are guests but someone has to say something. An old man stands and says, *honoured guests, just as your wives are lovely to you, so our wives are lovely to us.*

Elliot knows when he has been one-upped. He shuts up. He has been mightily impressed by the savings of the village organisations. He had never seen such a thing before. Says so quite often.

In Broshal, in the heart of *poverty ridden* Nagar, they all nod and agree. Shoaib says *the village is successful because of the quality of its activists.* It is the first time we hear Shoaib say this to outsiders. It is nevertheless true. Shoaib will fight for years to have this fact acknowledged. The local Ismaili elite are not impressed. What if the activists become too powerful?

The journalists guard has dropped. Shoaib administers the *coup de grace.* The helicopter settles on a tiny ledge. Surely it is too narrow. Grab the hand-grips. The rotors slow. Engines whine to a halt. Start breathing again. Climb out, look around, slowly, the view never fails to take your breath away. It does, again. The Gawachi pipeline, slung hundreds of feet above a mountain stream boiling through the gorge. A final touch. A man walks along the narrow pipeline walkway. Gawachi's high-wire walker. Eyes widen. It seems impossibly dangerous. The man whistles as if he does not have a care in the world. Caught out, the journalists gasp in amazement, and then look a little embarrassed. Hardened travellers, they have just been impressed.

The pilots cannot resist showing off, adding a final touch. The helicopter lifts off at full throttle, hovers, engines scream, they slap the craft into a sudden gut-churning 180 degree turn, tilt and power into the gaping nothingness.

Shoaib smiles. He had expected it. Final matchpoint taken.

Careful not to give away too much before his column hits the press, Elliot writes in the guest book, 'most impressive—so much local enthusiasm and so little bureaucracy'. Remembering perhaps the village elder's put-down, Dean adds a little flippantly, 'only one thing left to do with productivity rising as easily as His Highness's helicopter—get the men into the kitchen'. Shoaib chuckles politely. The two Arabs stay on target, recall their folk lore, 'indeed mountains can be moved' they write.

In Islamabad they tell Radio Pakistan they had been 'highly impressed', adding there was no reason the Gulf Coordination Council should not support the work. No matter. It did not come to pass. Excepting the mullahs of Chilas, the villagers of the Northern Areas wanted roads and channels not mosques or madrassahs.

The world ages, infinitesimally, moves on to 1986, third year, the programme is running hard, can Shoaib lift the pace? He can.

More travel. Explains the theory of social mobilisation at a seminar in Ottowa. Some are puzzled; others listen carefully, get the point. Shoaib is better with a bunch of villagers. Why doesn't he use the same simplicity?

At UNICEF's headquarters, Manou Assadi entreats Shoaib to withdraw his resignation letter. Assadi knows who his organisation is losing. Shoaib smiles, apologises; it is time to move on. Defeated, Assadi throws up his hands and wishes Shoaib all the luck in the world. Shoaib leaves the safe harbour of a UN organisation. Heads for stormy seas, spirit blithe.

A close call, nearly a major disaster. Gardner's gloomy forecast comes true. 'Helicopters?' 'the most dangerous form of transport...fall out of the sky' he says. A year later Shoaib's helicopter does fall out of the sky and he is in it. So is Hussain Wali. It could have been a wipe-out for AKRSP.

The day begins. A routine winter flight to Chitral across the Shandur pass. There are five on board plus the normal clutter of bits and pieces for various village projects. Shoaib's 'usual' seat is heaped with packages. He takes the seat behind the pilot; right hand side.

Weather closing in. No worries. It often happens, especially in winter. The pilots are used to it. A routine event. Not this time.The helicopter weaves along the river. Shoaib begins to worry. The normal route is across the frozen Phander lake. They hit a weather-wall, ghost white in the thickening gloom. The pilot dithers. Decides to put the chopper down. Hussain Wali whispers urgently, *the snow could be deep. Does the pilot know this*? They touch down. Bad call.

Blinded; a rotor-whipped snow storm. Helicopter sinking; emergency take-off. The chopper leaps into the air. Shakes itself. Violent shuddering sets in. Hussain Wali shouts, open the door. Shoaib does. Is faced with a quandary. Instant decision

required; jump or not. He hesitates. Too late; the wounded chopper judders along the river. Looks down, blanches, *all such thoughts were extinguished by the sight of the rushing waters of the ice-cold river*, Shoaib later writes.

They swing away from the river, skim the snow. Hover, shaking violently. Was this the time to jump? The helicopter jolts like an epileptic. One more enormous jolt, a climactic seizure—they plummet to the snow. Topple over. Shoaib's change of seat comes up trumps. He is on the top of the heap. Does fortune favour those who do not quibble over inessentials?

They disentangle. The ever resourceful Hussain Wali climbs up the ladder, dives full length into the snow. The others quickly follow. A ten foot drop from the landing ski, the snow *a magnificent cushion.*

Shoaib sits up. Spits out snow. Sees a figure crawling away on all fours. *Rambo of the North* he remembers thinking, *the boy has watched too many action videos. Should he check the video library?* Admits later he too had wondered if the helicopter might blow up. Had not thought of the benefits of crawling. The flight engineer must also have been an avid video fan, Rambo watcher. He smashes his way out through the front windscreen. Sustains the only injury. A damaged hand. The pilot shuts down the crippled engines, values his hands and makes a more dignified exit through the open door. Both shout 'no, it won't blow up'. Reassured, someone crawls back to the helicopter. Of course he does. The GM Sahib cannot find his glasses.

Shoaib is embarrassed. Sits there, utterly shocked. Looks at his helicopter, a beautiful swan with its wings broken...my heart bled to see it in this sorry condition...I felt I had lost someone very near and dear to me. Immense relief from everyone else. Shoaib's 'bleeding heart' was not literal. It could have been far worse.

Nothing for it except to start walking towards the nearest village and hope they have got the direction right. Envy yaks *lying in the snow as if they had no worries in the world*, in better condition than the 'sorry state' of most other animals. Shoaib ponders the fodder problem as he plods. The things people think about in an emergency. There is no record of what the others were thinking.

Shoaib's people, the villagers, are streaming towards the crash, churning through the snow, from every household, every nearby village. The GM's helicopter has fallen out of the sky. They pull off their gumboots, insist the survivors wear them. Barefoot in the snow? 'We are used to it' they grin 'look at the children'. Hussain Wali prefers to put his faith in his fur-lined slippers. After this, he will always wear them flying.

They stumble into a startled line of men bringing horses into Gilgit for the coming polo season—wave away the offered ride.

Phander rest house is colder than a graveyard. Shut down for winter. Shoaib can go no further, resists urgings to go on to the next village. So runners are quickly despatched, wood arrives, blankets, food, people, dozens of them. They want to see the GM Sahib. Make sure he is in one piece.

In the villages, midnight meetings are called, people assemble, resolutions passed—everything they have is put at the GM Sahib's disposal, everything. No empty words, they mean it. It was all very touching and endearing Shoaib writes.

It was more than that. The watchfires had been lit; they would not die. This is what a village organisation is all about. Mobilising people.

Out on the cold white snow a villager placed a solitary lantern. The helicopter was dead, its shroud a bleak tarpaulin.

Nine o'clock.

Two drivers stumble in, draw themselves up, smile. They say 'from Gupis in the dark without delay'. Drifts clot the road. They had walked the last ten miles. The GM Sahib was in trouble. Hot tea, warming snow-sodden shoes. It is ten hours back to Pingle; it will be a slog.

First light at seven-thirty, the bedraggled party trudge to the first village. A hornets' buzz. In Gilgit, the general, Shoaib's friend Safdar Ali Khan, had ordered out his Puma. 'To hell with the weather' he had growled, 'are we soldiers or are we not?'

Shoaib knew a soldier when he saw one; watched the Puma skimming across the mountains. He was back in Gilgit in an hour. He heaved a sigh of relief. The alternative had been twenty hours on perilous roads. Back to the office. Bath and bed can wait. But first Shoaib went straight to the general to thank him.

Outside the AKRSP office, the snow-slick footpath is thick with people. They funnel through the compound gates, long lines of anxious villagers, townsmen, stream along the corridor, into Shoaib's office, a word, a touch, a smile, relief, they leave smiling. Their GM Sahib is back from the dead.

Back at the Inn at last. Reach for the notebook. Write. *Everyone came to greet me....How happy they all were....Such moments are one's cherished treasure....How could one repay such concern, solicitude and affection?*

When the news reached Aiglemont the prince's brow had darkened. The pilot began to pack his bags. He had not only smashed up one of His Highness's favourite toys, he had damn near taken out his flagship programme. Shoaib says *yes, he was a bit of a dare-devil, but I would have flown with him again.* The prince instead picked up the ex-chief pilot of the army's Puma fleet.

After all, one of his pilots had rescued Shoaib.

Later a wag had written and posted on the Gilgit notice board—'the fiasco at Phander will be immortalised in history like Hanuchal, Soust, and artificial insemination. Long after the office rooms and corridors are silent and in the villages there is much grain and earthy yield, bunds protecting wild rivers, rich pastures dotted with new livestock breeds, walled nurseries thick with seedlings; days when Bob Shaw is an eccentric intellectual-cum-director of a multipurpose development corporation, and Major Mirza (the unfortunate pilot) is running a successful business of 'flying coaches'; and world-class models are posing in Karim Jan's high-rise studio (the photographer whose dog fought so well), the fiasco will continue to evoke all sorts of passions'.

But no, little of this came to pass, the wind now blows down unpainted corridors, and much else has faded; gone away, the dog included. Even memories. Except in the villages; except in Phander. But funnily enough, Karim Jan and his photographs are still there but no international models, no high-rise studio.

In time there was another helicopter, the prince saw to that, but it was never quite the same. By 2007 in fact there were four, all registered in Switzerland perhaps for insurance purposes or perhaps to flit unimpeded into Badakshan in Afghanistan, or Central Asia; the pilots blonde Swiss youths.

They don't even know the way to Gilgit or the valleys, Shoaib says, shaking his head, *a local chap must sit with them.* Controlled by the Foundation and the Development Network, one sometimes flies into Tajikistan, ferries people and materials up to Badakshan. Shoaib shrugs, *another has been on the ground for three months. I don't know why, but they usually give me one when I want to go to Gilgit.* He has to ask, an official request well in advance; they graciously allow, or not. It's not the same.

Ah, the good old days.

Down to earth. Life without the helicopter. Slows, picks up again. Snows, but Shoaib is determined to reach Islamabad. Back to the 'bad old days'. A fruitless wait for a PIA plane that never comes or a dash down the Karakorum Highway with Naib Khan at the wheel. Perhaps he has forgotten. *I had never seen the Karakorum Highway in such bad condition* he writes, *an obstacle race against falling rock, landslides, mud flows and waterfalls.* Relentless rain, more than a hundred blockages, the jeep crawls across precarious tracks dug in desperation across the slides.

An immense mudslide, too big, too unstable, even for Naib Khan.

Shoaib will not give up. Rolls up his trousers. Wades through the mud. Waits while Naib Khan haggles with the driver of a battered pick-up. Inside are three

dubious Pathans. Are they drug peddlers? Shoaib hands a wad of money back to Naib Khan. His imagination is working overtime. Looks into the future. Sees a body huddled on the roadside bleeding. It is him. The pickup hobbles off. Shoaib chatters non-stop in his not so chaste Pushto; name drops, powerful Pashtun.

His co-passengers hail from Swat. They shift uneasily. Perhaps the man is mad.

Dog tired, in Abbotabad Shoaib seeks out the commissioner, his friend, Ejaz Rahim. Fails. It is that sort of trip.

Manages to flag down a minivan. The driver is delighted. A trip to Islamabad? His passenger is desperate. Pays over the odds without a murmur. Near dawn they rattle into Islamabad. Does Musarrat make tea? Shoaib counts the cost. Sixty hours, thirty-two in a jeep or van 'on terrible roads'.

Lungs again. He develops a 'nasty cough'. Musarrat keeps him in bed for two days. Up and out of bed again and back to Gilgit. Nothing like mountain air for a pair of dodgy lungs. It is a long drive to Baltistan but the programme there is under siege. Haji Mohammad Hussein needs reinforcements. The jeep trip has consolations. Shoaib must be feeling better because he writes of *the glorious sight of Markhor grazing the hills beyond the Indus.* A 'shortcut' recommended and regretted. Shigar not gained until seven in the evening. After the long frustratingly dangerous day, a consolation prize—the public works rest house is *comfortable and well maintained.*

Past the hot springs of Chitran. *People sit in the water all night during winter* we are told. I would. Baltistan is frigid, winds howl across the stony ridges. Crouch over a miserable twig fire in a refrigerated hut or lay back in a self-regenerating heated bath? A no-brainer.

Despite the rumoured opposition the villagers are as keen as mustard. They have reached 'third dialogue', no stopping now, hack a jeep track through the ice of an avalanche. It is perilous but possible. The passengers elect to walk. Naib Khan is nonchalant. The religious leaders are still divided. The villagers are used to such squabbles. They get on with life.

One village organisation member is in a sulk. He thinks he is important; after all he is a Union Council member and cannot see why his vote should not over-rule the rest. Shoaib spends a patient hour or so trying to explain why.

Shoaib treads warily around the 'turf' of the other Aga Khan organisations. He can see the bear traps. Some of his staff are pushing for a 'shotgun' approach to social services—basic health care in every village. The medicos of Aga Khan Health have decided otherwise. They have opted for the high-tech route: narrow their focus to a few well equipped hospitals. All in Ismaili areas. Shoaib will

stay well clear; will only get involved he says, *if an entire area is targeted,* Ismaili or not.

The other Aga Khan organisations continue to be sceptical; they hold back from using village organisations as entry points.

In Chitral, the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has placed its cheque book on the table. Government cannot believe what is being said. The 'Fund' wants AKRSP to implement its project in Chitral; and provide help to the troubled Sindh Arid Zone Development Authority. After all, IFAD's Chitral project proposal is an AKRSP look-alike and no one seems to know what to do in Sindh. The government balks; Shoaib finds himself in a difficult position; he very definitely does not want to be the man in the middle; luckily the Fund backs down. Its mandate is to work through governments, not against them. But they don't quite give up on Sindh. Not yet.

In time the money is disbursed, gone, and the Chitral project fizzles out. Some gains; a few roads, some buildings, a couple of other projects. But that is it. The same old story, another international debt Pakistan will need to pay back sometime.

Trips to Islamabad are now a litany of woe.

Trudged wearily to the airport again in the early hours but to no avail. Shoaib hates getting up early in the morning—and failing. Better to stay in bed. He does so, celebrating May Day in bed *to make up for lost sleep.* Writes, *I have never missed the helicopter so much.* Up before dawn for four successively frustrating days he groans, *my sleep patterns totally disoriented, trying to catch up in the afternoons is futile.* An attempt by road also fails. Caught between two landslides, he manages to eventually make it back to Islamabad. He frets. What is going on in the north? Eventually there is a shift and a 'weather window' opens. An early morning flight for once *one of the rare times when PIA obliged.* Shoaib was lucky. Three winter weeks can pass without a flight; the same in spring when monsoon storms sweep in.

Summer brings visitors again. Hordes of them.

AKRSP finds a genuine friend in Sartaj Aziz Shoaib writes. Just back from the international arena, Sartaj will become influential in the government of Nawaz Sharif; often lend a vital helping hand just when it is needed. Later pushes through the vital financial kick-start for the rural support movement in Pakistan.

A genuine friend, *one of the best,* Shoaib smiles.

Listens to the men of Sandi Bali haggling bitterly. They have impressive savings, but riddled by factionalism *they can be expected to make little progress*. Shoaib sits back. He will wait until they resolve their differences. A common phenomena, *the women seem much better organised* he writes. They are. Should women be the focus? Shoaib has not yet given up on men.

An old villager of Sultanabad stands, makes an emotional apology, says their past attitudes were just plain bad, no other word for them, now they are ready to cooperate, no holds barred. Shoaib nods. Smiles. He will wait and see. Work through the dialogues.

In a somber mood Shoaib visits Hayward's cairn near Yasin. Wonders perhaps when some distant lord will whisper a command. Wonders who might be the swordsman. Cannot conceive it might be Shaw.

Some philosophy. Some disbelief. Money matters.

Shoaib says *by far the most important change we seek to make is behavioural*. Visiting government officials are baffled. They look at the amazing village accomplishments; look for 'hidden costs'. How could village projects be done for so little money, be so successful? They shake their heads in disbelief. There had to be something fishy going on. Someone had to be fudging the books. Of course, no one was.

Shoaib had left credit out of his dialogues. Savings, yes, but not borrowings. But, as soon as the villagers caught on, they wanted to borrow money. Who will provide the loans, Shoaib ponders? Not Habib Bank. As we already know, 'with the best will in the world I cannot' said the bank's manager. 'I might as well give the money away'.

In 1984 'credit windows' had been defined by AKRSP staff and medium term loans advanced for such works as land development to complement a new channel. Problem—the five year terms were longer than people's memories. Adjustments made.

Jump ahead to 1988. Shoaib went to the Board, overrode objections, extracted an agreement—*like pulling teeth* he laughed—to allow AKRSP to underwrite a line of credit from Habib Bank. Mutabiat Shah, one of Shoaib's originals and the manager of the credit programme, says the Board took a gloomy view, did not expect the village organisations to repay their loans, waved goodbye to a couple of million rupees; wrong again, they couldn't believe it when the villagers did repay the money.

Akhter Hameed Khan threw his hat into the ring. The huge amounts of savings sitting idle bothered him. Savings like that needed to be put to work. Group credit would be extended to village organisations who would lend to

individual members. Group credit had a downside however—group responsibility; one defaulter would be a cost to everyone. Cold feet suddenly in Gilgit so over one hundred dialogues ensued. Did everyone understand the implications? The villagers grew tired of all the talk. Get on with it, they demanded. They would make sure there were no defaulters.

Then Shaw's people in Geneva weighed in, did not want people's savings put on the line, used as loans. Shoaib agreed. Savings were only used as collateral. Donors also threw money into the pot. It was all ready to go.

In 1989, the Village Organisation Credit Programme was launched. The village selected? The model village, of course—Ahmadabad.

At first social organisers were put in charge, underwent a hasty training programme, carried bags of cash; hardly anyone had seen a cheque before; where would they cash it anyway? In Chitral, staff members had their personal accounts debited and later re-adjusted as accountants desperately sought ways to manage the flow of cash and balance the books.

Sophistication soon replaced ad hoc approaches. Credit managers emerged. Village accountants were trained, and to everyone's relief, there were very few defaulters; the programme boomed. The magic touch again—the village credit programme was a runaway success. Thousands of households become credit-worthy borrowers. Farm production lifts; small businesses flourish; and overnight almost, villagers become financial managers.

In Geneva His Highness day-dreamed of a bank. So did the Karachi businessmen—they wasted little time dreaming, they began to plot. Sooner or later, it didn't matter, they would have a bank. The villagers did not dream or plot. They were happy to leave things as they were. Banks were for bosses, for big business, not small farmers.

First stirrings of discontent in Geneva. Shaw tosses Shoaib's strategy paper into his out-tray. He isn't happy. 'Shoaib' he mutters, 'never strong on strategy, a master at "winging it"'. But that's the way it has worked so far and Shaw knows it, so why is he starting to jib? What does he sense? Is the pace too hot; is Shoaib simply running too fast, going too far; does Shaw feel he is no longer holding the reins; never quite knows what Shoaib will do next? He doesn't inform Shoaib, but he approves of the progress reports. He can send these straight to His Highness. That helps.

Ron Pears arrives with his CBS News team. He brings with him an aggressive prejudice—development cannot take place under the 'aegis' of Islam. I think he meant 'auspices', under the authority of—not aegis, under the protection of. No matter, Pears thinks Islam and development don't mix.

He is not however a bigot, his mind is open, he is ready to be persuaded. Hanuchal siphon, Soust tunnel, a few massive village meetings, the helicopter—there is more; all lead towards the usual epiphany. Pears becomes a believer. Another convert. He will leave the north a changed man.

Shoaib describes the CBS team as being without .equal. There is a spectacular splash on Canadian television. It is taken up and flashes across the international networks. Gilgit is an amazingly good news story—too few around in the 1980s.

Gruff James Grant of UNICEF makes his visit in November. Tells Shoaib he is sorely missed at Sri Lanka's Mahaweli project although things are still moving along. Smiles, takes Shoaib aside, says he understands exactly why Shoaib has taken leave of UNICEF although many think he has taken leave of his senses; Grant would do the same himself. He is envious. Very. He leaves with a wave and a wry smile.

Envious? The top man of a mainstream UN organisation?

Shoaib thinks his old boss is just being kind. He is not. Grant is speaking from the heart. He had dreams once too.

As 1986 draws to a close a cryptic sentence; *Bargo and Tholdar villagers shoot at one another.* Not everything is sweetness and light in the north. AKRSP is. A light in the north as 1987 begins, if not all sweet.

Shoaib begins to dream of taking social mobilisation to the entire country. He has reason to believe he should. All great ideas have their time in the mountains, in the wilderness. The old man Akhter Hameed Khan shakes his head. He thinks Shoaib has already gone too far too fast; thinks 'let the idea move out of the north when it is ready, no push, no shove, all by itself'; agrees, 'village organisations will not just appear, cannot just be created by passing laws'; agrees, 'support organisations of one kind or another are needed until the villagers are ready to stand alone'; sits back, thinks his Sufi thoughts, 'what will happen will happen'.

An important question. Should AKRSP reach out, begin to extend to other regions in the country, or should Shoaib think instead of replication, of creating a system of equals,

Shoaib receives a note. His Highness is concerned. Who has been talking to him? Immediately writes, *of course he will not allow AKRSP to overstretch*; yes, certainly he will consider His Highness's suggestions—a network of independent, autonomous rural support organisations might just be the most sensible option. Perhaps they could be linked?

The prince sighs, settles, turns perhaps to his plans for Sardinia. His title at the mast-head of an organisation is difficult enough even in the northern mountains where Ismailis are in plentiful supply. To fly the same flag down country with its over-heated religious and feudal divides is asking for trouble. 'Suicidal if you ask me' say the more pragmatic amongst the Ismaili inner circle.

Shoaib can live with it. He can adjust. Easily.

In May another celebration. World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department publishes its report. Earlier, behind the scenes, Bob Shaw masterminds a brilliant coup. The Bank's senior executives agree to do what it has never done before—evaluate the only project it has not bankrolled. Intrigued, they also want to find out what the fuss is all about.

A three-man team assembles; pocket their first class tickets, file out through the wide glass doors of the austere multi-storied building on H Street. In Pakistan local colour is provided by Shoaib's old friend Tariq Siddiqi. The team is led by the very sensible Graham Donaldson. Experienced, smart, the team's members are not easily impressed.

The May report confirms the rumour.

Something really important, totally amazing is happening in the Northern Areas. The bankers write of Shoaib in admiration, 'he spends most of his time on frequent field visits, walking and talking with villagers, social organisers and field engineers. The GM's example makes it clear to the staff that the practical needs of the villagers' come first, and that the focus of the programme is the field, not the office'.

And more. In an era when rural development is falling out of favour, Shoaib's programme proves the lie. Rural development is not impossible in the world of peasantry. It's just that no one else knew how to do it. The peasants had been discounted, village knowledge ignored; educated outsiders knew what to do and the best came from the West. Wrong, most of it. Terribly wrong.

Even World Bank's experts admitted this. Well, they almost did. Kept a few worries to themselves. What they saw was this.

In the Northern Areas, Shoaib had let loose the peasants, the villagers, let them decide for themselves what would lift them out of endless poverty. They did; he helped; and the whole shebang was off and running at a furious pace. In two packed years, 526 village organisations were in action, a phenomenal 38,000 households—97 per cent of Gilgit district—upwards of one thousand projects had been identified, four hundred were underway or completed, some of them astonishing even to phlegmatic bankers, many bordering on the impossible, an extraordinary outpouring of people-power.

But you had to see it to believe it.

The bankers saw it, and in their measured fashion, told the world. Were believed. Started by looking at the visitors' book; saw who was coming; how many. Set up a Visitors Center, they said. Shoaib acted with alacrity. How long had he wanted to do this? The Board could not object to a World Bank recommendation. Surprisingly, the bankers also ticked the box for women. Well done, they said, Women's Organisations are not just window dressing, they acknowledge an importance far beyond the kitchen—they teach leadership and provide a forum for ideas. Just the job, could hardly be better. Shoaib was delighted. They are, however, a trifle fussed about monitoring and evaluation. No base-line studies, they point out, just rough start-out area estimates. Tut, tut!

For Shoaib dirt poor had been base-line enough. And anyway, if you carry out detailed base-line studies you raise hopes, raise expectations far too soon. What if you cannot meet them? You also waste time, enable endless pontification. Shoaib had no time to waste. No time to talk. He had not bothered to walk; he had started at a run, and ignoring his mentor, gone even faster. His staff loved it all. Responded. So did the villagers.

There is more, far more than you really want to read. The first team and those to follow, all earnest men, took a serious approach, tried to give value—they were not cheap but the prince paid up happily—wrote dense reports packed with findings, data, tables listing numbers—an accountant's dream. And recommendations. Seriously considered recommendations.

Who took notice? Shoaib did, here and there. If it suited. Who reads them now?

Unlike Akhter Hameed who has little but contempt for the World Bank and its ilk, Shoaib is an apologist, insists *there were no negative aspects to any of their evaluations*, says, *all those very open-minded individuals like Graham Donaldson, very candid, all of them had their hearts in the right place, no, no*, he says as if to reassure himself, *they were all very supportive*, and then a pause *at least while I was there*. Were they? Shoaib is sometimes too honest for his own good. He clears his throat and says, well, *I suppose there was one thing*.

There was. The evaluation team's proposal that Social Organisers should be phased out in areas where social mobilisation seemed to be well underway. Oh dear, planned phase out, making decisions for the people, deciding what is best, not waiting to be told, World Bank staff, donor experts cannot resist the temptation to meddle, take control.

Remember the villagers we sat and talked with in Chitral's Garum Chashma area in December 2007, men from some of the best and most active village

organisations, men who had already formed clusters, built microhydel schemes, were thinking of a road to Central Asia, remember what they said? It was this—Social Organisers had been taken away too soon, that it should have been up to them to say when they were ready to do without a social organiser, when they were ready to stand entirely on their own two feet. It was their decision, not anyone else's. Wasn't that what Shoaib Sahib had taught?

Later evaluation teams were laudatory but not quite as sanguine as the first. Three times the World Bank's teams returned, each time reporting marvellous achievements, giving top marks, well, almost top marks. The exception? The bankers wanted a plan. The Washington suits share Bob Shaw's Western worries, share donor concerns, listen to the Karachi businessmen in Karachi, frown, note AKRSP's 'reluctance from 1989 to 1992 to engage in planning'.

Shoaib believes in letting people decide for themselves. He knows this is absolutely right; knows the futility of making plans and blueprints, of going out and telling village people what they should or should not do. Shoaib also believes in the importance of those he calls activists, men, and women too, who help others in the village to see what they see, to make decisions that benefit everyone. And he believes in the villagers, in their power and potential, in finding ways to unleash this power so they will do things for themselves. With a little help of course, the combination is incredibly powerful.

Why would anyone want to change any of it? But they did.

The last World Bank evaluation is carried out in 1996. It notes 'a change of attitude to planning after 1992'. By then the Board had pushed Shoaib's self-eject button. Tells everyone the finger was Shoaib's. Not quite true. But Washington is happy; the Board is happy; even the donors are happy. They quickly send consultants to explain how to fill in the numbers on a log frame. Pure guess work but who cares? Back in London, Ottawa, Amsterdam, the bureaucrats purr. Paper flows across their desks; the i's are dotted, the t's crossed, the numbered squares neatly ticked, boxes filled with predictive notes.

It is all meaningless. It is the way they want things done. Their way.

Back to 1987.

War rages in Afghanistan. The Russians are under siege. USAID focus attention on transit territory, Shoaib's old stamping ground, the North West Frontier Province. The Americans are there in strength; one hand holds the olive branch. Do not ask what the other hand holds.

Rocky Staples has to be an American. Can you imagine an English Foreign Service man called Rocky, a Frenchman, a German? Rocky has a pocketful of dollars. Bob Shaw and Shoaib team up and suggest Rocky pays for a new rural

support programme. Someone thinks of a name, Sarhad Rural Support Programme. It will be an AKRSP look-alike. The Americans talk big, peel off one hundred and forty million from the four hundred million they say they are ready to spend in the Frontier; say it can be spent on the new rural support programme. Everyone is dazzled, excited. The casual way Americans splash money about. Is it real? Will it last? No, it won't.

Mid-February 1989, a river bridge spanning the Amu Darya, a winter-bright day, General Boris Gromov clumps across the bridge; he is a soldier; chin out, head held high. The Russians are leaving. Afghanistan is a smouldering ruin. The mujahideen rejoice but after a few short months of peace, they soon fall out. More ruin.

It is a signal. No Russians in Afghanistan. No need now for the Americans to be so accommodating, spend so much money back in Pakistan. So they begin to scale back in Pakistan. Bring up the 'Pressler Amendment'. The one hundred and forty million disappears.

So fickle. Who would have thought? Not Shaw; not Shoaib. In 1987 the world is their oyster.

Ramzan Merchant is trundled out. 'Pay up' he says to the Aga Khan Foundation, 'let's pay Ejaz Naik to carry out a feasibility study'. A cheque is quickly written. Ejaz Naik gets to work, signals thumbs up to the proposition. The Sarhad Rural Support Organisation begins its chequered career.

Then USAID's regional legal adviser gets in on the act, asks, how did AKRSP work its magic; how long will villages need support; can they bottle Shoaib's charisma, clone him; will it all really work in the super-conservative Pashtun heartlands, in the slow boiling heartlands of feudal Sindh, in the widdershins politics of Punjab?

A spin around the north and the USAID man is a convert; he sat open-mouthed when villagers put AKRSP staff on the spot, and treated Shoaib's organisation as a resource and not as a patron. Another visitor *who had never seen the like*. It was all go for USAID's legal adviser. Rush back to the office, a quick wriggle through USAID's torturous documentation procedures and then meet Shaw, for lunch of course, in Geneva.

USAID is not the only agency wanting to jump on the super-successful AKRSP band-wagon. Seduced, flattered, eyes star-dusted, the Foundation is persuaded to keep its finger in this new national rural support 'pie'; it won't keep it in for long.

Another win; a huge one this time.

Remember Ejaz Naik's promise when confronted with the wretchedness of life for some northern area villagers. He keeps it, steers Shoaib's proposal through the labyrinths of government, down corridors, across desks, 'sign here' he says and they do. How reads the document when the ink is dry? It reads 'AKRSP may negotiate directly with donors for funds'. It is a huge concession. Not everyone is happy.

Why give up such power? Why let donors give money directly to AKRSP? How can such organisations be made to toe the line if you don't control the purse strings. Mutter, mutter, and 'oh yes, AKRSP is sectarian isn't it, won't that create a stir in certain religious quarters'? Too late. Already the Dutch have pledged a million, the Canadians and the British more, and so it goes.

The other side of the coin.

Bursting with a good deed done, Akhter Hameed Khan is asked what government can do for him. Snaps crustily 'what can they do? Leave me alone'.

And while all this is going on thirty-three eager Canadian Venturers to be greeted, fed and watered. They are heading for Hunza and a happy summer wielding picks and shovels with the people on a village link-road project in Hunza. Shoaib shrugs, smiles, *why not* he says, *it won't hurt.*

'Lusty looking lads, they might even do some work' Hussain Wali adds. In the villages the maidens comb their hair. A Canadian connection? The menfolk nod and echo Shoaib, 'why not' they agree as they sit and drink their tea.

A little different when Pierre Trudeau arrives in an army helicopter. Hunt out the red carpet, the mir's kitchen staff ready at their ovens, the Serena hotel manager sends his suit to the dry cleaners. It is all a triumph of course except for Soust. The army do not like the look of the weather. Cannot afford to lose a helicopter or Pierre Trudeau.

Too bad. Pierre does not get to compare photographs with his friend the prince.

Just one of a stream of glittering luminaries to visit—the Northern Areas now a must on the travel itineraries of the world's 'top one hundred'. Even the leader of the Shia Ithna-ashri sect, the doughty Syed Yahya Shah, is trotted out for an eminent visitor.

Weather wise, Spoelberch of the Foundation makes an autumn appearance. Avoids Gilgit like the plague when the mercury hovers at 40 degrees, when the black rock walls of Rakaposhi shimmer with radiating heat well into the night. Bill is paving the way for another princely visit. Making sure all is well, no wobbles, does anything need re-painting? He chats, tours here and there, tells

Shoaib's management group, no, the Foundation does not expect miracles, does not ask AKRSP to be responsible for every aspect of economic development in the north.

Then again, if staff feel they can do something, then go for it. It is something the World Bank's evaluation team wrote about.

Murmurs from a development handbook—village organisations to be responsible for the management of agricultural development.

Staff roll their eyes. Think, 'try and stop them'.

More murmurs—a solid agricultural production base must be established before agro-industry can hope to pay off.

Staff know some villagers have just made a handy sum marketing apricots down-country, both fresh and dried. Apricot driers on the way. Ah well, Bill means well.

And then, when only Shoaib's inner circle are present, a question from Geneva, where was Shoaib thinking of taking the organisation next? There is nothing on paper to tell them. They are beginning to worry. They need paper they can understand. Shoaib does not send any. Yes, the list of accomplishments is amazing, but where can they read what Shoaib plans next? The programme is worryingly large, is still growing like topsy. Is Shoaib's personal touch enough? Isn't it time for procedures, plans, corporate structure?

Shoaib smiles. He listens but does not see the need for change, will wait for the villagers to ask. Do they have a loose cannon on their hands, Bill wonders? The Board think so. A distant rumble. Barely perceptible but a warning.

Things could be worse. Suddenly they are, the skies open, rain sheets down The Administrator declares an emergency. It is not man-made. The rain continues to bucket down. Will not stop. Flood bound, Shoaib has time to write, half the town is under water and the whole Northern Areas declared a disaster area. Spoelberch poor chap, lucks out. He is ambling around the Punyal valley when the rain sets in. He frets; Shoaib worries. It will not do if Bill becomes morose. Of pleasant mien, Bill is a gentleman and doesn't rant even when he runs out of socks. He is instead charmingly grateful.

He has reason to be.

Four dull days watching the relentless downpour from the veranda of a modest mountain rest house. No desk, no passing parade of paper, a scratchy telephone line, perhaps even a few bed bugs. Shoaib chalks up a few debits with the Commander of the Frontier Constabulary, a huge credit with Spoelberch—the Constabulary's helicopter lifts him out of Gacuch.

A quick bath, clean linen, then back to the comforts of Geneva, wet socks forgotten.

The Afghan war touches the villages. In Chitral, two stranded Afghan gunship helicopters are captured in Torkhow, off course in the murk, fuel gauges nudging empty. Pilots mutter, navigators hang their helmeted heads; villagers pose on the hulking craft like big game hunters, children merrily swing on the drooping gun barrels. The most exciting thing to happen for years. The army arrives to spoil their fun.

In India, Shoaib is a guest at an official dinner.

The host, the Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, a fellow student at the University of Lucknow; another honoured guest, the Pakistan Ambassador, cousin, academy batch mate and sartorial adviser, Dr Humayan Khan. The line of partition is still porous; loyalties, families, and connections. Was it all worthwhile? For the new generation connections grow more tenuous, second hand memories.

Back from the floods, and secure again in his Geneva office, Bill Spoelberch has given the green light. The prince will come. The tour will be triumphal.

Chrysanthemums, masses of them, burying the prince; special chairs, lots of muted princely pleasure at the passing parade of carrots, cabbages, turnips—hopes turnips are not on the menu—apples, yes, munch an apple, beam at the heaped platters of fruit, all from new land, channels, the people chorus thanks to God, and His Highness.

At Chubbier village the weather-leathered village president bursts into tears—*poor chap was overcome with emotion* Shoaib writes with a smile—His Highness, the Imam, fulsome in his praise 'of this little mountain village'.

At another, the lead rope of a flower-festooned yak is handed on to Shoaib, passed to the livestock specialist, quickly handed to a mountain herdsman. Of uncertain temper, a yak would not feel at home in Aiglemont, would not much like Gilgit. It will lord it in the mountains instead, the royal yak.

The prince stands, the people cheer. Feet shuffle. What will he say? The prince speaks from the heart; it is a speech worth framing. Many people do. Can it be better than the prince's last visit? Is that possible? It is.

First there is the astounding road the Shimshalis have near finished across the trackless mountains, three hours in a jeep instead of six hard days on foot. And then, don't give anything away, wait for it—the Soust tunnel. But then we already knew this. Two strong lads had portered in a special chair from Khuda Abad, the prince climbs over the parapet, stops, his smile lights a thousand lives.

The rest we already know. The visit is a triumph. Everything the prince had hoped for has come to pass. It is better than good; it is brilliant.

More journalists. Gauliose dangle from jaded Parisian lips, thick aroma of Syrian and Turkish tobacco, crumpled packs casually discarded, village children scrabble for them in the dust, the winged helmet emblem fascinates them; the *Wall Street Journal* man is serious, a non-smoker, the *New York Times* doubtful, sniffs wistfully at the Frenchman's smoke; all leave utterly convinced. Shoaib doesn't have to sell the programme. It sells itself.

A villager clasps Shoaib's hands, says, 'GM Sahib is like a *Bhagat*' (a holy person who leads humanity towards God, someone who speaks to angels). For once Shoaib is speechless; pulls himself together, writes *I wish it were true*. Does he? I don't really think so. Too bad the journalists were not there to hear.

Down to earth with a thump.

In a southern Chitral valley the men of a village organisation gather. Prone to firing in the air to welcome honoured guests, one hundred members are asked to pile their arms along the wall. Shoaib notes, *a useful precaution when arriving by helicopter*. That's southern Chitral for you. A herd boy can skim a stone into Afghanistan.

On the wings of angels, tempts fate, writes—*I have never had it so good as now*.

The djinn of the mountains slap their sides with glee.

Beyond belief

If you could foresee the future would it help; is ignorance bliss? 1988 starts blissfully.

Shoaib loves to travel. Always has, still does. Almost an addiction. Did it all begin with those happy far-off days bouncing along in an ox-cart on tour with his grandfather? Slow; steady? Very, but not without purpose. No lazy lotus eating meanderings. Up early and away, hours listening to a litany of complaints, offences, judgements, an evening stroll with a gun, something for the pot and then talk.

Shoaib tells a funny story. It is about Musarrat's famously eccentric father told by his wife, Musarrat's mother. On his way back from England in the 1930s, Musarrat's father had forwarded his much loved open-topped MG sports car to Bombay, 'or was it Calcutta', Shoaib laughed, 'wherever they sent those

things then'. To get the little low-slung sports car to Dera Ismail Khan there was really no other way than to drive the dusty roads. Loading his wife, Musarrat's father set off. Imagining himself something of a rally driver he pushed the tiny car to its limits. Goggled, dust-coated, muffled against the dust, he failed to notice his wife had shot sideways out her seat and onto the road verge as he slid around a tight corner *like a cork out of a bottle*. Family lore has it that it was some time before he noticed. Backing up, the track was too narrow to easily turn, the long-suffering lady was discovered standing under a tree 'very dusty and rather cross'.

A different world now, but Shoaib still loves to travel. Car is fine, bus if he has to, best by plane, the swifter the better. Forget boats. Too slow, a waste of time and you can't just stop when you feel like it. And Shoaib gets sea-sick. Time, always time. Not enough of it.

And so the rush. Time travel a dream. Arrive before you leave. Now that would be something. And so he travels. At the drop of a hat. Sometimes it seems as if the entire subcontinent does. A connoisseur of seat width, comfort, service, travel has almost become an end in itself. A fidget if he has to sit too long in one place.

To London to sit with Musarrat, argue with Afshan, fondly bewitched by Sarah's children, read the papers, walk; to Bangkok to talk seriously with Roohi; to Monaco to smile with Shelley, chat with his much admired son-in-law Tim; to almost anywhere else if it will help the poor, repair the damaged image of his country. Masood for one always shakes his head, says he does not know how Shoaib does it.

In November of 2007 while Felicity and I wandered around the north, Shoaib was in the air to New York to address the UN General Assembly; a quick diversion across the continent to the bedside of Musarrat's dying sister; then London, sick as a dog but don't tell Musarrat—he has promised to meet us in Chitral, is still on his feet. But his system is faltering and he knows it. Back from London, he coughs, feels rotten. Lungs again. Bed, right now, commands his doctor. And so those three captive weeks in Islamabad where we sat in a fire-warmed room and drifted through the past while Shoaib mended. And then, cough gone, colour returned and a grudging green light from the doctor, he is off to Bangkok again! Smiles, waves, says he will meet us in Karachi in a couple of weeks time. He has a meeting there.

As 1988 begins he slips away to London and then to upstate New York. He will speak at a gathering at the prestigious Cornell University arranged by the Foundation's enthusiastic American chapter. Shoaib delivers a paper, 'New Approaches to Rural Development Participation: AKRSP in Northern Pakistan'. An academic affair, the learned audience are impressed, more so without the

self-imposed restraint of delivering a formal paper, Shoaib begins to talk freely, with passion, without 'development-speak'—all those words, all those wordy explanations. He is far better talking from the heart, talking to villagers, anyone, but always from the heart.

There is applause. The accomplishments they see are dazzling even if the explanation is sociologically obtuse. The method works magically and that is what matters. Scientists love a magician, a magus, an alchemist. Secretly they dream of alchemy themselves, the ability to transmute—anything.

Shoaib transmutes people.

Back in the north he calls his management team together, tells them to think about how to respond to the recommendations of World Bank's evaluation report. Equivalent to a gold medal in the world's development 'games', the Bank's carefully worded 'well done' has rocketed AKRSP into the stratosphere. It cannot be all good; the Bank's team have to find something to criticize. They do, and write as an afterthought about some 'interesting omissions', some gaps. The Board has seized upon these, tells Shoaib to let them know what he intends to do about the omissions and gaps—soonest. Social organisers have come in for comment. Are they still needed? It is not an unreasonable question.

Shoaib sits down to write. Not a favoured occupation. Someone has to defend the Social Organisers. The Board has never really understood why they are needed. Someone also has to tell others in the Gilgit office exactly what is expected of them, and of the Social Organisers. AKRSP is now almost too large to work like a family. Delegation is required, of ideas and action.

Shoaib sits at his desk, he plans to write an informal 'action paper', the words flow freely, *a Social Organiser shows villagers how to work together, is a motivator, the 'eyes and ears' of the Managing Director*—although to be so he has to read their field reports which is quite a job. Good, but we have heard all this before, are they 'spies' then?

Not at all.

What they say and write is not a secret. Anyone can hear it, read it. And seeking a phrase to put a full stop to this explanation, finds one—Social Organisers are AKRSP's 'sheet anchor', a bridge from the villages to the organisation and the management.

What about their clients, the villagers? Well, these people are *simultaneously workers and owners; producers and consumers; buyers and sellers; managers and cooperators; traditionalists and innovators;* runs out of words, adds, perhaps to himself, *and God alone knows what else.*

Pauses, perhaps for inspiration, finds it, writes, *motivation is not an abstract notion but manifests itself in*...what?

Writes *the formation of a village organisation, the generation of capital through savings,* pauses again because the villagers are into saving all right but just how to invest all the accumulated rupees back into the village is proving to be a very tricky question. Presses on, writes *motivation also manifests itself in the villages as a willingness to join in collective management, in working together to identify productive physical infrastructure projects, in a desire to implement and upgrade these projects.* A Social Organiser's other tasks? *Pointing village organisations toward credit sources; helping to upgrade skills through example, and nominating candidates for further training.*

And of AKRSP's role and responsibilities towards a Social Organiser, writes, with no exceptions, every part of AKRSP is active in helping a Social Organiser (carry out these roles, the roles he has written down), from the all-important engineering section to the more obscure monitoring and evaluation office.

But what if a village organisation becomes mired down in disputes and argument; what if a village organisation never moves beyond the 'basic package' stage, the first project? *Then*, Shoaib counsels, *a Social Organiser should become concerned; and so should we.*

This flurry of activity was not so much a reaction to criticisms from the Board—Shoaib could live with those—but from his mentor, Akhter Hameed Khan. Never one to hold back, not even when his 'star pupil' was involved, the old man had noted, in a paragraph in one of his twelve brilliantly insightful reports that Shoaib calls the best development manual he has ever read 'Social Organisers' were very busy but only 10 per cent effective'. And perhaps even more damning, the old man felt 'many lacked a sense of direction and focus'.

Well, that put the cat amongst Shoaib's pigeons.

Had AKRSP simply grown too fast, gone too far, started running before it had properly learned to walk? Shoaib was sure there was no truth in this stomach-sinking question. Well, perhaps there was a glimmer of truth, but nothing that could not be fixed. He set about doing so. Right away.

Hussain Wali had already written a highly practical 'Rural Development Manual'. This would become mandatory reading. Also, every section head was asked to get to work right away, draw up check lists to help social organisers in their work, to make sure they knew what they were supposed to do. Determined to re-institute direction and focus in those social organisers who might have 'lost the way' Shoaib penned an uncharacteristically direct memorandum.

While all this is happening the Board's view is this: 'sociology is all right in its place but we need results, numbers, hard data'. They have them, of course. Shoaib's people send bucket loads of numbers, bombard them with tables. The Bank's men have also been busy tabulating. It is what they do, and they do it well. It looks good to them.

The Bank's verdict the second time around, 'very good'.

Move on from numbers. 'What about management, do we have a real manager' the Board ask. They don't, and they know it. Not one whose style they understand; not one they would have chosen had they known what would happen; a manager in Gilgit who is not compliant to their will— Shoaib is very definitely not 'their man'. Eventually they will have such a manager but first they will have to find a way to ease Shoaib out. Hussain Wali too.

They begin by casting doubt, not stones. At least that is something. Can the 'Shoaib approach' cope with the 'people giant' he has created? Good question actually. Even the Bank's men raise gentlemanly queries. Donors too. The whole edifice Shoaib has created is just too different. Donors give their money and then sit back a little uneasily. Nothing else they can do really. Luckily, the results are brilliant, but the whole thing is just so unorthodox. No bureaucrat worth his (or her) salt really likes it, donor or otherwise. Ambassadors do. They see value for money. So do prime ministers, presidents, and princes, one anyway, and that is all that really matters. Like the Dutch ambassador. When he happens to visit Gilgit, Shoaib says, *Your Excellency, here is the helicopter, I am off to Baltistan tomorrow, do you want to come.* Did he? A helicopter ride to Baltistan? Turns to his personal assistant says, cancel all appointments in Islamabad. Shoaib smiles at the memory. *It was a tool I used to the greatest of advantage.* The Dutch, of course, become major donors.

The Board remain unhappy, home in on the budget. Want a clearer picture, whatever that means.

They worry about staff numbers. In December 1982 there were two employees and shortly afterwards six; that was supposed to be it, they say. The summaries in front of them now show nearly 250 employees spread across three entire districts. Where were the hiring and firing rules, the personnel management procedures? Answer—in Shoaib's head; in management group decisions. This worries them. They want a 'clearer picture'. Fair enough except that this really means more control, screws tightened, something they have wanted right from the word go.

An offhand comment by His Highness on a recent visit: 'nothing ever remains static'. Did he mean the organisation? Shoaib's tenure as top man? The

Foundation's contribution? The Board put their own spin on the comment. Settle for Shoaib's tenure.

Some Board members read balance sheets at breakfast time. They don't like the look of AKRSP's. Staff costs were rapidly increasing, a fact to make any businessman sit up and take notice. Yes, the World Bank team had described the cost per beneficiary as 'very reasonable', but although beneficiary numbers were climbing fast, so it seems was cost per family. So they ask, 'where was all the additional funding to come from; who will pay for the programme beyond 1990?'

Should have been a question, not a worry. Not whether there will be any donors willing to pay up, but which one should they choose. Whether they are aware of this or not, a decision is made; somehow, operational costs have to be reduced.

A few Board members go further. Pull out their calculators. Total budget for 1988 is 110 million rupees, a bit over 64 million rupees for programmes and 45 million for everything else; actual staff salaries are 26.5 million rupees, peanuts for a USAID project, for example, but not to the Board. 'Bung all this in a deposit account' said a few directors, 'and each beneficiary would receive about 1,700 Rupees, more or less the same as AKRSP's current cost per beneficiary.' This does not of course include factors such as sustainability and growth, or that hidden, difficult to define benefit that Shoaib calls Social Capital, the business of villagers being able to manage their own lives.

The directors put away their calculators and smile. They know they have been making mischief but in doing so it seems they have also won a point.

Robert Shaw also throws his concerns into the ring. Yes, it has been a brilliant success so far, but look at Gilgit District. Although nearly every villager was a member of an AKRSP sponsored village organisation, the main recent gains had been in total numbers not in productivity per family. This of course was not quite true. New channels meant more water, more land, more crops, more fruit, a doubling, in fact, of incomes. But not, Shaw argued, much improvement per unit area of land, the holy grail of all true developers.

He added, and it was true, 'savings were great but they were not an indicator of improved productivity'. AKRSP, he said, would have to lift its game. Could it be that Shaw had begun to wonder if Shoaib, no doubt a people's man beyond compare, was the right man to work the next miracle, whatever that was. Maybe it was productivity.

Shoaib was puzzled, for Shaw was straying from the basic premise behind the entire programme—don't try and second guess what the people want; make suggestions by all means but don't ever decide for them; don't tell them what they should or should not have; just respond to their list of wants. Indeed, if this

list included higher yielding cereals, more efficient domestic animals, more marketable fruit varieties then see what can be done about it. If these issues do not appear on the villagers' lists, perhaps ask why.

There was a problem however; research agencies were still grappling to find answers to improving productivity. There was not a lot on offer, and with his international contacts, Shaw should have known this. Agricultural productivity gains proceed in a slow and steady manner. The gains may be cumulative but rarely are they startling, they sort of creep up on you, a son may notice a difference from his father's time. It is not like a new channel, a siphon, a link road where gains are quantum, large upward leaps. Agricultural productivity inches slowly up—sometimes not.

Still, Shaw was right to raise the issue—but he was ever a theoretician not a field man. Theoreticians like the look of their arguments on paper. It is up to someone else to make them work. But even if Shoaib had held a doctorate in agriculture from Cornell, it would not have made much difference. Income had already doubled and if productivity per beneficiary and per unit area of land was to also double over the next decade it would have to be through something other than agriculture. Through business, mining, manufacture, even tourism with all its drawbacks. The young men now know this.

The Board took Shaw's worries and sharpened them. At last they have an issue they can home in on—productivity, whatever this means. Surprisingly, Shoaib does not seem to have a ready answer.

He doesn't, flies back to Gilgit, tells his staff, we have reached a very difficult stage, qualitative improvement is necessary and performance has to be evaluated.

Shoaib also resolves to spend more time in the field (how can he?) to work closely with Social Organisers to revive their motivation, refine their sense of direction, lift their game. He does not want to lose his Social Organisers, and the village organisations they nourish. He doesn't, but in the future AKRSP does.

Some field staff stand up, say they will work harder than ever. But in self-defence point to the office, it's not all our fault they say, size has caused a disconnect, and cooperation and coordination between field and the office has declined. It needs to be reinstated; section heads should not squash field initiatives without looking into them.

If this worries Shoaib he does not say, instead he introduces the new staff grading system the Board has sprung upon him. There were now to be three professional grades—junior, senior, and management. Only a few, however, can expect an increased salary. Shoaib cautions the elevated few not to expect the same to happen again—salaries will be pegged to performance—but does not say how this will be done.

The real concern—seven posts are to be abolished; eleven 'retrenchments' required. This creates enormous consternation; they are the first staff cuts ever. Jobs are as scarce as hens teeth in the north, and there is also a cultural expectation that once employed, no one will ever be fired. That is how it is in government service. Shoaib cannot help it; a few are let go, gently, and with a generous pay-off. Some years later when real staff cuts are made after Shoaib has left, the pay-offs will be called 'golden handshakes'. They are, but not everybody who gets one wants one.

Staff become unduly worried; ask if they should look for alternative employment. In truth, Shoaib should have answered yes, they should. They worked for an organisation whose sole purpose was to answer to the people they set out to serve—they were staff of an organisation for the poor. Whether they stayed or were 'retrenched' depended entirely on whether the skills they had on offer were needed by the organisations they served, village organisations, singly or in groups, organisations of the poor. That is why they were paid so well.

Shoaib had not quite worked all this out. He knew it but had not been able to set it down with any clarity. Not yet. This was fine for professionals like Tariq Hussain. Few at the senior level saw AKRSP as a place of permanent employment anyway. Where it hurt was at the lower local levels. Social organisers, junior office staff, drivers, people with few alternatives, northerners.

There is a sunny side. Despite the Board's sharp-edged questioning, despite the unfounded worries of some staff, and Shoaib's own worries about his beloved social organisers, the 'rave reviews' keep rolling in.

USAID raise conservative eyebrows, ignore conventional 'aid-speak', describe AKRSP as 'one of the most successful programmes ever recorded...as being on the cutting edge of what is considered development'. Add 'there were few voluntary organisations in the US sophisticated enough to understand this message. But it was very hard to sell the idea to anyone, especially politicians'. Far easier to fund a bunch of wells, schools or roads, something concrete even if the end result proved worse than useless.

Amazing stuff! But that's Americans for you. Always the unexpected.

Shoaib, trying his hardest to be humble, writes *it was quite revolutionary for USAID to admit that the institutional package was as important as the technical package*. Wonders why after nearly six years his own Board did not understand, *AKRSP is an institution-building programme, not a service delivery one*. Hopes *service delivery programmes will be more effective*—work like a

dream—*if they work through institutions fostered by AKRSP*. Says again in case he has not made himself clear, under his watch AKRSP *would not become a super-department providing a wide range of services.*

But if he is this sure of himself, why didn't he stand his ground with the Board, with Bob Shaw? Wasn't there anyone by his side to tell him this was the obvious thing to do? Just say simply, 'back off you lot, we are into showing people how and why, not where and what'.

Then there is Bob Shaw's other worry: Shoaib's vision of taking the idea of social mobilisation out into the world. Shaw was man enough to put his own view on the line 'AKRSP ought not to think of further geographical expansion, but should concentrate on defending its own programme'. He does not say what he means by the word 'defend', but the message is clear. Shoaib should stay home and focus all his energies there—home meaning the Northern Areas.

To finish all this introversion, this bout of breast-beating, Shoaib pens one final comment, *the most difficult hurdle at the village level was to persuade villagers that the completion of their first grand infrastructural project was not an end.* They should see it in another light. It was a beginning, the first footstep along the pathway leading to the creation of a self-sustaining institution. Social Organisers had to get out there and make this point, make it until villagers could repeat it by rote, dream it, say it in their sleep.

Of course there is variability Shoaib admits, in some villages *you encountered a 'stone wall', in others the beginnings of a 'super-highway'*, but *unless villagers understood the vision*, they would not organise, or even more importantly, stay organised. All the more reason to 'reconnect' with Social Organisers, to recognise they did not always have an easy job.

An example from Chitral.

One village organisation slips into dormancy after they have completed their project. 'We became tired' they say when Shoaib asks why. Then urged on by an active social organiser, they revive and take out a group loan for agricultural machinery. Shoaib nods, pleased, 'see what a good organiser can achieve'.

The pragmatic Hussain Wali is harder to convince. Believes there is always a period of let down, particularly after bigger projects are completed. Enthusiasm just seems to wane with time. Can it be rebuilt? He shrugs and hopes it can. In the meantime he will keep on helping the villagers to build things.

All the more reason Shoaib argues, to make a special effort to keep reinvigorating the Social Organisers. Their enthusiasm also must wane with time. Human nature.

Having to be polite to visiting donor agency delegations was a never ending task, the Dutch, the Canadians, the British, all had to be welcomed no matter what else was going on, made to feel as if they were the important ones, that a special effort had been made. Of course it usually had. Most of the visitors were charming, appreciative. Few ever left unmoved.

Shoaib writes, *the visit brought tears to the eyes of Nicholas Barrington.* Good lord, tears in the eyes of a fairly crusty senior British diplomat? Whatever happened to the stiff upper lip? An ardent supporter, the best of friends, the British ambassador had a hand in channelling British Aid funds in large amounts to Chitral, a former principality the Raj had once 'taken under its protection', famous siege and all.

April and Shoaib is restive. Still no helicopter. A risky road dash to Islamabad halts abruptly near Chilas. A landslide. It can really rain in April.

He can't just sit in Gilgit. Ignores Feroz Shah's advice and eventually makes it to Chitral.

Discovers Feroz was not joking. Most of the valleys were still either blocked by snow or mud, or out of bounds because of fears of prowling Soviet gunships. Feroz has a 'told-you-so' gleam in his eye.

A contrite Shoaib writes, *it was indeed not the most opportune time for the GM to visit.*

Arandu is possible, just, *more than thirty rifles resting against the wall of the old Domel Nisar fort under the watchful eye of the sentry.* With war on their doorstep and awash with weaponry, Shoaib is amazed to hear an older man speak of 'love and unity'. A few months ago most villages *were allergic to the name of AKRSP.*

But Pashtuns are pragmatic. They have seen who puts butter on the bread.

With field trips on the back-burner, Shoaib is caught up in a spate of dinner parties and luncheons thrown by various notables to welcome Chitral's new deputy commissioner. A sparse eater, he has no excuse not to put his feet under a succession of dinner tables—bad manners otherwise. He groans after three consecutive feasts but is spared from more by the Chitral Scouts. The weather is foul but the colonel sends an order to his scouts on watch at the Lowari pass 'cajole the pilot to press on'. The colonel becomes *a friend for life.*

Rescued, he jubilantly writes, *release, saved by the third PIA flight.*

May 16th. Eid is nearing. Everyone is in a happy hurry. Family members will do almost anything to get home wherever this may be, go to extreme lengths to do so. There is a frenzy of bustling movement all over the country.

Anyone who does not go home is a social curiosity. It is one of those things. Like Christmas in the West.

In Gilgit there is laughter, smiling faces, staff wave merrily goodbye. Shoaib is happy. Despite the worrying run-ins with the Board and even worse, with Bob Shaw, he is content. He thinks he knows how to fix things. He has already said he has never had it so good. Nothing has happened to make him change his mind.

It will.

The Sunni mullahs of Chilas hate their Shia neighbours. They loathe the ritual mourning of Muharram, sneer at the empty-saddled white horse pacing slowly at the column's head, the wailing mourners, stripped to the waist, backs streaked with blood, in a frenzy of grief for their loved leaders traitorously cut down at Karbala more than a thousand years ago. 'Heretics' mutter the scowling Chilas mullahs. Without the hard hand of the feudal lords the power of the clergy grows, so do the ambitions of petty politicians. It has already come close to boiling over in 1983. The hatred simmers on.

May 17th. AKRSP. Smiles, happy talk, the last few down country staff hurry to the airport, some to the bus station, local staff rush home, then to market, a fat sheep for the feast, a goat, even a cow. Shoaib joins them, takes the first flight to Islamabad. There, surrounded by family, friends, for once places Gilgit on life's backburner.

May 19th. Rumours fly. A Sunni lies dead in the Gilgit bazaar. His killer is a Shia. At last the mullahs have a trigger, a call to arms. Revenge they growl, death to the heretics.

Shoaib says what really happened was that fanned by the fierce rivalry between candidates for the Northern Areas Council, the Shia Al-Quds Day procession was harassed. Clashes occurred. Shia hot-heads retaliated, attacking the Sunnis of Kashrot Mohallah in Gilgit town. Slogans were scrawled on the walls, supposedly by a Shia militant youth group, denigrating the Khulfa-e-Rashdeen, the first three caliphs, adding fuel to the fire. Militant Sunni youth groups rushed to scrawl their own innovative insults. In the ensuing melee, one is inadvertently killed. It could have all been stopped dead in its tracks right then. A firm show of force was needed, a few hotheads from either side slung in jail. Left to cool their heels. Shoaib could have done it in his day. It didn't happen. The army stayed firmly in their barracks, the police were not called out.

The call from the muezzin through loudspeakers was picked up, again and again, echoed down through Kohistan. Kalashnikovs were pulled out from under beds, grenades from grain bins, shelves, someone threw in a few mortars just in

case, side-tracked from delivery across the border, trucks assembled, engines rumbling. Others set off on foot, passed through villages on the way, 'join us, brothers' is the cry, 'death to the heretics'. The trickle becomes a stream, soon a flood, a *lashkar*, a tribal army, twenty thousand, forty thousand strong—no one will ever know—a mob with its rabid 'instant' generals pours up the Karakorum Highway, a truck load every ten minutes, waved through the barricades, on foot, lid lifted on a boiling pot of prejudice, pads relentlessly over passes, across ridges, pauses and then strikes, howling through the Shia villages outside Gilgit, dealing death to men, women, children. The villages of Minawar, Sikwar, Jakalabad, Batkore, Shutay and Shahtot are overrun, destroyed. Another column races down from Darel, past Singal, howls into Sharoot and Shakyot. Burn, kill, destroy.

In Shoaib's mountain villages the members of different sects nod at each other, perhaps a little grimly, some smile. No one attacks his fellow villager; some even give sanctuary to travellers and strangers. The two hundred Sunnis of Soust are guarded by their fellow villagers, men of other sects, Ismailis, Shia, it doesn't matter, comrades, they all worked on the tunnel. Elsewhere in the mountains villagers help each other, protect those who seek to travel, guard those who don't.

As they pass, the *lashkar* ignores the Ismaili enclaves who remain warily on guard. Some think they know why, believe the *lashkar* leaders have their orders: the Aga Khan has too much international influence and could make an embarrassing fuss. Perhaps this is right; perhaps not; who will ever really know the truth? All that we do know is that the *lashkar* leaves the Ismaili villages untouched, focuses on the hapless Shia. These villagers have also sensibly chosen to ignore the stupidly excited speeches of a few of their own recently defeated council candidates. Fools, they think, fools to try and incite involvement. The villagers are not stupid. They can see what they would be up against. They choose to wait and watch, stay on guard, offer sanctuary to friends and passers-by, keep their heads down. They have done this for centuries.

The administrator is in a quandary. He only has two hundred police and there are twenty thousand, forty thousand inflamed Sunni fighters. 'God knows how many' shouts the chief inspector wondering what the hell he is going to do. Shocked by the odds, the chief inspector will do his duty if asked. To his relief he isn't; the administrator sits on his hands. The prospect of two hundred widows horrifies him. A few brave policemen mount some desultory forays; do what they can. It isn't much. Curse, where is the army?

Good question. Where was the army, the proud Frontier Constabulary? Apparently sitting in their barracks, waiting for orders that never came; and if

they were too few, why didn't the C130s fly in straight away, bristling with reinforcements?

Islamabad airport, Friday, May 20th. Shoaib takes his seat in the Fokker Friendship, hears an announcement, 'trouble in Gilgit. Those who wish may disembark'. Only four people do. One man comments dryly, 'there is always trouble in Karachi but they don't cancel flights and nobody gets off'. Worried cabin crew pass out tea and biscuits, the plane takes off. Lands in Gilgit. The airport silent, the town unnaturally quiet.

Hurrying to his office, Shoaib hears the awful news, a rampaging tribal lashkar is still on the loose. The few who stayed to hold the fort are now holed up in the Gilgit Serena; most local staff have taken their families to the safety of their villages. Thank God, breathes Shoaib. No fatalities close to home. Not yet. Most down country staff are not due back until May 22nd. Shoaib thanks God again.

The people of Sakwar village on the outskirts of Gilgit cannot thank anyone. They are either dead or fleeing for their lives. Hussain Wali telephones Shoaib at the Chinar Inn to bring him up to speed, talks of panic, 'and where the hell is the army' he despairs.

Shoaib calls the administrator and 'apprises him of the situation'. Doesn't the man already know? Maybe he does, says every possible step is being taken including deployment of the army.

Fine; except the army doesn't seem to know it should be out there.

Shoaib telephones Hussain Wali, *every possible step is being taken* he says. 'What does that mean' shouts Hussain Wali? Shoaib wonders the same thing himself. Hopes for the best. But the administrator is fudging, sitting tight, hoping for a miracle. No 'steps are being taken'. Night falls, the *lashkar* continues its rampage.

May 21st. Day breaks on a bleak scene. The killing continues. The Frontier Scouts stay in their barracks. A few police wander about. The *lashkar* ignores them. Continue their selective rampage.

May 22nd. Sunday. Shoaib wakes to the whine of turbo-prop engines, squat C130 transport planes, Hercules, one after another, four flights, packed with army reinforcements. Why did it take so long to reinforce, the Gilgitis ask? Do the reinforcements rush out and arrest the ringleaders, disarm the *lashkar*? Silence the strident mullahs?

A curious telephone call from the administrator. The lashkar is willing to withdraw. Says Syed Qasim Shah has flown in, is with him now helping to calm

things down. Shoaib passes on the news to Hussain Wali who is singularly unimpressed.

The Deputy Commissioner Gilgit has enough presence of mind to declare the day a local holiday. Hopes it is all over. Shoaib tells Hussain Wali to keep the office closed. I doubt he needed telling.

Someone forgets to tell the *lashkar* that it was all over, to down tools and leave. *Black Sunday* Shoaib writes. The *lashkar's* idea of leaving is to cross the river and raze the Shia village of Batkore to the ground. One of Shoaib's, the villagers had just completed a link road. The *lashkar* put it to good use.

Monou Assidi of UNICEF and Jim Wolf from the International Mountain Institute had chosen to spend the Eid holiday in Gilgit in the peace and tranquillity of the mountains. Not a very good choice. Shoaib arranges a hurried exit on the plane for Wolf and his wife. Assidi is a worry.

Shoaib on the telephone to the administrator again.

Yes, the administrator has heard what is happening, agrees it is 'prudent' to get Assidi, an Iranian national, out of Gilgit soonest. Assidi is a Shia. A possible 'international incident' makes the administrator's blood run cold. Shoaib decides to take everyone else who will come up to the comparative safety of Hunza. Out of harm's way. Is he thinking of the Baltit fort?

The office *chowkidars* say 'not us'. They stay. They want to keep their jobs. No down-country rabble is going to make them run. Someone fires a small calibre rifle bullet through a window two days later. Breaks some glass. Otherwise all quiet.

A lot of people in a panic. *All vehicles commandeered to take staff to different destinations* Shoaib writes. A good idea. Vehicles are a very tempting target. Best if they are scattered and out of sight.

A surprise. Shoaib's normally unflappable assistant Rauf is *fraught with worry*. A gentle person, he has been shocked to the core by the violence. Down country there are also eight family members reliant on him. What will become of them if he is killed? He refuses *point blank* to come to Hunza with Shoaib, *all expenses paid*. Shoaib is astonished. He believes Hunza is a safe haven. Rauf thinks otherwise. Fears the worst.

Six more C 130 flights touch down on the 23rd. Rauf hitches a ride on one back down to Islamabad. Shoaib sighs, heads off to Gulmit, one less person to worry about. Writes, 'caravans of people, vehicles, women and children fleeing desperately on foot', he cannot believe his eyes, *scenes from a Vietnam war documentary on our doorstep*.

The Nagar side of the Hunza valley is Shia territory. Barriers at each village, grimfaced men. Some armed. 'I drove myself' writes Shoaib. A guard bends his head to see who is driving; 'brow clears; Ah, the GM Sahib'; barriers are lifted, *without any questions.* It was one bright spot in an *atmosphere charged with tension and acrimony.*

Two hundred or more worried Sunni Pashtun traders mill about at Soust, trucks loaded to the gunnels with Chinese goods. They know how vulnerable they are. How tempting their goods but dare not try and run the Nagar gauntlet, fear the barriers will not be raised, petition Shoaib for help. Where is the Deputy Commissioner Hunza? He cannot be found; is 'strategically absent'. Shoaib assures them they are safe at Soust, 'conveys their plight' to the administrator, who adds it to his list, promises to do 'something'. Promptly forgets. He has bigger worries than a bunch of stranded traders.

Shoaib heads back to Gilgit. Duty calls. He cannot just sit around in Hunza.

Pays a courtesy call to Syed Qasim Shah, the administrator's guest. Returns to the Chinar Inn. Is incredulous to hear of a *lashkar* column headed by an 'absconder'—from justice we assume—having razed two villages in Punyal; the raiders say they are tired. They refuse to leave until transport is provided by the administration. Killing is hard work. Chopping fruit trees down even harder.

Transport back down-country? Shoaib and Hussain Wali cannot believe it. Why not straight to Gilgit prison?

Ponders what to do next. Resolves to go straight to the president, to General Zia ul Haq just as soon as he can.

June in London, the sun shines through leafy trees, Shelley hurts, sits, writes a poem, 'melancholic mountain stained red...air drenched with death...simple mind trapped in fanaticism', folds an envelope, sends it on its way. Shoaib opens it, sheds a tear, shows it to everyone he can. More tears are shed. It is the way he is. Loved.

Shoaib is a little surprised when the president agrees to see him 'as soon as possible'.

What was said? Shoaib tells us. *I poured out...the anguish, frustration and sorrow I had been harbouring since the unfortunate events...during my life I had lived through many difficult situations...but I had never seen such fear and panic as I witnessed at Gilgit...women and children on the streets running for their lives...Shias, Sunnis, and Ismailis alike begging for transport to evacuate their families...*(it) *was like medieval times when invaders terrorized and subjugated...nothing was spared* (in the path) *of the* lashkar...*human life, houses, animals, fruit trees, everything.*

Shoaib presents the president with a list of questions. He is too choked up to speak, to ask 'why was the *lashkar* allowed to come to Gilgit; why did the administration fail to repulse it?' Says to us *I could never have imagined they would have allowed a* lashkar, *an army of thousands, to descend like that, no, I could never have imagined that, a medieval army, that is what I told the president, one of those terrible medieval armies one reads about.*

Manages to say to the president, 'there is now an acute lack of confidence in the minds of people about the ability and willingness of government to protect their lives', says to us *it must have been deliberate but I simply do not know who allowed it to happen—blocking the Karakorum Highway is the easiest thing in the world, there are so many bridges but they were allowed free passage to Chilas. It was an absolute surprise.*

Then he shook his head, *but look what is happening in Swat. How do you know how their minds work?* Whose minds does Shoaib mean? He answers, *extremists, any extremist anywhere.* Adds to the president who must have known this already, *it simply could not have been our chaps, our villagers, within the north the different sects rub along well enough; why only last November in Gilgit addresses of welcome were presented to His Highness by a Shia and a Sunni village delegate.* And so they were, five hundred villages sent their representatives, a grand affair. And now Shoaib wonders, *has all this goodwill been destroyed by outside incursions and interventions.* He means, of course, the *lashkar's* three days of bloody work. The other stuff, the angry youth groups rattling sticks at each other in the bazaar, scribbled graffiti, the hot blood, even the inadvertent murder, all of this could have been settled, the perpetrators brought to justice.

'My dear fellow, how awful' says the president, 'what can I do'.

Quite a lot as it so happens. Shoaib is prepared. The pragmatic Syed Yahya has suggested compensation will help heal the wounds. 'Done'says the president, relieved. Much easier than bringing the mullahs to book, to answer why it took the authorities so long to act.

The president took Shoaib's arm, dismissed any protests that there is absolutely no need, walked him to his car. Waved him goodbye.

Presidents can say one thing, do another. Not this time. A former commissioner, Khalid Ahmed, arrives poste haste, makes camp in a destroyed school at Jalalabad village; and sets about handing out compensation. It helps but not a lot. Memories are long in the mountains.

There are other accounts, books, newspaper articles, studies, no need to say much more. Villagers count five hundred, some say more, who fell that day,

murdered in their villages, in the fields, running, to save a family, running to a mother. They don't talk about the raping, the pillaging. The official figure is thirty, with twenty-five injured, six hundred houses burnt to the ground. Animals slaughtered, orchards destroyed have been listed by some clerk as 'large numbers'.

Up in Gilgit, money changes hands, houses are rebuilt, tree seedlings are handed out. Flags flutter in the wind over the burial mounds. No one forgives. No one forgets.

One curiosity. Few of the *lashkar's* 'warriors' were northerners and yet they knew exactly where to go. So who 'fingered' the Gilgiti Shias; who said, 'this village, this house, this family, this orchard, those animals?' Yes, after a time the other sects wore 'colours', armbands, head-scarves, but still it is hard to avoid the nasty thought. Within each rampaging mob, within each group of killers there was someone with local knowledge. How else were the attacks so selective, so targeted?

Who were these worms inside the apple?

Nobody ever said. Nobody was ever put on the spot. The whole event was quietly buried, covered up, as if it had never happened. Although for years afterwards the army, whose absence was such an aching question, patrolled in force whenever Muharram approached; ringed the town with checkpoints.

His Highness again. Come to pour princely oil on troubled waters, reassure the people. His tour a muted triumph. It could hardly be anything else. Shoaib writes, *in August, before leaving, His Highness again offered condolences for my father and then embraced me.*

Another dip in the flow of 1988, another low point, another death; private sorrow this time. Even though Shoaib had spent little of his childhood with his father, a man who lived in the huge shadow of Shoaib's maternal grandfather, in later years they had met and got on together well. He will be missed.

It is November. Writes, *the events of the previous May had put a damper on my visits to the villages, especially of the warring sects.*

A rumour. Village organisations were arming; for self-protection they said. Loan money was being used, even the unthinkable, selling land to acquire lethal weapons, *gun runners said to be having a field day* Shoaib notes. Some in the administration complain to the president, look, this is what they are doing with the money you ordered us to hand out as compensation.

Shoaib says the new administrator swiftly *pulled the rug out* from under the gun runners, freed up the market, prices plummeted. Whose idea was that? Do I detect a smile, memories of his civil service days, the long lines of applicants

when Shoaib put his pragmatic views of gun licensing into practice? Caught short, some 'runners' offer Kalashnikovs on easy credit.

The bottom falls out of the market. The traders curse. Shoaib's smile fades, gloom deepens, writes, *the gulf created between sects, between neighbours, even between relations who had lived side by side in peace for generations...was like shattered glass....difficult to put the pieces together and back in place again....and even where this had been painstakingly rejoined the ugly scars were but all too visible.* Takes a deep breath, adds *with this backdrop, I set out for the remote valleys of upper Nagar.* Is vindicated, mildly elated, writes, *it all went well, tucked away and protected, the village organisations still functioned.*

Life can go on. You cannot keep good men down. Not for long anyway.

Cheered, Shoaib writes *there was a strong resurgence....The pall of gloom that had descended in the area appeared to be dissolving....Some could even joke about the incident. And as pragmatic as ever, I came away with the feeling that it would be naïve to expect people not to worry about their own safety...and take measures* (to) *ensure security according to their own perception.*

Guns are sometimes a necessary evil Shoaib implies, and villagers are free to do what they wish. In short, he will look the other way. Says to us, *look, it was their money and after what they had experienced who could really blame them.* Not Shoaib.

In Nagar there is even a ray of sunshine. Remember the chaotic village meeting in the early years? Writes, *on my first visit to this village by helicopter a fight had broken out in which fists and stone throwing was resorted to. It was nice to see them now so disciplined and organised.*

It was also a relief to tour an unaffected area. Back to upper Chitral where even the war in Afghanistan cannot be heard, or only as a distant rumble. And the news is immensely cheering. Nearly half the district's villages are now involved. AKRSP's staff and vehicles are everywhere, busy as bees in a blossoming orchard. Three hundred and five organisations; fifteen thousand members; two hundred and thirty-seven infrastructure projects; one hundred and eleven already completed; a staggering seven hundred thousand fruit trees hand-planted by women; savings of eleven million rupees sitting snugly in Habib Bank underwrite borrowings of nearly fifteen million from the new village credit programme.

It is a brilliant result.

A frown. The villagers continue to insist their managers should be paid by AKRSP. Time they stood on their own two feet. Takes a firm line for once; one has to explain the principle and stand steadfast and totally ignore the 'howlings'.

Who pays the village manager, the production specialists, is a problem everywhere. 'Why should we', argue the villagers, 'we are poor?' Shoaib instructs his staff, *ignore the howlings*. To the villagers he tones down his views, *if you don't stand on your own two feet you will never learn to walk alone let alone run. And if you are thinking of growing bigger, better, if you are thinking of forming clusters, you will need the help of the best activist you can find, and you will have to pay him well.*

Most villagers grumble. They are not quite ready .o hear this sort of talk.

A smile. Mastuj's one hundred and fifty-five households complete a monumental irrigation canal seven miles long. The Public Works Department had put a seven million rupee price tag on the project. Writes Shoaib with glee, *accomplished by the villagers with less than rupees three hundred thousand of AKRSP assistance*.

Contractors scowl. Rack their brains, wonder how they will make a living now.

Leaves Chitral on a high note, someone has got the message. One village organisation manager at least. Stands up and says to Shoaib's amazement and delight, 'an infrastructure project was not an end in itself but only the means to the establishment of a self-sustaining organisation of villagers to meet all their needs and requirements'.

Shoaib hugged the man I am sure. Wished he could 'bottle' the message, give it to every other village manager to drink. Sighs, writes, *village organisations are like school classrooms—some students are brilliant and advance quickly; most muddle along in the middle but try hard; there are a few laggards*. With laggards, Shoaib sometimes runs out of patience. Of one village he writes, *I told them in no unclear terms unless they changed their attitudes their village organisation would never become self-reliant*.

In Gilgit life gradually normalizes. The outside world has not really grasped the true horror of the 'May massacres'. In any case, a few hundred villagers murdered in religious rioting in the mountains of Pakistan hardly warrant a major feature on the world's television networks. People are hard at work killing each other in Afghanistan and many other places. Also film crews were not on the spot. No one is really interested in yesterday's news, especially if there is no visual coverage.

Government is more than happy to let news of the killings fade.

A happier note. AKRSP's second film, 'First Harvest' is a winner wherever it is shown. It is also exactly how government wants the world to see the north. *Ambassadors are instructed to 'go all out' to promote it* writes Shoaib.

One result—the previous administrator has been put out to pasture and the new man appears in public as often as is seemly. Opens the Aliabad Channel with the traditional rite of pouring milk, ghee and flour into the flowing waters of the Khul. Meets Shoaib, smiles to the crowds. They are not all that impressed.

Shoaib is an apologist for the previous administrator. Believes he was let down. He may have been but it also seems he made a few bad calls, may have been just a little too reluctant to act, too accommodating to the demands of the *lashkar*. But then again what was really happening 'behind the scenes'; who was on the other end of his telephone? So maybe Shoaib is right when he says that the previous administrator took the fall for others.

Tariq Siddiqi sends up another batch of his civil service probationers from the academy in Lahore. Shoaib tells them, *our ambitions are simple—to improve the livelihoods and living standards of ninety-eight thousand households, a million people*. Explains the terms of partnership, how at least three quarters of the people in a village must agree to participate, agree to raise farm skill levels, accept AKRSP's improvement packages, implement a project of their own choosing that will enhance productivity, and embark on a savings programme which will underpin credit for more development. And the all important finale—*we do not talk to committees, we talk to the whole village, that way a small, inner self-interest group cannot hijack the whole thing*.

Point made, the probationers tour the villages, are impressed. Most of them simply file it all away in their 'pending' file. Who wants to be a development man?

But Shoaib is unrelenting in his enthusiasm. Once again they produce notebooks, ball point pens; 'forget self help', he says with quiet emphasis, 'forget it; send anyone who promotes such foolish notions to the salt mines'. Well, perhaps Shoaib didn't quite put it this way, but it was what he meant; continues, 'and what is the secret behind AKRSP's success?' No one puts their hand up, they wait, they know they are about to be told; they are, 'we focus not on social sector activities, health, education and the like' Shoaib says, 'not at all—and this is the most innovative thing about this programme—we focus on the productive sector, we put more food on people's plates, more money in their money-belts'.

And to wind up his homily Shoaib adds, 'think of this, the most recent budget of the entire Northern Areas is five hundred million rupees, but not one rupee of this will be spent on village organisational development. We, on the other hand plan on having nearly one hundred and fifty million rupees to spend next year (1989) and will spend most of this in the villages. And yes, we hand out a grant of about two hundred rupees for every person in a village but it is

used to build productive infrastructure, something that will result in solid gain. For every rupee we invest the people generate fifteen for themselves'.

There was polite applause I am sure, and then the probationers went back to the academy and afterwards out to a posting. Some remembered, some did not, but the seed had been planted. It might stay dormant for years but always there was a chance that sometime, somewhere it might grow.

A continuing worry.

Social Organisers are in receipt of the specialist package information Shoaib had directed each section head to write. He worries that they are 'dragging their feet'. Yes, they were out there making perhaps two, sometimes three village visits every day but still there seemed to be *no specificity to the functions they were performing*. If they didn't start working on the specialist packages he believes, *they will be left with nothing to do once an organisation has been formed*. Shoaib resolves to write yet another discussion note, do the rounds, try and energise as many Social Organisers as he can.

That is the worry; now a diversion.

Hamari village organisation had sent out search parties because one of their older members had gone missing. As they feared they found the poor fellow dead but what they did not expect to stumble on was his secret aquamarine mine. He had been steadily digging up sacks of the precious stuff for years; quietly marketing it through close-lipped trader friends. 'Well, I'll be blowed' they said, or something like it, 'the old man has been secretly digging up a fortune in aquamarine and pocketing it all'. And then they might have looked at each other while the penny dropped. How would they stop everyone else from getting their grubby hands on all this; and even more worrying, how would they keep avaricious government officials at bay?

As it always will, somehow the news quickly spread. 'Get rich fever' gripped the area *there was a bit of a gold rush* Shoaib laughed. At one time seven thousand fervid gem hunters were said to be camped out in the vicinity. Food vendors made a handy sum.

Government agencies of course wanted a piece of the action. More than a piece actually. They wanted it all. For once they failed. They were dealing with the sons of hardy mountain bandits, the scourge of caravans along the old silk route, fighters who had once held off the armies of the Raj and nearly beaten them. Officials from the Government Mining Corporation gulped and retreated, abruptly stopped by villagers manning hurriedly erected barriers. 'It's ours' they growled brandishing an odd assortment of weapons, 'buzz off, and don't think of coming back'.

The officials buzzed off. They were only salaried employees after all. It is not wise to argue with determined mountain men.

It took a little time—some official egos needed to be soothed—but eventually the villagers of Hamari won the day. The mine was theirs, 'anyone else who thinks otherwise can apply to the village organisation'.

Shoaib was shown a single lump of glistening aquamarine. It was more than the villagers' would do for most outsiders. The lump was heavier than a brick. 'Two-and-a-half kilograms', crowed the villagers, a Pathan gem dealer's first offer had been three hundred thousand rupees. They were rich and they knew it. How had the old miner kept it a secret so long? Mountain men can be good at keeping things to themselves. Obviously. Not actually in the market any more for an AKRSP grant, Shoaib offered the 'good offices' of the organisation to look for technical assistance. Does not say if the villagers thought this a good idea but if they managed the mine and sales as effectively as they had fought off government and private would-be take-over merchants, they wouldn't need anything else for quite a long time.

That is the diversion. Now some good news?

Well, most would think striking it rich with an aquamarine mine was the good news. Not Shoaib. The good news is *Thole Bala is a 'Category A' village organisation* Shoaib writes. The organisation has a healthy savings account; has decided that a plant nursery will be their project; and has taken out a loan of four hundred thousand rupees. With this they bought a tractor, a thresher and a couple of passenger jeeps and have elected a sub-committee to manage their 'machinery pool'. They have made their first repayment, sent members off for specialist training and have an associated women's organisation.

Behind Thole Bala's success is one of Shoaib's 'secret weapons'—*Akbar Hussain, a very able activist.*

Down in Islamabad, Sartaj Aziz has pushed an idea through the cabinet, approved by the new Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a brash, no-nonsense son of the Punjab who has done well for himself in business, very well. Now he turns his hand to politics. Sartaj Aziz's idea? Village organisations will be set up all over the country as a tier of local government. They will be called village development councils. The Ministry of Planning is sour; they wanted to establish 'model villages'. Sartaj Aziz dismissed the idea out of hand; rammed his ideas through instead.

Sartaj Aziz has lots of ideas, heaps of enthusiasm. Shoaib cautiously approves, writes *a revolution was being ushered in through this proposal.* Wonders if it will work. Has doubts. Akhter Hameed Khan is sure it won't, 'not

if government has its finger in the pie'. Aziz proposes to set up an autonomous board, wants Shoaib as chairman. Shoaib has previously declined an offer to head up a federal government body. He is still very chary of involvement with government and in any case, the Northern Areas demand most of his time. This flurry of activity will be short-lived. Government changes hands. Sartaj Aziz is sent to the sidelines, but it is an augury of things to come.

Islamabad, Tuesday, December 20th 1988.

Shoaib is off early to a meeting in Rawalpindi. A short trip. He is to have lunch with the Italian ambassador in Islamabad and does not want to be late. Musarrat has moved back into the house on Aga Khan Road. The family is to have their own home in Islamabad at last. Rented out for many years, Musarrat has decreed the house needs renovating. So has Falaknaz. The builder is in, warns of a possibly faulty gas heater in one of the rooms. In all the rush and bustle the warning is forgotten.

One reason Shoaib is down from Gilgit; his daughter Falaknaz has come to stay. She has her two children with her. They are loved and cherished by everyone. Jamshed, Falaknaz's husband, has been posted to Saudi Arabia. Falaknaz plans to stay on with Musarrat for at least six months while Jamshed settles in. Shoaib is delighted. Falaknaz and the children will be a wonderful tonic for Musarrat.

Today Jamshed is away in Peshawar, official tour guide to a party of Chinese. He is due to leave for Saudi Arabia in January. Life looks good.

Late morning Shoaib telephones his house. He wants to know which of the two, Musarrat or Falaknaz will accompany him to the Italian embassy. Ishaq answers. His voice is strained, tells Shoaib to come home immediately. Something has happened. Mouth dry, heart rate accelerating, as calmly as he can Shoaib asks what. Ishaq tells him 'Munchu bibi's children have been affected by gas. Begum Sahiba has taken them to the hospital'.

Oh God. Heart lurches, speeds back to Islamabad, hoping for the best, fearing the worst.

It is. Far worse than Shoaib could ever have imagined; unimaginable. Something no father, should ever have to face, no mother. Shoaib's beautiful Falaknaz is dead. So are her two children, Shoaib's cherished grandson Shan, his beloved granddaughter Pareesa. An unaccountably mundane domestic accident. Suddenly it is a different world.

Musarrat fails, falls. Shoaib remains standing but is walking wounded. Blinded with tears. A man who has seldom flinched cannot now bear to face Jamshed. When he does Jamshed's words are a sword thrust to his heart. 'Uncle,

I had left them hale and hearty in your care only a night before'. It is a mortal wound. Shoaib will never recover. Will always shoulder blame.

Friends provide support. Shoaib sees everything through a haze of grief. Many stay by his side saying little. Important men from all walks of life. One such is Pakistan's premier poet, Ahmad Faraz. He writes, and Shoaib has the entire poem inscribed on Falaknaz's tombstone. The final lines... 'my strength to fly has ended, the mind is numb and the heart beats have stopped, every sound of life has vanished'.

Is this true for Shoaib? Can he go on? Bob Shaw is one who wonders. Is Shoaib a broken man?

Shoaib is badly damaged, very, but he will mend. He can go on. He will. Going on is all that keeps him sane.

The members of the Board are equally appalled. To a man, even those who wish Shoaib gone as general manager, not one seeks to use this dreadful occasion to their advantage. They act as gentlemen should. A man, a colleague has lost a daughter, two grandchildren. They are shocked, their condolences are absolutely genuine. It could have been any one of them. No man deserves such a fate.

A stone thrown into the pond of life, the ripples quickly lap the North.

The villagers, Shoaib's people, all of them are horrified, unutterably distressed. They know all about death but this one is a thunderbolt. Strikes at the man they love and revere, the indestructible GM Sahib. What will it mean to them?

They meet, of course they meet, are distraught. They send delegations, offer heartfelt condolences, see a devastated man, sorrow quietly and wait.

Mohammad Shah, 'keeper of the keys' says yes, Shoaib Sahib recovered but he was a changed man after his daughter died, after all the killing in Gilgit. Says, *underneath he was sad all the time but there was no change in his routine, no change in his duty. He would put on one face for his work, but when he returned home, he would look at the photographs and become sad.*

The poet of the north, the activist, the marvellous old Mohammad Abdullah Malang, spoke of how after the awful personal tragedies of 1988, the man he most admired above all men, Shoaib Sahib, had said 'all the people of the Northern Areas are my children so I do not feel so sad having lost my own'. Did he really mean this? I am sure he wanted to. So did the prince for these were the words he also used.

To make an awful situation worse, Musarrat fell desperately ill. *I went out of my mind* she says, *I had no strength and all my illnesses got worse.* But eventually she recovered, so did Shoaib, Musarrat from her desperate illnesses.

and Shoaib from the depths of black despair, enough to face the world again. But neither would ever quite be the same.

When Musarrat was well enough, the prince flew them both to Switzerland, to Aiglemont, *first class* Musarrat said with a small secret smile. What happened? What was said? Was it as mysteriously spiritual as some suggest? When Shoaib returned, friends say he seemed a little more relaxed, a little relieved, as if some of his enormous burden of guilt had been removed. *There were some things His Highness said I can tell nobody*, Shoaib confided at the time to those closest to him.

But if Shoaib could not talk about it he could write, of walking into a wonderful sunlit private office, floor and tables of lapis lazuli, white sofas and chairs and through the windows, a beautiful garden 'bubbling with fountains', write *how the prince tried to console us in every way*; said Falaknaz *was definitely in heaven with her children*; said the whole of the Northern Areas was Shoaib's family; said Shoaib had brought his, the prince's own vision to life.

More than twenty years later that day in Aiglemont was still clear in Shoaib's mind, crystal clear. Sitting back in his chair in Islamabad on a December day in 2007, supping mid-morning soup of course, Shoaib had sighed; *this is what His Highness said to me when he flew both of us to Aiglemont. He took my hand and spoke of the trust his own grandfather had placed in him; how he felt what I had been entrusted with was even more important, one hundred thousand families reliant on me; how, if my daughter were alive, think what she would have wanted; how he was sure she would have wanted me to continue this work; how important it was to so many. These words were a great comfort to Musarrat, to us both.*

For this story it does not matter what else was said. Prince Karim cared and he wanted Shoaib to go on. It was enough for Shoaib.

And of course the prince was right. What would have become of AKRSP had Shoaib stepped down at that moment? He was as crucial to AKRSP as was the prince to the world's Ismailis. At the top where it counted, AKRSP was a one-man band; the prince knew all about the strengths and weaknesses of a one-man band. And if he had any doubts of Shoaib's ability to stay the course he kept them to himself. Others didn't.

Musarrat recalls meeting Bob Shaw while they were in Switzerland. Yes. I met him and he asked, 'can Shoaib go on, can he go back to Gilgit? She laughed then because she thought the question ridiculous. 'What do you think', I asked him?

Shaw asked the same question of others, Tariq Siddiqi for one. Tariq admits it was a fair question and needed to be asked. How had he answered? For once

Tariq did not parry my question with another. *I said why not, what sort of a man do you think he is?*

Sustained and touched to the core by the massive outpouring of sympathy, much of it from people he hardly knew, Shoaib went back to AKRSP, back to Gilgit. It was all he had left, or so he thought. He would work, harder than he ever had. It would save him from thinking.

Only the nights were bad. Ghosts of the past drifting through the windows of his mind.

Musarrat suffered far more than me, Shoaib said. Untrue of course, she just had more time to think, no all-absorbing job. *But I got a little better*, Musarrat's tiny voice whispering one night in London, *I had always been his conscience.* Said while she didn't want to talk about his work anymore, she could still do that much *yes, I was always his conscience, and I remained his conscience.* She also became a mystic.

And then we talked of other things.

Terra Incognita

When it comes, as come it must, the knife that cuts deepest is held by a trusted hand. Why? Well may you ask?

The four years following Falaknaz's death are Shakespearean. There are plots, deceptions and betrayals, and at the end, the people lose.

Like a great ship slowly losing way, it all happens in slow motion. For quite a long time AKRSP appears to flourish and it is business as usual. It is a deception. Soon the ship will become becalmed. It will no longer move forwards. It is all immensely sad.

So was Shoaib as the dreadful year of 1988 bled away. More than sad—he has taken fate's sudden and contemptuous sword thrusts, several of them. Severely wounded, he staggers. Remains standing. Just.

The villagers of the Northern Areas close ranks and gather in support. Sudden tragic death no stranger. This they know. Grief will pass. Life will go on. But until Shoaib's hurt is muted they will provide an anchor so he does not drift, a massive bed of support on which his spirit can rest.

They do this without question. Shoaib has given them life. They return his gift.

Memories of Falaknaz haunt Shoaib's idle waking moments. How can a man live with a ghost?

Shoaib does not want any idle time, crams every waking minute with activity, throws himself headlong into a ferociously busy work schedule, embarks on a furious round of visits. To Oxfam in London; the Overseas Development Agency to drum up a consultancy on the role of women; a dash to America and a flurry of talks and presentations at Johns Hopkins in Washington D.C.; to Princeton; to California's two major universities, Los Angeles and Berkeley; even the Congressional Aides Forum in Washington and of course, World Bank's Society for International Development.

Can he go on? Just watch him.

The learned audiences, the eager students, the political hacks, all in their turn stand and applaud, tears in their eyes if they chance to see the film 'First Harvest'. 'Enormously stimulating', they cry, 'astonishingly progressive'; the flavour of the month, this was the way development is supposed to work; never had.

Back to Pakistan and 1989.

The newly installed prime minister is curious. Shoaib is not exactly on Bhutto's 'black list', but he is not a 'favoured son' either. He cannot, however, be ignored. There are too many of the world's important people travelling to the Northern Areas. Benazir calls Shoaib in, listens to his presentation. As an individual she likes what she hears; as a politician she cannot see how Shoaib's ideas can be absorbed to re-emerge as her party's own, used to her party's advantage. So she does what every good politician does, she equivocates.

The programme is indeed revolutionary she says, the results in the north highly impressive, but is it really practical?

How, she asks, can anyone find the thousands of activists who it seems are needed to take the idea to the country; how can a way be found through the convoluted labyrinths of factionalism and dissension rife in Pakistan's rural areas? Good questions, although she neatly avoids mentioning feudalism, an issue just a little too close to home, close to Larkana. But strangely all is not lost. Although Shoaib's request for 'five people who could be trained by AKRSP and who would then take the ideas out into Pakistan' is dismissed as political grandstanding, at least Benazir smiled. It was better than the sharp rebuke, the regal snap handed out to one of her own; a man who hesitantly thought activists could indeed be found and trained overnight. Her eyes had flashed, she snapped 'don't be ridiculous'.

But wonders never cease. A call from the prime minister's secretariat.

Did Shoaib think His Highness would lend his support to the establishment of an AKRSP-type programme in Sindh, in fact in Larkana? And yes, a directive would also be sent to the Frontier government recommending the Sarhad Rural Support Programme. The Americans were keen so why not? In Sindh, Kunwar Idris was chief secretary so the idea would certainly have been supported. But someone didn't think it was such a good idea and managed to have the idea quietly shelved. Too hard? Not in the best interests of the party? Who would get the credit? Who knows?

In the Frontier Province, Sherpao's brother Aftab Ahmad is on side. He will approve Sarhad's establishment and listen favourably to Shoaib's request for the appointment of Ejaz Rahim as chief executive officer. Debts are paid, not all. Some.

And then another surprise.

Not only had Benazir written earlier to her chief ministers' in Sindh and the Frontier commending Shoaib's approach to rural development, in 1990, before her party was ousted, she authorized the conferring of a high award, the Sitara-e-Imtiaz, for Shoaib's work in creating AKRSP. Shoaib's eyes widen; Benazir is an admirer.

USAID wants to know what is happening with Sarhad so Pat Patterson invites Shoaib to dinner. They dine and discuss. Afterwards Shoaib sends a million rupees from AKRSP's account to 'tide Sarhad over', until the notoriously slow USAID bureaucracy gets its act in gear. AKF was considerably put out, mutterings in Islamabad and Geneva. They did not like this much at all, Shoaib chuckled, but I said why are you worried, there is no big deal, you will get the money back? Getting the money back was not the point. Not entirely unreasonably AKF saw its role as 'keeper of the exchequer', liked to have its hands on the money flow at all times, put all funds through its books, keep in touch, maintain control. It was one of AKF's reasons for existence. Getting the money back was the least of their concerns. Didn't Shoaib understand this, they grumbled? Why wouldn't the man conform, play the game; why wouldn't he stay in line?

The Sarhad programme was about to hit a road block.

The 'Pressler Amendment' is resurrected. Enacted in 1985 but conveniently shelved while Russian conscripts fought and died in Afghanistan, the amendment aimed to ensure that the huge amounts of aid—military and civilian—given to Pakistan by America would not be used to further Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. In October 1990 the amendment was invoked; it was all-inclusive—both economic and military sanctions were imposed. Well, when push came to shove some military equipment survived but a lot of development funding bit the dust. Overnight the Sarhad programme became a penniless orphan. As Shoaib said with a smile and a shrug, *one fine morning the Americans just walked away.*

Lesson learned. Donors are fickle; somehow rural support programmes need to be self-funding. AKF do not want to hear this.

More publicity.

This time an interview with the *Pakistan Times*, one of those wonderfully erudite articles retired officers read with their morning tea; nothing excluded, no stone left unturned, even the old nineteenth century German thinker Raiffiessen trotted out, the shortcomings of both the socialist and capitalist models for small farmers, the importance of development partnerships, evaluations by the World Bank, expansion (of AKRSP) versus replication (a network of independent organisations)—it was all there for anyone to read. An instant education over toast and tea. Most interesting, more toast please steward.

It was almost as if Shoaib sensed an attack was brewing; was preparing a defence. Perhaps in his own quietly honourable way he was.

In Gilgit the old man, Akhter Hameed Khan, is back again. He is no stranger. Ask Shoaib. He will immediately tell you without prompting how Akhter Hameed's 'twelve reports' if put together would be the 'best book on development ever'. A personal view and not by any means an easy read, the reports are however an excellent critique, a marvellous guidebook for anyone who wishes to start a rural support programme. They are packed with ideas and commentary, almost an overload of ideas—not even Shoaib acted on every one.

One reason for Akhter Hameed's visit—an attempt to bring an element of normality to Shoaib's life. Nothing like a few crusty comments to sort a man out. Akhter Hameed Khan makes them, challenges the staff, 'what's all this talk of clusters, whose idea'? Assembled senior staff suddenly sit to attention. Are they about to have their knuckles rapped by a master knuckle-rapper? Hussain Wali stands to reply. Why not Shoaib? Maybe it is because there is very little that can ruffle Hussain Wali, make him run when he has decided that walking is just fine. Maybe he thinks Shoaib needs support. Maybe he thinks straight talking is needed. So he stands and tells Akhter Hameed how some village organisations were becoming lazy, becoming reliant, believing all they had to do was to tell a Social Organiser to jump and AKRSP would simply reply 'how high?'

Villagers are cunning. Games were being played.

A question: who should pay the village activists? The villagers pleaded poverty, said why shouldn't AKRSP keep on paying activists? So did the activists. They knew villagers were notoriously tight fisted, would begrudge every penny spent on their salary and anyway, being on the AKRSP payroll was far more prestigious. *We had to think of something to break this impasse* said Hussain Wali, *so we thought of the power of many*. The cluster idea, he explained, was based on the simple theory of 'strength in numbers'. If associated village organisations could be 'clustered', if a sort of super-area village organisation could be formed, this new organisation should have the strength, the power to arrange its own input supplies, spread costs and pay activists who would have group responsibilities; more kudos.

Hussain Wali sat down. Staff held their breath while the old man thought. *Good*, he finally snapped, *a good way to deal with medieval mentalities, a good way to push out private profiteers, an even better way to start a local bank.* Everyone relaxed, Shoaib beamed, the 'old man' approved. *Funny thing about villagers* Akhter Hameed added, *they willingly pay exorbitant mark-up to traders but are reluctant to pay activists.* He shook his head.

Traders and private enterprise have their place in Akhter Hameed's world, particularly in some areas of marketing, but they have to be watched, he counsels. He believes had not Shoaib's AKRSP stepped up to the plate in the Northern Areas then the 'Punjabi system'—the 'trade lord' and the 'tractor lord'—would now be dominating the north, raking in all the profits, keeping the villagers poor. He thought the north was now on the brink of moving on to the next natural phase in the social mobilisation story—private ownership of land with services and inputs collectively managed and arranged. It was not socialism that was important but the cooperative spirit, he argued, 'make sure you all understand this'.

Everyone nodded. Not all understood. There was more. Technical officers should climb down from their high horses, should not demand obedience and discipline from villagers, should not consider themselves 'the chosen' just because they had been lucky enough to receive a good technical education. They were there to serve not to dictate. Some uneasy muttering. A few red faces, not many, just a few and a smattering of nervous laughter. Surely a veterinary doctor should be able to command some respect; be addressed by his title? But no. He or she should consider themselves the fortunate possessor of a skill, not a position in life. They should be humble.

More mutterings. Not everyone wanted to hear such talk. Then it was the turn of Social Organisers. Akhter Hameed thought they were becoming complacent, fixed, unimaginative. Not only should they nurture and teach village activists the social organisers 'trade', they needed to teach the same thing to their technical colleagues. Get off their backsides and get on with it. Phew! Who thought only the veterinarians would be taken to task, called to account? Anxious glances exchanged. How were they going to sort this one out?

And then to everyone, don't think for a minute an activist can become a 'jack of all trades'. The American Village Aid programme flopped for this very

reason. You can't expect one person to be the source of all advice, don't think an activist will be able to do everything. Get the idea out of your heads.

And while I think of it, said Akhter Hameed in full flight now, do not forget good accounting. There is no alternative, the old man lectures. Cooperatives were let down by poor accounting. Don't let this happen to you. 'And oh yes', pause for effect. Everyone sits up, straightens their backs, was this going to be the punch line? It was. 'Just look at all those savings sitting about more or less unused, benefitting the merchants of Punjab more than the people of the north. It was time to think about launching a people's bank, not a commercial bank, there were plenty of those around already and they were of no use at all to villagers. The manager of Habib Bank for one readily admitted this. No, what was needed was a village organisation bank. Something radically different.'

Had he finished? Not yet.

'Nobody was thinking at all about trees. And now that the mirs and rajahs no longer had to be obeyed, it was open season. Everyone seemed to be cutting down anything they wished, selling rights to contractors, denuding the mountains at an unsustainable rate. This is what AKRSP should be teaching—trees are not the property of individuals, they are owned by everyone.' Raises his arm, points with a finger demanding attention, thunders 'a vital village resource is being stolen by dacoits'.

And yes, trees had been a blind spot. Shoaib was from the age of British gentleman hunters, sportsmen, users of resources. Animals were fair game, so were trees. They had been put there to be used. Although Shoaib would never become an environmentalist, he would become sympathetic to environmental concerns. More so perhaps when Akhter Hameed pointed out the obvious. Trees and grass are important communal resources. Something should be done about them.

But it was never going to be easy. It is still an issue.

The old man sat back satisfied. Well, as satisfied as he ever was, counselling those around him not to worry about occasional failures, they were fighting a war, he said, and in war casualties always happen. Accept them and fight on. The end. He is finished. Lecture over. He will return to Orangi but he will keep thinking about the north.

He will not be given a lot longer to think.

Bill Spoelberch is still executive director of the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva. Bob Shaw waits in the wings. The Geneva crew has worries. Two of them. Is Shoaib still the man he was? And what about the way forward for AKRSP? Where is the plan, the blueprint, the strategic vision? Happy to sit back and let Shoaib make the running in the early years, they think of AKRSP as

a baby elephant. Can it still be managed by one man when it grows up? They should have visited the forests of Burma, Sri Lanka. One mahout, one elephant, each day taken as it comes. Shoaib's AKRSP.

Still, they cannot escape the straight-jacket of their own Western management training; and they hear the politely whispered queries from the donors, from their own people, yes, AKRSP has achieved great things, still seems to work but where is the plan for the future, the replacement hierarchy, the management structure?

Questions worm-wriggle in their minds.

Is AKRSP a 'house of cards', will it fold and flutter to the ground if an ill wind ever blows? So Spoelberch wings out from Geneva again to see for himself. It is no hardship for Bill, glad to get away from the office and the increasingly insistent pressure that 'something will just have to be done about AKRSP'. He is a wise and experienced friend and he will soon retire. He will not rock the AKRSP boat unless he has to.

Bill doesn't really think he has to.

Gilgit is a relief. Off and away he flies in the helicopter with a chap named Fairchild, a member of the World Bank's water management group. One village organisation after another, a little out of breath keeping up with the pace Shoaib now sets. It is too much for Fairchild. He folds midway on the climb to Hanuchal channel.

A photograph taken by someone else will do quite well for Fairchild.

Gultari village sits at nearly eleven thousand feet. Four days crawling in a jeep along mountain tracks, three hours in the helicopter. The track will soon be closed, the village isolated, snow bound for eight months except for those brave enough, tough enough to walk. Tears in Spoelberch's eyes again as the villagers celebrate the acceptance of their project proposals, welcome trials of high altitude wheat varieties, fruit tree nurseries. Who cares about management, about plans, when this sort of thing keeps on happening? He will have a word with Shaw.

Flying to Chitral across the Shandur pass. The annual polo tournament is in full swing. Teams from Chitral and Gilgit. Started in the 1930s by a British officer as an alternative to raiding, it is now an event on the social calendar of Pakistan's elite. He unclips a ballpoint and writes in his diary, for Shoaib cannot be idle, *Shandur looked like a medieval battle ground, tents and pavilions dotting the entire scene, colourful pendants fluttering in the breeze, horses thundering in pursuit of a ball*, not pursuing people, that is the thing.

Reflects ruefully on the return trip of the *sorry spectacle of beautiful mountain fields littered with rubbish*, plastic bags flapping in the wind for months to come like the time-tattered robes of fallen warriors. Shoaib shrugs his shoulders, writes, *this is what happens when nature comes in contact with man.*

Shoaib is honoured. He will give a feature lecture at the Civil Service Academy in Lahore. His audience are captives; they are obliged to be attentive; they are not spared. Shoaib begins at the beginning, with the Raj, with Brain's well-meaning attempts at rural reconstruction in the 1920s ; dismisses the concept of self-help as a time-wasting, dead-end diversion; shakes his head at the Americans and their Village Aid initiative where the 'baby was thrown out with the bath water', so typical of the Americans with their tremendous enthusiasms, the absolute way they deal with disillusionment; speaks of the ups and downs of his own life, touching on Comilla and Daudzai, and as deputy commissioner in Kohat; of the bright promise of the Integrated Rural Development Initiative and how it was craftily torpedoed; of the sub-continent's development 'greats', of Akhter Hameed Khan; of Sartaj Aziz'z attempts to launch village development councils; and finally of the bright light that now burns in the Northern Areas, his own AKRSP.

What of the probationers? Were they attentive, glassy eyed? No doubt they took copious notes. Tariq Siddiqi was known to spring surprises in his examination papers. But were they converted? Probably not. An interest in Shoaib's style of development would not be of much help in climbing the more lucrative or power-soaked rungs of the civil service ladder. A few would have listened and wanted to know more. The rest would have mirrored a Western audience listening to a missionary who is about to return to some disease-ridden part of darkest anywhere. 'What a marvellous chap', they will say afterwards. 'let's donate something to help him out'. And then stroll to their cars and back to the comforts of their suburban houses, their assured jobs.

Islamabad and Musarrat, still grieving, still frail. Deep breath, back into the world.

A packed appointments calendar—dinner with the Germans whose ambassador *spoke highly of AKRSP as usual*; meetings, the European Community's representative, with the British, the Canadians, and finally with worried United Nations officials. Does Shoaib have any ideas on how to reconstruct Afghanistan? He does, but Afghanistan's warlords put an aggressive spoke in UN's wheels. Development will have to wait.

It is still waiting.

At the World Bank office in Islamabad, the cheerfully pragmatic deputy Peter Nottidge listens. Can the Bank help dampen down some problems brewing

with government's technical departments? No, it can't, not officially, but Nottidge is willing to murmur a word here, a sentence there. Nottidge cut his own teeth as a technical officer in government service in Kenya and knows about such matters. This is exactly what Shoaib wanted. An unofficial murmur from on high works very well in Pakistan, and keeping a lid on government grumbles is an ongoing issue. Outside help is sometimes needed. Shoaib has taken care to keep the administration on side. It has worked. He has not been so successful with those further down the table at the commissioner's weekly planning meetings, the technical departments.

In his abrupt no-nonsense way, Hussain Wali once said, 'government was overshadowed by us', meaning AKRSP. It was. He also dismissed the excuse that government was weak on the ground and had no money. Once a senior public works engineer, he estimates government had upwards of seventeen thousand unsackable employees on its payroll and 'enough money for development if spent wisely'.

Hussain Wali takes no prisoners. Dismisses ideas of AKRSP working with government as trying to mix oil and water. Too different. Thought Shoaib eventually came round to his way of thinking too, says Shoaib 'stopped giving the departments life after the initial years'. Tells a story.

Accompanied on a trip to Gupis by government officials. A young boy stands, asks why three schemes still sit forlorn, unfinished. Sits down again. Government official stands, adopts his 'my dear fellow' attitude, says he will have to consult his files back at his office. Thinks 'that should shut him up'.

Sits down again—in his chair of course—not on the ground as Shoaib would have.

Boy jumps to his feet, points to a rock, a date painted on the side, 'read the date' he says, 'exactly one year ago. That is when you said the same thing'. The boy sits down. On the ground, not a chair.

The government officer reddens. Fumes. Pointedly ignores the boy. Damned cheek, needs a short sharp lesson. Turns to Hussain Wali and says it is an insult, AKRSP's fault, they should not encourage such behaviour. The child should be put firmly in his place. Villagers should be taught to respect their betters. Government officers do not expect to be taken to task by simple villagers. Shoaib does, so does Hussain Wali.

Oil and water.

Trouble stirs, a fetid undercurrent. There has been a letter. It has been gleefully published in many of Pakistan's newspapers. It is extremely critical of AKRSP. Alleges, amongst other things, that it is a secret Ismaili organisation

and does nothing to help anyone else, people of any other sect. The letter bears the signature of one of Chitral's former princely family members, the wonderful old gardener, Major Khushamadul Mulk.

It is a forgery, 'damned lies' fumes the old major, angry as a cornered cobra. A true gentleman, a member of Chitral's princely family, he would never stoop to such a level. Never dream of writing such a letter. The damned newspaper editors should know that, should have asked him before rushing into print. He dashes off an angry rebuttal, a furious denial. Says whoever wrote the letter should come and see him. Talk face to face like a man. Tells us of how his father, the Mir, once dealt with a group of troublesome clerics from down-country out to stir up trouble in Chitral. 'Had them escorted to the top of the Lowari pass one clear winter's day, had their shoes gently removed, the way down the pass to Dir pointed out. They did not come back'.

The British High Commissioner Sir Nicholas Barrington leaps to AKRSP's defence. He immediately writes to each of the newspapers, and to the Prime Minister, Her Excellency Benazir Bhutto of the 'scurrilous and dishonest campaign mounted by certain anonymous people in Chitral'. Sir Nicholas's message is clear. He does not beat around the bush.

But it is not so much the prime minister who needs to act, ironically it is the Ismaili hierarchy because almost certainly, we are told, the author of the envenomed letter was an Ismaili government employee based in Islamabad. Why on earth would an Ismaili author such a hateful letter? It is no secret: not all Ismailis in the north, or in the south for that matter, are Shoaib's fans. Some nurse toes they believe have been 'trodden on'. Was this one?

The storm blows over.

In the north, somewhere between the villages of Gultari and Domel, on the eastern slopes of the Deosai plain, the helicopter hovers. Across the icy wastes lope two gorgeous snow leopards. They are as rare and as beautiful as life once was for Shoaib. He watches and remembers. The helicopter tilts and whirs onwards. The snow leopards vanish. So must Shoaib.

Still the world's development glitterati flock to Gilgit. They all leave with stars in their eyes, a procession five hundred strong during the peak summer months. Some arrive on semi-official business, others admit to holidaying.

Guy Salter is one of those who holidays, choosing the lovely month of September 1991. Salter is definitely not a commoner; he holds down the job of Assistant Private Secretary to His Royal Highness, Charles, Prince of Wales. Salter and his chums are given the full treatment. This pays off. Salter's effusive thank-you letter to Shoaib finishes with an offer. Charles has just had his polo

arm rebuilt; he will be convalescing at home; home being St James Palace London. Shoaib has told Salter he will be in London on annual leave in January, visiting his own family. Salter is as good as his word. He will see if an audience can be arranged.

Charles may not be everyone's cup of tea but a murmur from the palace still counts. He is also a trained listener and reasonably well briefed. Was Shoaib based in Switzerland? He wasn't. Gilgit eh! A long way from London. Well done. Saw the film my secretary brought back, were you in it? Ah yes, wearing a hat, yes, I liked the hat. Shoaib name-drops shamelessly, mentions the Aga Khan. Charles nods, he knows Karim of course, occasionally sees him on the ski slopes, polo matches, that sort of thing. Once on track Charles asks the right questions, expresses keen interest, agrees it was bad luck the weather conspired against Diana's visit to Chitral, sticks to generalities, laughs away anything that has a hint of politics or policy, avoids issues, keeps Shoaib focused on his work in the Northern Areas, on giving Charles' own team advice on how best to support rural development, preserve the environment. Salter has obviously put in a very good word; Charles has been impressed; says so to Shoaib who of course invites Charles to visit the north.

Delighted with the afternoon Shoaib exits through an anteroom where various important people and well heeled petitioners wait their turn. Gleefully astonishes the director general of an international organisation, who blurts out 'Shoaib, I didn't expect to see you here'. It makes Shoaib's day. He is from an era when royalty counted, particularly British royalty.

There are fizzing wings on his heels all the way to outer Edgware Road; all the way back to Gilgit.

No let up in the stream of visitors— a 'name' from the prestigious Winrock Foundation out on a 'jolly' who cannot be refused; Canadian appraisal teams open-mouthed at what their money has achieved; a Dutch team overwhelmed by a happy one thousand-strong throng of villagers complete with local band are thrilled when women rush to shake their hands; and an almost nightly affair, an official dinner at the Gilgit Serena hotel, this time for Thomas Sullivan, the European Commission's man in Pakistan.

Sullivan speaks 'glowingly' of AKRSP—did any such visitor speak otherwise—but getting money out of the Commission is like extracting blood from a stone. It takes a huge amount of paperwork and an inordinate amount of time. Mir Ghazanfar thought otherwise; wondered if the European Commission might fund some health facilities. Shoaib dutifully passed the message on. He did not really need the Commission's money but their tacit support is handy. Other wallets were open, cheque books fluttering in the wind.

Money was, in fact, pouring in. Shoaib could pick and choose. The 'chosen' would each be allocated an 'empire', Baltistan to the Dutch, Chitral to the British, and Gilgit to one of the 'originals', the Canadians. Nearly twenty-three million dollars, more or less evenly divided, a little more for Gilgit than the rest. A long way from the seven hundred thousand dollar bet the prince had placed in 1982.

The smaller donors—and there were many, at times as many as twenty—could keep their chairs at the table, especially Oxfam. Remember Nick Gardner's epic journey. And the Canadians could fund women's development initiatives across the board.

All this in seven fantastic years, seven years since the first footstep, six men bundled into a jeep wondering what the future held, leaving a finger-mittened Rauf with his single, ribbonless mechanical typewriter in the shop front office in the one-street Gilgit bazaar. And then it is almost as if Shoaib suddenly forgets how to write. The prolific outpouring of 'Notes for the Record' slows to a trickle. Where there had been dozens there are now only one or two. From mid-1990 to early 1992 there are only nine; for the next ten years a miniscule three are filed.

Pakistan's new Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, appears on the scene. He will play an important role in Shoaib's future life. Despite rumours that Nawaz is corrupt and power hungry—so what else is new in politics—Shoaib's friend Sartaj Aziz is happy to serve in Nawaz's inner cabinet. If Sartaj is there it cannot be all that bad, reasons Shoaib. Sharif listens to Aziz, and blunt and impetuous as ever, decides that Shoaib's story is worth a punt. More than that. Why not bring the fellow into the fold?

Shoaib is flattered but declines. He is, however, more than happy to receive help for his newest enthusiasm, a Pakistan-wide rural support initiative, the National Rural Support Programme. Suspicions are raised in Karachi and Geneva. Shoaib, they thought, has previously agreed not to try and take AKRSP out of the north, not to expand, has been given lukewarm support to provide advice and training to those who wish to start their own modified replicas. Nothing else. Given USAID's funding promises, Shaw has been quite positive about supporting the Sarhad programme proposed for the North West Frontier Province, but a national programme is something different. Exactly what is Shoaib up to? Heads nod; tongues wag; but the question will have to wait.

Rain again in the north. Lots of it in October 1992. Creates chaos.

Villagers, many of 'Shoaib's people', die in a landslip in Charpursan. Roads are blocked, even the Karakorum Highway, Khunjerab is cut off, so are many other places, telephone lines down. The helicopter is constantly in the air, even rescuing a couple of travellers who had struggled out of China. Shoaib hears scarcely believable tales of horror. He orders his people to do what they can;

answers complaints from villagers by explaining that rural support programmes are not geared to respond to emergencies. But Shoaib for once is wrong. Fast forward thirteen long years to the 8th of October 2005.

A massive earthquake flattens towns and villages across north-western Pakistan, devastating districts of the North West Frontier Province, Azad Kashmir and Indian Kashmir. Thousands are dead, hundreds of thousands injured and traumatized. Houses, schools, hospitals, roads, farmland, all destroyed, turned into piles of rubble. It is cold. There is little food, no shelter, polluted water. Terror and uncertainty are rife

AKRSP has faded but new stars have arisen. Shoaib's ideas have spurred the formation of a network of rural support organisations. They swing rapidly into gear. In many cases they are the first to arrive. Front runners are the Sarhad people, reinvigorated by the arrival several years previously of Masood ul Mulk who had left AKRSP Chitral in disgust. Shahzada Mohiuddin in his startling glass office in Chitral, power broker, deeply entrenched in local politics, blunt as always says with a dismissive shrug, *yes, Masood made the AKRSP programme very successful in Chitral but 'they' expected him to carry their suitcases, behave like a respectful servant.*

A servant? A member of Chitral's former ruling family? Forget it. And actually, Masood's leaving was not quite as simple as that but Shahzada Mohiuddin's laconic comments will do. This is not Masood's story. As for the Karachi businessmen, guilty or not about Masood, there was no question about their attitude to Shoaib—they now wanted to be rid of him.

Now back to Masood and the earthquake.

Sarhad have people on the ground; others rush in from elsewhere in the Frontier province. Masood sends everyone he can spare, every resource he has. Working alongside the Sarhad programme is the quixotically named National Rural Support Programme, quixotic because this programme has blurred operating boundaries; at the same time it is a national body, and yet not a national body. More about this curious anomaly later. Right then it did not matter.

For Shoaib and his many men and women, his many rural support programmes, it is like old times again.

There is a job to be done and no one knows how to do it better.The rural support organisations become the heart of the relief effort, the main conduit for the massive flow of aid materials. Out in the countryside the true worth of village organisations is demonstrated time and again. Where these have been formed the relief effort takes hold immediately. People are organised. They

know what to do. Even amongst the rubble. They swing into action with an efficiency and capability that other agencies find amazing.

No need to say much more about the earthquake. The entire magnificent assistance and recovery episode is well documented elsewhere. Main point—Shoaib was wrong in 1992. By nature, rural support organisations are geared to respond to emergencies. So are village organisations. It is what they do all the time.

Back to the north and the rains of 1992. An announcement.

Rather than channelling funds through government departments, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has made one of his sudden decisions. Caught everyone by surprise. He has decided to bypass government departments and give AKRSP fifty million rupees to rehabilitate rain-wrecked irrigation systems. Is this the first step in the 'Prime Minister's grand design to entrust all grassroots development to village organisations?'

Shoaib thinks it is. Tells the villagers.

Great excitement even if it is only about irrigation channels. The smarter activists begin to muster people. Some villages have already almost completed repairs on their own initiative, others wait for instructions. Not all activists meet with Shoaib's approval. The Soust Social Organiser for one is given short shrift. Shoaib calls him an 'unimaginative nincompoop'. Strong words for Shoaib. But the fellow, Shoaib said, had sat on his backside since the rains began waiting for instructions. Social Organisers are meant to do a lot better than that.

When the dust—or in this case the mud—settles, so does the excitement. It will be many years before the 'Grand Design' Shoaib spoke of with such excitement becomes a belated reality. Ah well, good try. And have I made a good try also? Have I managed to tell you something of the sheer galvanic pace of Shoaib's life in the 1980s, the highs and the lows, the way the world came to Gilgit, the wonder of it all? There is more, of course there is more but now we must move on.

Shoaib does.

And yes, he started with a bang, no doubt about it, a bang that kept on getting louder. But did the brilliant years in the north end with a whimper? No, they didn't. Although they ended not quite as a gentleman would wish, not quite as anyone who saw Shoaib at his brilliant best would ever have imagined, not at all how the villagers of the north would have wanted, the amazing years did not end in a whimper. They just ended quietly, and with dignity.

There were also no winners, only losers. And of them all AKRSP was to lose the most. And so the tenth year, 1992 begins. It will be Shoaib's last as general manager. Like an ageing lion, patriarch of a rambunctious pride, he

seems to know it is. In March he writes a paper he calls 'Reflections'. It accompanies the ninth annual review. It is his farewell to the north.

Exactly who Shoaib had in mind, who were those he alluded to as 'connoisseurs of rural development' is best left to our imagination. Could those who were hard at work putting the finishing touches to his demise be regarded as connoisseurs? Generous to a fault, to Shoaib perhaps they were.

'Reflections' skates over the truth, ignores the ugliness of the past two years, is a valedictory piece of the nicest sort. Anyone who reads it can see Shoaib is making the best of it, being as nice as only he can to everyone, even to those who spoke or plotted against him, remembering the good times, seeing all those incredible years through rose tinted glasses, saying goodbye.

Why else write a prelude to an annual review like nothing you have ever written before, why try and make sure that those who deserve recognition are given it, why write of Hussain Wali as shining like a bright star, giving his all, of clever young Tariq Husain setting such a high standard in monitoring and evaluation; or his prize catch, AKRSP's first 'blow' for womanhood, Maliha Husain, poached from the foreign office. So many bright young people, so many—better than I ever deserved says Shoaib; older people too, Riaz and a host of dedicated technical people, of the once rebellious young Izhar, a new man after his degree from Cornell, bubbling with energy and ideas; and in the office the faithful Rauf, 'steady as a rock'. He names so many, remembers them all, tears in his eyes, Nisar and Mutabiat working away at credit and banking, Salim Jiwani keeping the books balanced, the money flowing, even newcomers such as Salim Chishti, a people manager or the late arrival, the redoubtable Shahida Jaffrey meeting and greeting the worlds elite, easily their equal; knowing it .

And then there are the regional offices, Mutahir Shah in Skardu and in Chitral, one of the 'Daudzai originals', Feroz Shah whose seat has recently been given to the quietly reserved but brilliant Masood ul Mulk. There are simply too many to mention, Khaleel Tetlay *as solid as a rock*, back again to monitoring and evaluation having been caste out by Anis Dani, and a laugh about Nur Muhammad—*can you imagine*, Shoaib asks, *a blackbelt security officer in a five star hotel becoming an outstanding social organiser?* Yes, it can be imagined. Anything was possible in Shoaib's AKRSP.

A surprise. The pair who in two short years caused so much upset in the Gilgit office, Anis Dani and his wife Najma, are mentioned. *They left their mark* Shoaib writes, perhaps the best he can do. No doubt they did, and then ever generous he adds, *they could have contributed more had they stayed on.* You can almost sense his hesitation, what else can he say? He moves on to those outside AKRSP.

His staunch friend, the old business gentleman Ramzan Merchant, the 'God bless you man', receives an accolade as do the entire Board of Directors. Now that is something. The entire Board? Heads shake in disbelief. Shoaib is certainly generous to a fault. Next is Hakim Feeresta who heads AKF's Pakistan office, a man whom Hussain Wali once described as 'more interested in pleasing Geneva than looking after AKRSP's interests'. Shoaib chooses to ignore Hussain's Wali's blunt assessment of Hakim's shortcomings.

Not forgotten also are AKF's various men-on-the-spot in Canada, America and the UK, all of whom did indeed work hard to promote AKRSP to the world. They have all earned their praise. Finally AKF Geneva, AKRSP's guardian angel, a string of names but especially Bill Spoelberch gone up a rung to executive director, always there in solid support, a Belgium gentleman to the hilt.

And what does Shoaib write of the mercurial Robert d'Arcy Shaw, once his most ardent supporter, a good friend, now a critic, his letter, the famous 'terra incognita' marked the beginning of the end for Shoaib. Shaw has also gone up a rung—previously director of special programmes, he now sits behind Spoelberch's former desk. Shaw is General Manager. Can Shoaib speak honestly of this man, once a trusted friend, once a confidante? He cannot bring himself to speak as Shaw has spoken of him; he will talk instead of Shaw as 'the brain behind the programme, someone who "literally gave his sweat and blood to make it a success"'. Well, so Shaw had; so he had.

Shaw's place has been taken by Christopher Gibbs, a direct transplant from World Bank who came, as Khaleel Tetlay so succinctly said, nicely straitjacketed by the Bank's own unique take on development. He will not last as special programmes director, just long enough to see Shoaib gone, a few alterations put in place. A fly-in, fly-out fixer, Gibbs had swallowed the notion, hook line and sinker, that AKRSP had hit the wall, needed to be rescued by professionals. He found however, that no one really wanted to be rescued and fairly soon returned to the World Bank.

As Shoaib approaches the last pages of his paper he slows, and then stops. He simply cannot write a valedictory without mentioning the people of the north. What can he say? What will ever be enough? Can he find the words? These are the people, his people whose sweat and toil brought tears to the eyes of ambassadors, caused hardened journalists to think again. But this paper is not for them. They will not read it so he does not mention names. Just says they are the heart of the programme. And of course they are.

Pause over, on he writes of the *umpteen cost-benefit studies* the many dissertations, papers, the extraordinary World Bank evaluation missions led by Donaldson, the attention of prime ministers and presidents, commissioners and

their deputies, of his old friend Ejaz Naik, the best of them all, forever loyal, a believer, a bureaucratic magician enabling the impossible, a flick of his wand and bingo, bilateral funding to a non-government agency. Then there is Tariq Siddiqi and even Humayan Khan the ambassador and his wife Munawar the serene, friends, relatives, batch mates, a passing parade of names, places, people march across the pages.

He does not forget the donors, all of them. He is full of praise, grateful. Theirs the grease that kept the wheels turning at top speed, far faster than any such wheels had ever turned before. But as you flip the pages you realise this is not a happy paper. It is tinged with hidden regrets, faint marks on the paper like dried tears. You keep turning pages expecting to come across them. You don't but you know they are there if only you had sight keen enough.

So, does Shoaib have any doubts? Is he worried? He is. He fears for AKRSP.

Says so.

Worries that His Highness, of whom he cannot speak too highly, the Board, Karachi's captains of industry and the sometimes fickle donors will lose patience and 'not give the experiment time to run its full course'.

They don't. We know that much now.

He fears, no, more than that, he actually knows in his heart his worries will come true. And they do. The 'establishment' is never entirely comfortable with a renegade no matter how successful, no matter how much the poor applaud. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Shoaib has spent the last two years vainly attempting to fend off the Board and AKF while they contrived to squeeze AKRSP into a more manageable shape, while the donors stood bemusedly watching from the sidelines.

But he cannot bring himself to write of what he knows, what he has seen, what he believes, feels. It is not what a gentleman would do. So he will not complain, not bemoan his fate.

Then there is the prince. To Shoaib His Highness rates nothing but the highest praise. Shoaib writes, *when my world was brutally shattered with the greatest tragedy of my life....His Highness helped us reassemble the broken pieces of our lives.*

For this one act His Highness can be forgiven anything.

The prince has stood apart from the ructions and rumblings, from the power plays, the various bids for supremacy over the last two years. Yes, he may have listened to the counsel of his advisers, but as always he has his own opinions. He will let things run their course. AKRSP is not his only concern and although he

may not have been able to keep Shoaib at the helm, and who knows, he may have wanted to, he will not forget the international lustre added to the Ismaili Imamat, the sovereign good, the new life given to the people of the Northern Areas, his people and their neighbours. He will not forget Shoaib's role in creating AKF's flagship organisation, the reason why London's *Economist* later dubbed him 'the Prince of development'. No, he will not forget.

The villagers also know their prince has not forgotten their GM Sahib.

Who was it, they ask, who flew with His Highness in the helicopter in 1996 at the opening of Hunza's latest tourist attraction—the wonderfully renovated Baltit Fort? It was Shoaib who sat at His Highness's side; Shoaib Sahib who stepped out of the helicopter with His Highness, the GM Sahib for whom the huge throng of villagers cheered and sang delighted to see the man they loved beside the man they revered.

They could not have been happier. But then he flew away again.

In the last pages of the paper, you suddenly understand this—Shoaib really knows the end is near. Does a man who believes he will still be there next year write of his wife, his family? No, he doesn't.

So Shoaib tells all those who will read this paper, board members, bankers, men and women in the Aga Khan Foundation's offices in Islamabad, Karachi, Geneva, his own management people, donors in their air-conditioned offices, ambassadors at their cocktail parties, tells them of Musarrat, tells them it was this tiny woman of his heart who has made the greatest sacrifices, suffered most. How even after the devastating tragedy of his daughter's death, how Musarrat would not hear of him giving up for her sake, still will not hear of it. How he knows if his daughter were alive she would be proud, she would have wanted him to continue. How she loved the area and the people. This is my family, he is saying. I am in their debt. So are you. Every last man, every last woman. Everyone.

Shoaib has not quite finished his valedictory; there is just a little more he wants to say. It is this.

Keep listening to Akhter Hameed Khan, Shoaib says. He is a national treasure, a dispeller of gloom. Writes *if you find yourself in a cul-de-sac as I have many times, he will show you a way out. He is a beacon.* But when Shoaib goes, so does his mentor. There are to be no more reports.

A final 'cry in the wilderness'. Exit strategies!

The concept may make sense to banks and donors with their fixed timelines, scheduled loan agreements, five-year budgets, political considerations, but it is

meaningless to villagers, to the concept of social mobilisation. Good God exclaim the donors, mutter the bankers, does that mean there is no end to the demand for money?

No, it doesn't. It means there is no end to the ever-changing relationship between those who provide support and those who are supported, that it is those who are supported, the villagers, rural poor, who must call the shots, make the decisions, not the money-men, not the support organisation. As village organisations evolve, as they coalesce and become bigger, better, more capable organisations, so will the nature of the support they require evolve, change.

And then Shoaib writes of rafts, an analogy that will come back to haunt him. Those damned rafts.

He writes 'you may build a raft to cross a river, but don't think of carrying it onwards' borrowing from Akhter Hameed Khan, 'if you encounter another torrent you will need a different sort of raft so look around for new materials, build one on the spot'. Shoaib says AKRSP has built many rafts, crossed many rivers, needs to think of the 'rafts' that will be needed in the future, says 'our challenge is to have the courage to discard the rafts of the past', adds a sentence many choose to ignore, the Board included, 'the solution lies not with us but with the village organisations'.

The solution in fact is the village organisations not the rafts.

A few years later a peripatetic English academic happens on an AKRSP embroiled in doubt, ready to listen to anyone. They listen to him. He is an Englishman, a latter day spin-off of the 'glorious' Raj, so of course his opinions count. He cheerfully and without apology, borrows Shoaib's analogy, labels village organisations as 'rafts' whose time is over. Isn't that what Shoaib said, he asks?

Shoaib hadn't said this. The academic is quite wrong, his use of the analogy is totally out of context, but he has his way for a time; infuriates Shoaib as no one has before or since. Perhaps even more so because his own seemingly innocuous analogy has come back to savage him. But all this, including Shoaib's uncharacteristic fury, is well in the distant future.

Right now, it is still the early months of 1992. On the verge of being ousted Shoaib has two main worries. The generation of capital through savings by village organisations has been wildly successful, so much so that no one quite knows what to do with all the money. Habib Bank does, sends most of the savings down-country to finance the borrowings of Punjabi farmers, Karachi businessmen. This is a ridiculous situation, one Akhter Hameed predicted and

Shoaib knows it—the north's poor hard-scrabble mountain villagers financing richer southern farmers, businessmen? What a joke. A bad joke.

Shoaib wants change. If he were to stay he would pull out all stops to find out just how village organisations can profitably invest their savings in their own region. He would metamorphose AKRSP's credit and banking section into some sort of supra-valley or regional 'village bank', a financial organisation capable of doing what all other banks cannot or do not do because there are far more profitable ways to use their funds—invest in the region and provide micro-loans to farmers and village organisations. Shoaib does not know how it might be done, but he knows it must be.

And then the impossible dream.

AKRSP will share all its hard earned knowledge with the world, will become a unique academy for rural development, a repository of knowledge and experience, a bright light that attracts a host of eager students to the north to learn the messages and practices of social mobilisation, to be taught by example by the villagers, to learn by osmosis.

Everything. How to mobilise the immense latent power of the poor; how to go about village-sized but nevertheless amazingly ambitious rural engineering projects, small scale electrification, village credit and banking, even agriculture and livestock, forestry, and enterprise development, and women, let us not forget women. AKRSP may not have all the answers, not yet, but it has the means to discover them. The academy will inspire the young, even the not-so-young, attract the applause of the elders, 'the scope and potential', he says, writing on the weakening wings of hope, 'is unlimited'.

One afternoon in Islamabad in December 2007, in one of the capital's ubiquitous donor aid offices, Karim Neyani, once secretary to AKRSP's board of directors, eyes no longer shining with enthusiasm, another bright young man earning a duller living as a pen-man in a donor agency, Karim Neyani held his head in his hands, *ah, what it could have been*, he shook his head in despair, *it could have been the brightest star ever*. A could-have-been champion, AKRSP became an 'also ran'. Neyani's words that day are a cry from the heart. And for Shoaib to write such an upbeat farewell paper was courageous and this is why.

While Shoaib has been reassembling his life after the disastrous year of 1988, lifting his working pace to a level few could match to ease the pain of loss, the Board of Directors and some at the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva had been thinking hard. They are spooked. AKRSP is not what they envisioned. It is too complex, too big; it is still growing far too fast. They do not really understand the organisation, they have no idea where it is going, and they cannot control it. Not while Shoaib is there.

There is also another factor. Internal politics! Some of Shoaib's moves, some of his statements are a worry. Shoaib can become a tall poppy if he wants. That is no problem. It is easy to cut down tall poppies. But there is more. AKRSP threatens to outshine AKF, to become bigger than the parent, perhaps even independent, something no one quite foresaw at the outset. The success story had been a wonderful thing while it lasted but there are those who think perhaps it is time to take AKRSP out of the international limelight for a while, to contain activities at a level that benefits the people of the north but does not put the Ismaili Imamat at risk in an increasingly risky and religiously polarized world. Were they right?

While he was still alive and as we already know, Hussain Wali did not beat around the bush. A bluntly spoken man, his quiet approach was sometimes mistaken for mildness. But Hussain Wali was a northerner; always thought of the north first, said the Board never really understood what was happening, wanted Shoaib to stop expanding at the end of the first year when there were two hundred village organisations, most of whom were in Ismaili areas, with characteristic bluntness said 'they did not want us to encourage (the formation of) any more (village organisations)'.

Equally dismissive of AKF, Hussain Wali said they would have been happy if AKRSP had remained a six-man team and had only stimulated the formation of fifty village organisations rather than three thousand. Instead they had on their hands a wildly successful, multi-million dollar development programme they really did not control or understand. There were hundreds of employees and projects, thousands of village organisations, a flood-tide of funding and important visitors. The north was humming as it never had before; Hussain Wali's heart was gladdened.

Shoaib Sultan Khan, the man they appointed to head this organisation may have become an international celebrity but the development planners in Geneva, some of the stolid business men, some of the more street-smart operators on AKRSP's Board of Directors in Karachi can see no procedures, no plans, no 'blue-prints', no management—that is, as they understand management. They have been caught up in a whirlwind sequence of events. While they are happy with the plaudits and bask in the sun of AKRSP's amazing achievements, they also worry. Just what is going on in the Northern Areas?

They are well out of their comfort zone. So are some of the donors.

Even some of AKRSP's staff are worried. Trained and conditioned in Western universities, Shoaib's AKRSP is an eye-opener. Is it a retreat to the past or is it the way of the future? Perhaps only Akhter Hameed Khan truly understands Shoaib's creation. But he will not explain. Maybe he cannot.

Shoaib is indeed weakened. The terrible events of 1988 might have felled a lesser man but doubts still threaten to overwhelm him. What if others are right and he is wrong? 'No', he argues to himself, 'how can I be wrong if so many poor villagers have been empowered?'

In Geneva, Spoelberch and Shaw do not necessarily think he is wrong either. They just want Shoaib to start to conform to management norms they understand. They have waited while Shoaib mourned, they have acted decently but now they can wait no longer. AKRSP may have to be brought into line. They, and all the others fail to understand it is not their role. It is not they who should control and shape AKRSP. It is the villagers.

As Masood ul Mulk explains in his quiet, no-nonsense way, this is an ongoing dilemma for any rural support programme. Those who fund the programme demand accountability, require things to be managed 'their way'. This he calls 'upward' accountability. It is the way most development works.

On the other hand, the principal task of rural support programmes is to respond to their clients—the villagers they aim to serve. This Masood calls 'downward' accountability. The trick is to be seen to be doing both—satisfy donors who provide funds and the various boards who control the support organisation, and at the same time remain entirely responsive to the villagers.

It is a near impossibility. One way out is for a support organisation to be self-funded via an endowment. Donors do not like endowments. They lose control. Nor do some Boards of Directors or agencies such as AKF who see themselves as benign rulers of development kingdoms, but rulers nevertheless.

When Shoaib began to speak of AKRSP being funded in the future by an endowment Bob Shaw saw red. That sort of talk is a betrayal, Shaw fumes. He, his fellow staff at the Foundation's office in Geneva, and the captains of industry in Karachi who sit on AKRSP's Board, are men at the top of the food chain. They are accustomed to command, to an organised hierarchy. Answering to the lowest denominator is not what they do. Nor will they willingly let part of their kingdom secede.

As 1989 began, there were those who thought Shoaib might be more malleable, more amenable than he had been, would now work along. The hard men amongst them thought otherwise. If they were to succeed and bring AKRSP 'back into the fold' Shoaib had to go. Shoaib had to leave Gilgit.

And what will the prince do? Well, he will let things take their course. He will not intervene.

Others will. AKF parachute in Anis Dani and his wife Najma. Said to be well aware of her own importance, Najma is nevertheless an able administrator although her people skills raise many hackles.

Recruited to replace Tariq Husain, one of Anis Dani's first actions was to take an axe to the monitoring and evaluation section. Dani believed the section's team to be substandard. Made no secret of the fact. 'I will bring my own team and do things my way' he is reported to have said. Khaleel Tetlay grew up in England, one of the few to return to Pakistan he always laughed when he said, *coming to Pakistan might be one of the stupidest moves I ever made, but at least I did not end up as a bloody London bus driver.* Dani did not have the same sense of humour so exit Khaleel who did.

Dani set out to change AKRSP; take over Shoaib's job, making no secret of the fact that he believed he was to be the next General Manager, that he was Shoaib's 'heir apparent'. He seemed to have strong links with AKF. AKRSP, Dani said, was in a mess. It had grown far beyond Shoaib's capabilities and understanding and needed to be taken in hand by a strong leader. Said to be a smart operator who had a very high regard of his own capabilities, Dani is also believed to have fed Shaw in Geneva with a series of confidential reports. They were far from flattering. Speak to almost anyone who was in Gilgit at the time and they will say this—Anis Dani sowed suspicion in Geneva, began the divide, the break between AKF and AKRSP.

And no doubt about it, Dani's stream of negative information helped undermine Shaw's confidence in Shoaib's ability to take AKRSP into the future. Almost certainly Dani's messages were one of the spurs that caused Shaw to sit down and write his infamous 'terra incognita' letter, setting out his worries, his fears— AKRSP, he now firmly believed, had entered 'unknown territory' and needed to rethink, to change its entire approach to development. The organisation had become a 'ship without a rudder'.

Up in Gilgit AKRSP staff shrugged their shoulders and said 'so what else is new?' More grumbles from Geneva. Let's get on with the real world. They did not buy the 'rudderless' argument; wasn't Shoaib Sahib still the GM? As for the rest, well, Shoaib's AKRSP had always charted 'unknown waters', there had been countless 'terra incognitas', each new area, each new village had been one. It was nothing new, nothing Shoaib did not know how to deal with, the same old jostling for power, plain and simple, the pragmatic shoulder-shrugging view of most of AKRSP's staff, most of those in the Northern Areas closest to the flame.

Could Shoaib change? Could AKRSP? Would Shoaib at last submit to the directives of the Board in Karachi, suggestions from Geneva? He had never done so in the past, had at times been brutally direct with the Board in

Karachi—take or leave it Shoaib had sometimes said. This was the big question. If Shoaib could not or would not, then there was an obvious solution. He would have to move on. One of the reasons Anis Dani had been sent in. Certainly bright, certainly an organisation man and certainly not a 'boat rocker' but one of those who firmly believed AKRSP should morph into a powerful top-down organisation, become a benign but undisputed power, one that 'knew best', one that would not be at the 'beck and call' of ignorant, uneducated village people.

Khaleel Tetlay believes that all was well between AKRSP and AKF Geneva, meaning between Shoaib and Shaw, while Shaw was a regular visitor and AKRSP a rising star in the world's development firmament. Shaw's role was no less important than was Shoaib's, but as the man behind the scenes, he certainly did not garner the same praise, the accolades, the admiration heaped on Shoaib's shoulders. Shoaib was known to every ambassador, every aid agency, his name was one of those that resonated throughout the entire development world. In the Northern Areas the GM Sahib was known and loved in almost every village. Hordes of people would gather excitedly when the helicopter flew in, running from field and house, but if it was Shaw who happened to emerge rather than Shoaib, most would drift quietly away. 'Shah Sahib', as Shaw was known to some, was given much the same respect as any one of his Highness's advisers. Only His Highness had greater drawing power than the GM Sahib.

Do you understand what I am saying? Only a saint would not have harboured some resentment, and for all his many virtues and accomplishments, Shaw was not a saint. So there it is, the Shoaib-Shaw double act was one of the major reasons for the early success of AKRSP, *They had a wonderful relationship* said Khaleel, for once not speaking as if we were on the other side of a large room. *Somehow though it soured, at least from Shaw's point of view, so much so that 'divorce' became the only option.*

What went wrong? Khaleel Tetlay believes several things did.

There we were back in 1989, said Khaleel, *doing wonderful work under wonderful leadership in wonderful surroundings. We were the best programme in the world but as almost always happens in our part of the world, some people began to think we had reached an impasse, that we needed renewal, after all most successful organisations have to go through a process of renewal every now and then. Why not us?*

One day, said Khaleel flippantly, a mannerism he uses along with cheerful bluster to conceal the seriousness of many of the things he says, *one day we all hear that a Dr Anis Dani is joining us to lead the monitoring and evaluation section and to act as deputy General Manager.*

Khaleel should have started to pack his bags right away *because what we got*, he laughed, *was a couple who arrived with the attitude of Punjabi feudal lords the 'new brooms' sent to sweep out AKRSP. They acted like 'cowboys'*, Khaleel laughed again and shook his head because it had actually been far from funny, *they saw nothing positive in AKRSP and wanted to change everything and everyone, even me.* To make things worse, as Khaleel said, *while Anis Dani was bullying everyone and tearing AKRSP apart, Shaw became General Manager in Geneva.*

Dani became Shaw's main source of information. He had a direct line to AKF's General Manager.

In notes that he left behind, Hussain Wali told of Shaw moving into Bill Spoelberch's chair and of a little known former World Bank man, Christopher Gibbs taking his place. Gibbs was apparently on some sort of secondment arrangement and was a firm believer in a planned approach to development. Khaleel Tetlay's take on Gibbs, as succinct as ever, *Bob's replacement came on secondment from the World Bank so you can guess what sort of baggage he brought with him.* Within easy reach as he unpacked was a belief in the importance of micro-management. Gibbs found a confidant and fellow-traveller in Anis Dani. They are said to have 'got on together like a house on fire'. Both apparently 'started talking up' the prince's latest enthusiasm, the establishment of a bank of some sort and of AKF Geneva and the Board in Karachi demanding the introduction of a more professional style of management for AKRSP. Dani's ideas of management included the introduction of bureaucratic procedures for everything, processes that had to be followed to secure permission for a field trip, obtain a vehicle, *every damn thing*, shouted Khaleel, *even allocating toilets by rank.*

The result of Anis Dani's management innovations?

Khaleel Tetlay again, *field visits just stopped and there was a great demand for the day-old newspapers that came by bus from Rawalpindi, there was nothing much else to do.* Khaleel was saved when Anis Dani threw him out. *I was shoved off to the Gilgit regional office where Hussain Wali was still running things in the old way, may Allah bless him* said Khaleel with sincerity, no bluster at all, *he saved my life, gave us all the freedom to work. If I have blossomed in later life it was due to Hussain Wali and the decision of Anis Dani to boot me out.*

It is hard to see how Dani could carry on in such an atmosphere. Eventually he didn't, and neither did his wife, Najma.

Shandana Khan, Humayan's very bright daughter, is far more discreet than the boisterous Khaleel although she can also have her moments. She could

however find little good to say about the Dani's. *There were people who were busily undercutting Shoaib Sahib and the organisation, and these two, Anis and Najma, were easily the noisiest. They gave the impression of being a professional jet-set sort of development couple, and they did a lot of harm*, and then she laughed a little nervously, speaking as she always did, far too fast to take legible notes. Luckily the recorder worked.

Shandana thought for a bit and then spoke of how, when it all became too much, she and Izhar Hunzai had gone to Shoaib and told him just what the pair were doing, saying as earnestly as only the young and committed can be that it would be best for everyone if Shoaib confronted the pair and had it all out in the open. She shrugged; Shoaib chose to believe no one could be that bad. *He just said*, Shandana sighed, still disappointed all these years later, *'oh stop gossiping' and that was the end of that.*

His most ardent supporters, AKRSP's 'youth brigade' would not try to intervene again, but I think he knew full well what was going on and that it was doing him a lot of damage said Shandana, just a hint of exasperation in her voice.

So why didn't Shoaib confront the troublesome two? Why didn't he have it out with them? All Shoaib will say of the pair was that they tried to do what they thought was right.

There is steel beneath Roohi's quietly spoken manner. Shoaib's eldest daughter, Roohi would not be one to cross and hope to emerge unscathed. When Najma's name was mentioned the steel hissed from its velvet sheath. *That couple* the disdain in her voice unmistakeable, *that couple, hah, my mother saw right through them, said right from the beginning they were not good for Shoaib.*

Too bad Musarrat was so out of it then.

There is a place for the Anis Dani's of this world; in Gilgit a square peg in a round hole, Anis Dani eventually found his square hole. Some years after the two had left Gilgit, Anis joined the World Bank. No doubt he settled easily into first class air travel and being feted by the various third world governments; and he is said to have also done well for the Bank. But he did not do well for the villagers of the north. The Dani's, in fact, were a water mark, a point where you can look back and say, 'yes, that was the time when things began to change, when AKRSP was dealt a fatal blow'

Fayyaz Baqir, a quietly spoken man, had he really been a firebrand left-wing political activist in his youth? Like so many of his kind, he left to study in America. Fayyaz believes Shoaib and AKRSP were seen by left-wing radicals as social fakes, presenting themselves as for the poor but in reality part of the 'Western conspiracy against the true bulwarks of socialism'. Not by Fayyaz, or

so he says, although he thinks he is one of the very few to have ever angered Shoaib. Introduced by Tariq Siddiqi shortly after Tariq Husain had left Gilgit, Fayyaz says he immediately felt at home. Not at home enough to stay though. For reasons he did not reveal, *personal reasons*, he laughed with just a hint of embarrassment, *it was a very turbulent period of my life, very emotional*. Fayyaz resigned; went back to America. Shoaib, he believes was very angry. *Shoaib would not talk to me when I left and he would not talk to me when I came back*, said Fayyaz quietly.

Unforgiving? This is a new facet. Was Shoaib really unforgiving or was it the imaginings of an overly sensitive man? *It was a quiet anger*, says Fayyaz, *but I knew he just did not want me around*. Eventually, Tariq Siddiqi acted as peacemaker. *Najma* (also) *helped calm things down*, Faiyaz said, *Najma was a good friend*. And so it seems she was.

Fayyaz talks a great deal, much of it text book social philosophy but he did make one quite interesting comment. *Most people in 'our' society* (meaning Pakistan and look-alike countries) *glorify individual power. Shoaib's work does the opposite; plays down the glory of power over others and instead focuses on giving people power over their own lives.*

And so we leave Fayyaz the social dreamer, and return to Shoaib's world, to the realities of poverty and how to overcome it, rather than the ideology of poverty and what to think of it. In Shoaib's world people have not only to dream and think, they also have to work.

Appointed AKF Geneva's General Manager, Bob Shaw was now unable to spend as much time in the field; he was also responsible for an increasingly large global network. He began to rely on others to keep informed. As we already know, even though it was baseless, some of the incoming news about AKRSP was worrying. Were both Shoaib and AKRSP running out of steam? Had Shoaib taken the organisation up a track which led to nowhere? Perhaps AKRSP now needed 'tighter' management, needed a 'blueprint', a plan for the future like any other organisation, more of a 'top down' approach. Perhaps Shoaib's tendency to 'fly by the seat of his pants' had at last become just too unsettling. And if luck had played any part in Shoaib's amazing success so far, was it about to run out?

Long after Shoaib had left, Khaleel Tetlay found himself manager of AKRSP's Baltistan sometimes troubled office when Bob Shaw made one of his now rare visits to the field. Taken to once barren land now a flourishing tree plantation, Shaw trotted out the usual question—how had it all came about?

The village organisation manager was more than proud to tell this visitor from the office of His Highness, said Khaleel, how a 'huge metal bird' dropped out of the

sky one day, of 'a man in a hat' stepping out, of how this amazing man had sat with them, encouraged them, how an irrigation channel had been built, trees planted. 'It was the man in the hat', the village manager had said, and everyone had stood and shouted agreement, roared their praise, 'the man in the hat'.

At this Khaleel speaking quietly for once, the colour of Bob's cheeks changed, he took a breath and then told me to translate this message to all the villagers who had gathered that day, 'tell them', Shaw had said, 'tell them this, it was me who gave the job to that man in the hat'. And then Shaw had stalked away, just as he had stalked out of the restaurant when Shoaib had spoken of an endowment.

No one loved him for what he had done.

So there was Shaw sitting at his new, more important desk in Geneva, fretting. Was Shoaib getting too big for his boots; was AKRSP getting too big for theirs? Was Shoaib encouraging AKRSP to develop an identity of its own, an identity that did not necessarily coincide with playing second fiddle to AKF, with being part of the AKF team. Shoaib had his own vision, his own hopes, his own expectations, and these did not necessarily coincide with those of AKF. And we must remember, AKF was not Spoelberch's or Shaw's. It was the Aga Khan's and through him the Ismaili Imamate's. AKRSP was a member of a very exclusive club. It belonged. Strangely enough, the one person who was probably most open to AKRSP becoming semi-independent was the Aga Khan.

But he held his counsel

Shaw didn't. Instead he sat down and wrote his infamous 'terra incognita' letter. In it he posed that AKRSP was entering unknown territory; that the current leadership did not seem to understand this, did not know quite where to go or how to get there, that perhaps new people, fresh blood was needed at the helm, a new approach.

Whether Shaw ever regretted writing this bombshell of a letter we will never know. Nor will we ever know why he seemed to lose his earlier good judgement, his sense of purpose, his willingness to work 'in the wings', why he was willing to squander his close friendship with Shoaib, the man he had gone to great lengths to recruit, why he seemed willing to destroy the marvellous organisation he had co-created. Shaw could not be found in 2007, long gone from his office, gone the way of AKRSP, vanished into obscurity. He deserves better than this. For all that Shaw oversaw AKRSP's demise; he also was there at the beginning, a mercurial and essential behind the scenes man. Shoaib could not have taken AKRSP to the heights without him. His name should be up there with Shoaib's.

Shoaib on the other hand, is still known, welcomed and respected in the world's 'corridors of power', loved in countless villages throughout the subcontinent, cherished.

Shaw's letter may have signalled the beginning of the end for AKRSP, but it was still far from a spent force. *Then one fine day, lo and behold* Khaleel Tetlay bellowed, *Anis and Najma are gone. We of course were saddened,* and here Khaleel let out another bellow of laughter, *now we could no longer sit about in office hours reading newspapers and we had fewer topics to discuss in the long Karakorum evenings.*

The pair did not leave empty handed. Anis became head of a trust set up with the remnants of USAID funds after the Pressler amendment came into play, while to the astonishment of Shoaib's 'youth brigade', even of Hussain Wali, Shoaib takes care of Najma. She will head up the fledgling national rural support programme in Islamabad.

There should have been no astonishment.

Najma was the sister of his best friend Tariq Siddiqi. Shoaib never ever forgot his friends—and Najma was an efficient manager. Khaleel will have none of this. It showed the big heart of SSK, he boomed, and the smallness of those two.

Of the Dani's, Shoaib was reluctant to say much at all. *You see,* he began, and then he paused, hunting in his mind for exactly the right thing to say, *you see they were encouraged by Geneva and eventually they left. They could get along with me,* and then he chuckled, *but not with the entire team, and anyway, I don't think they affected things much at all. And yes, it is true, I heard many things, but if I had believed them all we would have been in a fine pickle.* But he agreed, yes, the pair had some flaws and perhaps thought nobody else was better than they were, and then the final word, *they left I think because I would not let them do all they wanted to do.* And there we must leave the Dani's, leave Shaw to his worries, to his obscurity, move on. Shoaib had visibly relaxed. It was an episode he would rather not have happened.

So exit the Dani's. Some time later Gibbs also exits the scene, returning to the safe haven of the World Bank. In Gilgit, back to the monitoring and evaluation section bounces a joyful Khaleel, back to days where jeeps can be used without a pile of paperwork, where field work starts again, where field reports start flowing, the first income and expenditure surveys, the first village organisation surveys, *the good old times were back again* beamed Khaleel.

They were, but did not last. There was a war on. A paper war, a war of words. The good old times were as good as over.

On the 24th of November 1990, the Board of Directors had met in Karachi and with the tacit support of AKF Geneva fired the opening shot. 'As in the past' read the minuted declaration, 'the 1990 budget document fails to give a sense of where the programme is, where it is headed, whether the programme is scaling down or otherwise, and what strategy is being followed'. Shoaib shrugged this statement off; he had done it before; many times, and won. And if Shoaib could do this so could Khaleel, so could all the others who were still caught up in the magic of the north. The Board was up to its old tricks again but they could say what they liked in Karachi, it was what actually happened on the ground in the Northern Areas that mattered.

And in the north Shoaib's power and influence counted, not the Board's.

Shoaib also believed he had the support of the Aga Khan. The Board was well aware of this and so bided their time. They made their next move a year later. In November1991, in a meeting with AKRSP and the Board of Directors, His Highness said he thought it perhaps important that AKRSP be involved in creating 'an institution with a technology focus...perhaps an engineering company'. Had the prince been beguiled by the astounding success of the productive physical infrastructure programme; had he forgotten that these were achieved by mobilizing villagers; that it was their labour, their skills that had created the wondrous feats of engineering, nudged of course by Hussain Wali and his band of merry men? Could a profit oriented company afford to sit around and wait to be asked for advice? And who will pay for this advice? The villagers? But there was more. His Highness also thought AKRSP might logically morph not only into an engineering company but also a 'development finance institution' and a 'human resources development institute'.

The cat was among the pigeons. In suggesting a possible future scenario for AKRSP, could this mean His Highness also believed AKRSP needed a new direction, that Shoaib's social mobilisation initiatives had reached their 'use-by date'. Whatever the Aga Khan really intended, Shaw in Geneva and the Board in Karachi saw these proposals as a 'green light' for radical change.

They pounced.

They gave Shoaib and AKRSP two years to come up with a detailed plan that would satisfy His Highness's very general propositions. They believed they had the prince's permission to do so. And so the Strategic Development Committee was created, the Board's members said, heads nodding with a new sense of confidence, to assess the past work of AKRSP and to provide ideas for the future. No question at all, it was a direct attack by the Board and AKF Geneva. For AKRSP it was death by paper.

So began the years of floundering, a fruitless hunt for an all-encompassing plan, a plan that would be all things to all people, years when uncertainty ruled the day, a situation ripe for the plucking by all sorts of adventurers, an organisation wallowing in insecurity. And pluck it they did

Initially called the Programme Development Committee, its members were to include nominees from the Board of Directors and selected 'outside experts'. Until now, those very same 'outside' experts had flocked to Gilgit to learn, not to advise, and if the grand old man of development, Akhter Hameed Khan was not included on the list, where would outside experts be found who could do a better job than Shoaib and his staff? The more vocal of the Karachi Board members hurried to explain that 'the committee would also include people who understood the reality on the ground'. Did they mean Shoaib; his staff, or did the Board mean the villagers of the north, for if anyone understood the realities on the ground it was the villagers. But no, villagers would not be represented on the committee. They were 'beneficiaries'. The committee would decide what was best for them.

With the benefit of hindsight, the committee was a brilliant ploy.

There was every chance it would create sufficient confusion, sufficient doubt in everyone's minds to bring Shoaib down. I can see a younger, fitter Shoaib rising to the challenge; bringing into play the various 'tricks of the trade' he had seen deployed by masters of the game during his civil service days. Not this time.

Weakened by the devastating death of Falaknaz and her two children, surprised by His Highness's suggestions regarding engineering companies and financial institutions, puzzled by Shaw's apparent change of heart, and wrong-footed by the Board, Shoaib floundered. And yes, he could easily have recruited a couple of 'counter-insurgency bureaucrats', there were many itching to provide help, but he did not. Instead he decided to fight an honourable fight.

With this decision the war was as good as lost.

A Karachi Board member, one Currimbhoy, was to head the new all-powerful committee with Gibbs as Geneva's bag man. How do we know what happened next, the real inside story, the way people talked over the tea trolley in Karachi? Intelligence from an insider; one of Khaleel Tetlay's Gilgit friends. No reason not to believe what he said he heard. A staff member from Gilgit, educated in the UK like me Khaleel Tetlay huffed, he was seconded to Karachi to provide administrative support, in other words to take notes and answer telephones. Khaleel's colleague also became a private 'trojan horse' relaying inside information about what was going on in Karachi. Khaleel thrives on gossip, on insider information and makes no secret of it. He rolled his eyes, my God, he said, warming us up to be ready to hear what he was about to say, listening to the chit-chat he relayed you would never have thought AKRSP was the flagship programme of AKF. The animus that the lower

and middle level AKF staff had for us was just unimaginable. Shoaib of course chose to dismiss the ill-smelling information as malicious gossip.

Khaleel could not quite put his finger on the reason for all the malicious gossip. *Nothing specific, everything in general,* he grinned, *we had new jeeps, helicopters whenever we wanted one, better pay because we had no tenure—but try telling that to those guys in Karachi, they found fault with everything. And you know, staff at that level takes their lead from those above.* No need to go any further. Khaleel's point was this, *it seemed to me,* he said quite thoughtfully, *this us-and-them mentality was not only at Gilgit with Anis and Najma, not only at AKF Geneva, but also at AKF Karachi.*

Hussain Wali was also uneasy. He believed that part of AKRSP's weakness at the time was a growing disconnect between Shoaib's inner management group and the field. Separating out Gilgit region, creating a separate district office he believed, 'was one of Shoaib's biggest mistakes'. This effectively took the Management Group out of the field and added a layer of separation between the villagers and Shoaib's 'kitchen cabinet'.

And the Management Group never really went back.

No longer attending every dialogue, the Group were supposed instead to be the thinkers and planners; AKRSP had already begun to fall into the 'planning trap'. But how could plans be really made, the future charted without constant field contact? Good question. Shoaib was trying to work his way through this one and deal with the huge pressure of visitors when as we already know, the Board and AKF Geneva had sprung their own trap: the Strategic Development Committee.

Few staff members in Gilgit or the regional offices in Skardu and Chitral believed such a committee was needed. Instead, they believe a moment of doubt, a moment of weakness was seized upon from outside. Perhaps they had all simply become overconfident, started to believe it when their visitors told them how amazing it all was, that they were the best in the world. 'Yes', some are said to have admitted, 'yes, we began to think we knew everything'.

So began the years of 'strategic confusion' as they became known, years of uncertainty, years when AKRSP more or less stood still. Went backwards.

Masood ul Mulk is not a man given to exaggeration. He is one of those few who invariably think carefully before they speak. He had obviously thought a lot about those years. Without hesitation he agreed they were years of immense confusion, years where nobody really knew what was going to happen. Shrugged, *most of us thought AKRSP was going to be finished off.*

Masood was right. AKRSP was 'finished off', became a falling star. A once brilliant organisation, it lingered for a time on a plateau of accumulated excellence, nosed over the edge into a long shallow nose-dive to obscurity

At the end of it all, when AKRSP bottomed out the Board sat where it had always wanted to be, firmly in the driver's seat, and the programme, a gutted AKRSP, had to obey its detailed directives. There was of course a lot of paper, numerous fuzzy proposals, unclear directions. When the Board's man, Stephen Rasmussen was appointed as General Manager he admitted that 'he had no idea if the proposals would work', a company man, he said 'I accepted them as a given'.

Most were never put in place.

When the committee made its first visit to Gilgit, Masood was asked to attend. Stunned when Asif Fancy, a Karachi notable, summarized the committee's questions, Masood says they were bizarre, that all sorts of weird proposals were floated that later sank without trace. No need to list them except perhaps for one idea floated by Geneva and Karachi to 'legalise' village organisations. Shoaib and his staff were dead against this. So were the villagers, and they had learned to speak out. 'Leave us alone' they growled, surprising the committee, 'if we want to register as legal entities then we will decide this, not you'. Geneva and the Board ran for cover; backed down. What if word of the villagers' anger reached the prince? Perversely, some village organisations did in fact register, but it was their decision. As for having their savings used to finance a bank, almost every village was totally opposed, but in the long run, this was one issue where they lost and it still rankles.

The history of AKRSP has been the 'history of ideas', some good many not, but what else was there to do during the long winter evenings, Tariq Husain talking, we sat around and had long tea-drinking sessions because the generator had broken down or run out of fuel or something. No television, no movies, no cafes, no reading light, so we talked. Often we just grumbled and gossiped, but we also occasionally had quite brilliant ideas, and then he laughed, well, some of the ideas were brilliant.

The big difference in the early 1990s was that most of the ideas no longer came from the hostel hot-house or from the villages, but from outside the Northern Areas. And even more, most fell a long way short of being good. We wanted AKRSP in the mainstream, to more or less move logically on from where we were. Khaleel Tetlay's view, but they wanted 'Balkanisation' with lots of micro-institutions or companies. Hah, Khaleel roared which we found comforting. Uncharacteristically subdued, he had almost glanced over his shoulder to see if anyone else was listening as he told the story of the gossip from Karachi, but now it was the old Khaleel again, music at full volume, later we all realised it was a damned diversion, a clever one at that, to camouflage their real intent, to quietly divert AKRSP's $6 million dollar-for-dollar village organisation and donor agency fund to finance their new bank.

Down in Karachi, the Board decided not to say anything more about a bank for a while. Instead, they took the idea underground. Years later, the bank would resurface more or less ready to roll. It would take everyone in the north by surprise. Including the villagers.

But by then most were ready to be disillusioned.

One of the most debilitating aspects of the whole Strategic Development Initiative was the huge intellectual 'stop sign'. An extraordinary halt was called—stop thinking! While the committee deliberated, AKRSP was instructed not to undertake any new initiatives, stop any new thinking. New ideas were not staff's job any more; the committee was the designated brain, the 'think tank'.

How do you stop people thinking? Hussain Wali in a contemptuous mood wrote, if an organisation cannot experiment and innovate, the spirit of change is finished. However, Shaw in Geneva and the Board in Karachi now had the bit firmly between their teeth. Shoaib's way of working was 'ad hoc and disorganised' they said. To those in Gilgit, Shoaib's management style was just fine. It provided an ideal environment for innovative thinking, encouraged a stream of new ideas; kept the organisation alive. Why would anyone want to change it?

Was it all a 'miscommunication across cultures?' Masood for one thinks it was.

From the legendary support given in the early days, AKF Geneva had become a critic, an enemy. So had the Board. It seems that the Karachi businessmen, used to exercising power, used to total command, had never really settled into their supposed role as a policy guiding body, never really been able to contend with an organisation that became increasingly independent in its thinking, resented Shoaib's gentlemanly 'bare-knuckle' response to back off and leave well alone, were confused because instead of providing guidance the Board had often been given it. They saw Shoaib treating donors with kid gloves, his ultra-sensitivity towards government; they wanted more than just a polite nod.

They wanted respect and they wanted power.

Khaleel Tetlay, who might have been an actor in a juicy Punjabi melodrama, rolls his eyes and says, so the Strategic Development Committee went on and on and on, and while it did nothing happened, nothing, all initiative dried up, any thought of innovation ceased to exist, change had become a bad word, 'wait for the report, wait for the plan' was the only answer we got. These were the wasted years of AKRSP.

Karim Neyani was unequivocal. Secretary to the Board until replaced by Steve Rasmussen who took over as general manager, he still believes the strategic planning phase was a huge mistake. Spoke of the plan becoming a magnet, an obsession, a 'sort of horrible fascinated focus', a 'holy grail' that was to 'save' AKRSP, although exactly what it was to be saved from was never

really clear, something that grew in the minds of the Board into something no plan could ever be, something that in one grand, magical sweep, would make everything right again. The problem was that nothing was really wrong.

What the Strategic Development Committee was supposed to develop, the idea of a magic, do-everything blue print that was not based on the self-determining role of village people was counter to all that had made AKRSP so successful.

In more ways than one, the Strategic Development Committee marked the beginning of the end for AKRSP. It marked the time when social mobilisation was downgraded and left out in the cold in favour of other activities; when Social Organisers were quietly retired and that strange unworkable entity, the Field Management Unit was tried and failed; when AKRSP dabbled in enterprise development rather than village development; and when the Board and the new management team were beguiled by a cheerfully bluff English academic who happened to be dead set against village organisations and who came close to overseeing their demise.

Perhaps the best thing that can be said about the Karachi-based Board is that they gave of their time and energies and did their best as they saw it. And of AKF, well, when it came to 'golden handshakes' it was never mean, never nit-picking nor was it ungenerous. Shoaib made no bones about this, about AKF's generosity, everything from international travel, something Shoaib needed no encouragement to pursue, something he really loved, to his own personal emoluments. If a payment has been agreed, if a payment is due, AKF pays up, right away. And Shaw and others in Geneva may have genuinely thought Shoaib had 'run his race', and unlike the vindictive way Shoaib was treated by those in the Pakistan Civil Service who wished to see him gone, at no time was there a question of 'hanging Shoaib out to dry', of treating him really badly. In any case, the prince would not have countenanced it.

So although Shoaib will be increasingly side-lined he will also be granted a generous separation allowance, appointed as a Director of the AKRSP Board, and his views will not simply be discounted out of hand, although there will come a time when he will be mocked and harassed; mercilessly. And the financial side is not unimportant to Shoaib. He has households in both Islamabad and London to maintain, children to support, something AKF's managers are well aware of. He also is absolutely unready to be 'put out to grass'. He believes he still has much to offer the region's poor. There is also a dark side—if he does not have enough to do, does not have a hectic work schedule to keep him occupied, he just might not be able to live with himself.

Shandana Khan was one of those super-bright young people whom Shoaib ensnared with his usual combination of challenge and freedom; *I went for three*

months and stayed for four years, from 1990 to 1994. I thought it might be exciting to be there and it was. She dismisses AKF's concerns with a shrug, *yes, I knew Shoaib was having a difficult time with AKF, in fact I think we were all having a difficult time with AKF because we were just not on the same wavelength.* She shrugged again *sure, personnel management may not have been all that great because there were no detailed rules and procedures, but no one thought much about this, we were too busy.* Shandana spoke of that time with the same intense nostalgia, the shared feeling that this had been a golden period in her life, in the lives of so many around her, *we didn't need systems of control; no one kept track of our leave records, it was a sort of honour system and we worked all the time.* That was the way AKRSP was under Shoaib. You were trusted or asked to leave. The results were brilliant, of such high calibre, as Shandana says *who cared about leave records?* .

The Board and AKF set about changing all this, set about converting AKRSP from a brilliant, free running organisation, to one constrained by rules. It was the constant attempt to impose 'order and ideas' from outside which caused so much disillusionment. Shandana spoke of AKF sending in outside consultants and design teams at the behest of the Strategic Development Committee, how the entire atmosphere became disturbed, how the bright young people who had previously carried AKRSP on the wings of their own enthusiasm now felt the organisation was no longer in their hands. Shandana at her most dismissive, they sent a Dutchman who was there for a year I think. I was quite junior then but as far as we could all see all he did was to go off on a long trek and then he left. His contribution was absolutely zero. Shandana admits the Dutchman had given a presentation with graphs and lists and diagrams and a format he had brought from somewhere else, all of which made little sense to anyone.

Tariq Husain is equally dismissive. The Dutchman? Well, he was just a spy, an eavesdropper for Bob Shaw, totally inexperienced. As a management consultant he was a joke, it was certainly not the right thing of Bob to have done.

Shandana says that she and her younger colleagues were so busy and involved they never realised how serious the whole Strategic Development Committee period was. *We just used to laugh at these people, and the antics they got up to, or sometimes we would grumble at night when the power had failed again and we used to talk, but we never realised it was so serious that he* (Shoaib) *would have to leave.*

The confusing issue was the reversal of roles. Instead of seeking to find out what village people wanted, the planners in Geneva and the Board in Karachi wanted to have more control, more say, more of a role in determining future directions. They wanted a standard plan-based development approach, they did not want an organisation that was responsive to the priorities of villagers, that

would say to the evolving village organisations, 'all right, we have got this far, what next', and then talk though the possible options.

Oh yes, says Shandana smiling her quick, clever smile, we were told, 'what is your thinking, where do you see yourself in ten or fifteen years, draft your plans'. Shandana talked then of how confusing were all these sudden pressures from the top, how it muddied everyone's thinking, admitting with a rueful laugh that yes, they were all being asked to think in a way that was an absolute contradiction of everything around them. We used to work at a pace set by the villagers, she said, there were no log frames (performance indicators beloved by aid agency bureaucrats) and we felt we were in charge of AKRSP, that in some way it was ours. When the committee came we felt all that being taken away, that the reins were suddenly in someone else's hands, and this someone else was hidden.

In the ruins of the old Mughal palace at Hyderabad in India are the whispering rooms. The architects were acoustic geniuses. In some of the chambers a whisper in one corner can be clearly heard at a certain spot far across the other side of the vast vaulted room—there could be no secrets; and high on the lookout ramparts, a sharp clap or a word could be heard as if spoken by a guard at his side, by the keeper of the great gates far below. In a way, Shoaib's work has been just like that, one man alone on a mountain top clapping quietly and every villager hears.

Hah explodes Dr. Shahida at her most contemptuous, *nobody bothers to kick a dead dog but if you are somebody they will kick you all right*, explaining why a man like Shoaib could have enemies, some of them colleagues even, all so willing to indulge in destructive criticism, *jealous, that's all they are, jealous*, and she sat back glaring. I am glad she is on our side.

Critics have pointed to staff training as a weak point and Masood, always fair, always balanced, is inclined to agree that Shoaib did in fact relegate staff training to the backburner. That may be so but Shoaib had in fact sent dozens of local staff away for training, and also packed a number of mid-level staff off to the University of Guelph in Canada. However, Shoaib's firm belief was that all but local staff should come more or less fully equipped to fulfil the tasks they had been hired and paid generously to do. The training that Shoaib was passionate about was that of village people, of activists. These were AKRSP's 'permanent staff'. Everyone else was expendable.

Exit strategies were in the same category—to be determined by the village organisations and not by any outside agency. These two issues— the lack of an exit strategy and an absence of a structured staff training programme—are very easy to exploit, and exploited they were. Shoaib even came under fire from some within his organisation over staff training, while critics on the outside homed in on the absence of an exit strategy. Masood quotes Bob Shaw, for

example, as saying *when I look at AK Health* (which had been headed by Rasmussen before he moved up the ladder to AKRSP) *I can see lots of people ready to move on to management, but not in AKRSP*. And if Shaw was referring to a systematic grooming of staff for senior positions perhaps he was right, except that the Aga Khan Health organisation was entirely different to AKRSP, being charged with providing specific health services to mainly Ismaili areas.

On this one issue for once Shoaib showed signs of exasperation, how could I think of an exit strategy right from the start when I had no idea exactly what was going to happen. I knew they (donors and AKF) wanted to use this term but I mean, and here he almost spluttered, I mean it was utter nonsense. Shoaib set out to empower people, encourage them to start their own institutions, I could never tell how long this would take, exactly how and when it would happen, I simply could not put a date on that. And if villagers had no time-lines, how could Shoaib have them. But as he says, right from the start, AKF Geneva felt bound to conform to at least one or two donor-driven conventions and so AKRSP was to phase itself out after ten years. Why ten years? Shoaib has no idea except that five years, which is all that most donors will commit to, was thought to be too short for a social experiment of the sort that Shaw, Shoaib, and old Akhter Hameed Khan had in mind. Shoaib smiled then, yes, the founding fathers were really very optimistic.

Donors and the AKF, Shoaib says, *were always coming up with new terms*, such as phase out, end-point objectives, *and all that* said Shoaib flapping his hands as if warding off a swarm of annoying insects, *there is an old saying that when dogs bark it is not always at something real*. He would leave, he said, when the villagers were ready and able to create their own organisations, their own institutions, *and anyway*, he laughed, *has AKRSP exited yet*?

Twenty-five years have passed and it is still there, a shadow of its former self perhaps, but still there. So all the fuss over exit strategies, strategic plans, all the clamour and decorticating caboodle all the pressure was for nothing, except perhaps to get rid of Shoaib.

Was Shoaib ready to leave AKRSP?

Shelley said she simply could not imagine him being ready to leave, *it was his life*, tears welling in her eyes, she remembers an agonized Shoaib talking, remembers Musarrat, ill as she was saying 'let go Shoaib, let go and move on', she knew it was over, the Karachi businessmen had won. They had waited through the years when Shoaib's closeness to His Highness had kept him safe, they had gritted their teeth and accepted being politely told to mind their own business when they wanted more detail, control of the budget, control of hiring and firing, being consulted, being treated as they believed they deserved, because after all they gave freely of their time. And in a way they have a point,

let us give them that, but still it is hard to understand why they wanted Shoaib gone when he had achieved so much.

Unsurprised when he found himself a 'solitary' on the Board, phlegmatic when many turned on him, when the new general manager sat with those against him, launched a series of attacks so loaded with vitriol that Karim Neyani could not believe what he was hearing, that reduced at least one gentleman member to tears, Shoaib bore all this with stoicism. 'But what really hurt my father', said Shelley, in control of her emotions, *what really hurt him was when his friend of all those years, when Bob Shaw turned his back on Shoaib.*

Was Shoaib really weakened by Falaknaz's death? *Definitely*, Shelley gulping back more tears, *and he is still so vulnerable, he was once so robust; I can't tell you how robust, he just was*. Silence, wipe away the tears, *but he survived, somehow he survived, he is that strong.*

Sahib Nadir Khan, an unabashed supporter, says he went to Shoaib and begged him not to leave. He told Shoaib to forget the Karachi people but Shoaib said he was not leaving because he was unhappy but because he simply could not reject the prime minister's invitation to replicate AKRSP all over the country. He explained how Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif wrote to the Aga Khan, and how Shoaib somehow 'allowed' the letter 'releasing him' to be sent to the PM, and how he was to continue as a visiting consultant and a member of the AKRSP Board.

Not me, Sahib Nadir stoutly protesting, *not me, I opposed releasing him because*, he paused for effect, raised a lawyerly finger, *and I was correct, because after Shoaib no one would be able to run this AKRSP again the way he did, yes, I was totally correct, just look at it all today*. Resting his case Sahib Nadir Khan, nodding knowingly, case won, the official Sahib Nadir version. Close but not quite right, some things left unsaid as any good lawyer might. Why say them when they are no longer worth saying.

So the word went out, 'believe this story, it is what the prince wants you to believe, Shoaib Sahib has gone at the request of the prime minister, let him go and help other people the way he has helped you'. Villagers are not fools. Few believed. Even now, all these years later they look at me and hesitate, and then repeat the official version in tones and voices that tell anyone who has an ear, this is what they have been told to say, not what they really believe, villagers like Shah Gharib of Nasirabad, like the mother of Yasmin in Karimabad who cannot conceal her honesty, saying quietly, *yes, he was loved, and even though the general manager is my brother, Izhar, it was all far better under Shoaib Sahib, far better*. So saying she stood up and walked away into the chill glow of an autumn evening. Abdullah Malang is another, one of a host of voices, people who know, who grieve, who tell

of everyone bursting into tears saying when he left people no longer saw love, only money. So many, so many said this of Shoaib, 'he was a man who loved us'

But not all were forgiving. Not all accepted the official word and kept their grief private.

There were some who had growled, 'had we known Shoaib Sahib was being driven out we would have done something'. They can remain nameless but it is these men who Shoaib perhaps feared for. Mountain men of old. Men who will 'do something' to protect those they love.

One thing that dogged Shoaib all his days in AKRSP was the question—'but where is your plan'? Eventually, the question became an insistent mantra, one that the Board and AKF Geneva would not let up on; one politely noted by the later World Bank evaluation teams once the blinding gloss of the earlier missions had worn off; one sometimes murmured by donors wondering how to get what their bureaucrats at home wanted without losing a foothold in an investment that gave them more kudos than any other of their aid initiatives. But as an almost exasperated Shoaib finally said when I had asked one question too many, *there was no plan, the plan was always with the people.*

And so it was; actually so they were, hundreds of mini-plans, each one devised by a village to suit their needs as they saw them.

Was there nothing Shoaib could have done to stop the changes that gradually ate away at AKRSP after he left as general manager? After all, he was still a member of the Board. Shoaib did not hesitate, *you see*, he said very slowly and clearly, *if I had had my way I would never have given up the job as general manager, never*, and then he led us off on a word chase, talking of how when Shaw moved up the ladder he became increasingly separated from the field and how a man called Christopher Gibbs was brought in to take his place. Curiously, Shoaib cannot bring himself to name Anis Dani, merely saying that *another person* was also brought in.

Things began to change. The word of the moment was 'professionalism'.

AKRSP had to become a professional organisation, run by professionals in a professional way. *It was*, said Shoaib being about as critical and hard as he ever was, *as if whatever we had achieved over the last ten years was either by accident or had been achieved by someone else, some hidden inner group, some professionals, because the staff was not professional and our approach was not professional.* Shoaib believes they swayed Shaw and so influenced him to write his 'terra incognita' letter, persuaded Shaw that all the meaningless planning paraphernalia so loved by donors needed to be deployed, and here Shoaib had smiled grimly *all those word gadgets, all those exercises, papers to fill, you know all those things donors all love, and then they set up this committee under one of the Ismaili Board members to decide what direction AKRSP should take.*

Shoaib almost ran out of words here he was so vexed, because the committee *completely discounted all we had achieved and the vision behind its achievement.* They also discounted Akhter Hameed Khan as a cranky old man whose ideas were not only foolishly out of the mainstream, they were completely irrelevant in the world of professional thinkers. *Oh yes*, Shoaib nodding his head sadly, *they did not want anything to do with what we had achieved, what we had done, they wanted something new, something 'professional'*, and even more importantly, something that fell within the comfort zone of the committee and the donor world.

As we know, for almost two long debilitating years nothing much happened. Experts and consultants came and went, the committee deliberated and dead-ended, slowly, confidence began to erode. *Yes*, said Shandana, feet tucked under her, engulfed in the over-stuffed chair in the large rambling house in Rawalpindi, the garden an oasis of green, high stone walls and outside the dust and chaos of the streets, *the Geneva people may have been right to worry, at least a little bit. We did too.* Then Shandana smiled, *there was a bit of a panic.* Shoaib had asked everyone to write papers describing future directions. So, of course, there was panic, Shoaib was the future direction. Shandana again, *the results were fairly pathetic.* And why wouldn't they have been pathetic. What was wrong with the way things were going?

Nothing. That was the problem.

In desperation, said Shandana, Hussain Wali and young Izhar sat down one day and in fairly short order wrote a paper titled 'AKRSP in the Mainstream'. Shandana thinks the pair wrote the paper in four hours. The central idea was for AKRSP to be sustained into the future through an endowment. Shandana says she did not remember much else about the paper so perhaps it was simply a repeat of Shoaib's mantra using slightly different words.

An endowment?

Surprised faces in Geneva, mutterings in Karachi. It was not what the committee wanted, nor did Shaw in Geneva. None of them wanted an independent AKRSP, not one little bit. But it was all Shoaib and his staff would give them. It would have to do. Or something like it, said Shoaib.

We had lots of good ideas, stacks of them, Shandana smiles, *and we knew what we wanted in a very general way, but were we very good at putting these on paper, putting our case across in writing?* Smiles again, shrugs, *I don't think*

so, but we were good at complaining, good at saying 'outsiders' simply did not understand anything about the north, so I don't really blame AKF for worrying.

Masood is a little more succinct, says AKRSP simply could not compete with the language and ideas that were being thrown at it. This was not a game anyone had ever thought they would have to play. They were in the north for one reason only—to work with villagers—not to write erudite plans for outsiders.

If they were muddled about saying what they wanted, what Shandana and all the other bright young people who talked away the long winter evenings were quite clear about was what the north did not need. And what it did not need was another bank. 'We were dead set against a bank'. Not Anis Dani, of course, not Gibbs, not the consultants who came and went, not even Shoaib, who wavered. But Shandana and her ultra-bright companions believed a bank would be a poor substitute for AKRSP's wide ranging credit programme; that a bank would not send staff out on foot to remote villages, loan the tiny amounts village people needed, that a bank would not be able to serve the villagers. Only the rich would have access to credit. The same old story before AKRSP arrived on the scene.

But a bank was part of the AKF 'game plan'; it was also said to be part of the prince's dream of the future. The desk men in Geneva and the Karachi businessmen would not give it up. They understood banks.

So Karachi wanted a plan, Geneva demanded a plan, and Shoaib and the other AKRSP staff just wanted to be left alone to do what they had always done—leave it to the villagers to decide exactly what they needed and to maintain maximum flexibility to be able to answer these demands, to trust intuition rather than rely on analysis.

Masood tells a story. It happened long after Shoaib had gone. It happened because of what he had left behind, ideas that Masood still believed in. Trusting his own intuition, his own gut feeling, ignoring technical and social doomsayers, ignoring the instructions of the Board and senior management, listening to the requests and assurances of the villagers of Chitral, he had quietly gone about creating the world's most successful microhydel programme. The valleys of Chitral today sparkle with tiny clusters of light, each village nestling precariously in the giant mountains lit with electricity produced by self-maintained water-powered generators. It couldn't be done, said the experts; not only wouldn't villagers be able to look after the generators, organise the maintenance, but the expertise to help village people put such complex equipment into place was unavailable.

Sardar Ayub was an electronic engineer but he was all Masood had at the time. With a text book in one hand and confidence in the other, he began. One hundred and fifty microhydels later AKRSP's Board and senior management decided expertise was needed. They would send a trained engineer. One arrived,

a pleasant young university-trained American. He knew how to design and present projects on paper to exacting standards. He had installed one microhydel. There was a large waterfall near a village called Domel. Masood and the villagers wanted to know how much electricity could be produced.

Sardar Ayub was sent out. He spent a few hours at the site and returned. Walked into Masood's office said, the waterfall would produce a year-round thirty kilowatts.

Masood's blood runs with deeply embedded memories of managing men, managing situations. After all, his family had ruled Chitral for five hundred years; so the young, well-trained American was sent out to do exactly the same thing. Masood smiled and shook his head, saying how the young man needed 'all sorts of gadgets', spent three days carrying out detailed measurements and a day working them out before concluding the waterfall would produce 29.5 kilowatts.

Masood's point. Both men arrived at the same conclusion using different kinds of skills. Sardar Ayub's skills were a combination of experience and intuition, something you have to trust or not. The young American deployed methods and analytical skills he had learned from his years at university. You can see the workings on paper if you are trained that way. Who was? Not Masood. He just needed to trust the judgement of his technical people and they needed to do things the way the villagers understood; and fairly quickly.

Masood, smiling, point made, working where we do, the way we do and with the people we do you need a lot of the former and less of the latter. Intuitive synthesis not systematic, measurement driven analysis; a fair dollop of gestalt, or seeing the organised whole as greater than the sum of its parts and acting on it, rather than setting out measurements in a sophisticated report no layman, no villager could hope to understand; Masood believes until Bob Shaw lost his nerve, until the Board sought to take control, a fine balance was struck between the two, but once Shoaib was side-lined the balance shifted to analysis. Of great value to outsiders, donors and the Board, it did little for 'insiders', field staff and villagers.

Systematic analysis could never capture the full reality. It gave little responsibility to village people. It sought to command rather than respond. There was also no way such a system could be introduced while Shoaib was at the helm. He thrived on intuition; he believed in synchronicity—waiting for just the right moment, the right combination of events to act. Did he want independence? Did he want to take AKRSP away from AKF or did he simply seek to assure its future? Shoaib says no, he certainly did not want to take AKRSP away from anyone; he only wanted to assure the programme's future. The Board however thought he wanted to get rid of them. Shoaib had already

been a miracle maker. No doubt they believed he could do this. And if he acted as quickly as he had done in setting up AKRSP, it could happen any time.

The Board's only alternative, ease Shoaib out in a way that would not cause a riot, put someone else at the helm who would dismiss any ideas of independence, a manager, someone who would do what they wanted done, do as they were told; manage.

Shoaib, voice full of lost opportunities, of deep regret, and you know, it was 1992 when the letter came, exactly ten years after we started AKRSP, when we were full of hope and promise. And then suddenly, there we were on an entirely different wavelength, Geneva and myself, meaning Bob Shaw's change of heart, for ten years we had been on the same wavelength and so we could keep Karachi under control.

A slate wiped clean. In 2005, long after the eclipse of AKRSP as a world-leading programme, the Aga Khan Foundation received the Award for the most Innovative Development Project from the Global Development Network. Shoaib's name was not mentioned. And again in 2005, the role of Masood and engineers such as Sardar Ayub was entirely overlooked when Chitral's outstanding and hugely successful microhydel programme, one that AKRSP's Board and management had initially directed Masood should drop, was recognized by the prestigious Ashenden Award. Instead, a former microcredit officer, an obedient programme manager, was sent. He had never rocked the boat, had 'toed the line'.

Shoaib must wonder sometimes whether he could have played the game a little differently.

August 1992 and Shoaib is as busy as ever; ragged around the edges, pressure from Geneva, sniping from Karachi. The situation is not good. The faithful Rauf is also busy, snowed under with paper, more every day. Shoaib needs some trivial information urgently, yesterday. Rauf drops everything to hunt it out. A fax scrolls out of the machine. Rauf adds it to the pile of things to do.

An hour later the telephone rings. Rauf answers it.

Call for Shoaib. From Islamabad. Rauf flicks a switch, puts his phone down. In Shoaib's office an excited friend warbles down the line, 'had Shoaib heard the news? No, well he had just won the Magsaysay award'. Rauf still does not know. Shoaib wanders out, asks if there is a fax. Rauf retrieves it from his pile and hands it to Shoaib. Rauf says *Shoaib Sahib read it and burst out laughing*, turned to Hussain Wali and some others who had come to see what Shoaib was laughing at, and says *everyone in Islamabad seems to know I have won the Magsaysay award, it was on CNN today*. The fax Rauf had put to one side was from the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation in Manila.

Rauf smiled his shy smile, said *Shoaib Sahib kept on laughing and told everyone, 'look what a hard working secretary I have, but the poor fellow has just deprived himself of a very good cash award. I would have given him one if he had been first with the news'*. The things people remember.

There was more drama. Shoaib sent a reply, says it was a telex, Rauf says a fax, he is most likely right. A week later a polite but anxious call from the Philippines ambassador in Islamabad; had a reply been sent? God forbid if it hadn't. What then? Shoaib profuse in his assurances, of course a gracious acceptance had been sent immediately. It must have gone astray. *I don't know how the first telex actually got to Gilgit*, he laughed, *but I do know one did not go back which was more normal.*

Had the award been a surprise? Shoaib's answer is unexpected, but as always, painfully honest. The room settles into silence while he thinks. He wants to be absolutely accurate. Then he speaks. Some years before he remembers 'someone' sending him a form concerning the Magsaysay Award which he 'duly filled out and promptly forgot about'. In the meantime, the World Bank's evaluation team had put his name forward for the highly prestigious King Leopold Award. Was this the award Shoaib was hoping to receive? Shoaib smiled and shrugged his shoulders. It hardly matters now.

What does matter is how the people remember him, not the world's leaders, the panels of earnest selectors. Think of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize. Shoaib was a nominee, so were some other very deserving candidates, some who put their lives on the line. Did any receive a mention? No. So missing out on King Leopold's prize should not have been a surprise?

A senior Ismaili, caretaker Minister of Education in 2007, former Chancellor of the Aga Khan University in Karachi, readily put aside half-an-hour of his packed schedule. An unabashed admirer who described Shoaib as a very unusual character, a highly ethical man with remarkable leadership qualities and an ability to relate as easily to poor people as with diplomats, senior officials and leaders in the international world. There was more, much more, the minister spoke well and easily—commitment, quality, integrity, all right, let the tape run, we had heard it all before, variations on a theme until, well, I waited until I re-ran the interview and there it was, *and of course*, said the caretaker minister, *Shoaib has a huge ego, but I will not talk about that too much, it just goes with the territory.*

An ego? Shoaib? Well, this is a new one.

But why should I be surprised. We all have one. Shoaib did too, a part of his mind that any dictionary tells us 'reacts to reality and has a sense of individuality'.

There is also the matter of self esteem, a lack of which is a huge problem. Yes, Shoaib had all these, had an acute sense of self, of his conscious personality, an awareness of social standards, and he always seemed supremely self-assured, or at least that was how the outside world saw him—that was the image Shoaib projected.

Did I, Shoaib laughed, *did I really?* Yes, no doubt about it, and why not? But egotistic? Never.

In 2006, Shoaib received the nation's highest award. He gave it away to an activist in Haripur, *a lady called Huma*, laughing in delight at the memory, *the scroll and the silver trophy and all, they were all so happy, and they deserved it far more than me.* It is what matters to Shoaib, that the people are happy.

Shoaib again, flaps his hand, says forget the King Leopold Award, says of course he was delighted and happy to receive the Magsaysay, a bright spot on a darkening horizon, more so that he was following in his mentor's footsteps. Akhter Hameed Khan had been a Magsaysay recipient in 1963 *it was wonderful to be honoured as he had, to follow in his footsteps in this and many other awards.*

Ramon Magsaysay had been a famous president of the Philippines. The award had been conceived in 1958 to honour 'greatness of spirit shown in service to the people' and embraced East, Southeast and South Asia, or any person living in Asia without regard to race, gender, or religion. Serving heads of state and heads of government and their wives are not eligible until they step down. Magsaysay recipients are a passing parade of Asia's great humanitarians, community leaders, intellectuals and artists. A hallmark of the prize is that those awarded may also be individuals who have quietly helped others, serving selflessly and without expectation of public recognition.

In late August of 1992, Shoaib flew to the Philippines. Nearly two thousand guests and dignitaries assembled in the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. It was a 'very formal affair'. Musarrat was not one of them. She was still too ill to travel. But she was happy, said that in her mind's eye she imagined the glittering throng, that Shoaib deserved it all; for her this was enough.

Nawaz Sharif is not a happy man.

One of his countrymen has just received a major international award and he did not know anything about it. He has a very short temper and he is very displeased. No two ways about it. Is he the prime minister or is he not, he demands? Stung, his advisors swing into action.

A swift telephone call to Gilgit. The prime minister's secretary on the line. 'the prime minister is not happy', one way of putting it, 'asks if you will call on him at his house'. Shoaib is flabbergasted, 'just like that', he asks,' no official invitation, just turn up at his house?' Super smooth and eager to pour oil on troubled waters, his own in this case, the secretary assures Shoaib, 'absolutely, and do come, just as soon as you can', throws in a please for good measure.

It is an invitation Shoaib cannot refuse. He flies down the very next day.

While waiting to see Nawaz, a foreign service officer posted as an additional secretary and Shoaib's former probationer Reyaz Khokar strolled in. It was not going to be a personal chit-chat, Shoaib realised, a 'well done' from the prime minister, something was up. It was. Nawaz wanted to know how to take AKRSP's ideas country-wide. Did Shoaib have any ideas, the two asked? Why not write a quick summary? A computer terminal was quickly activated. No typist, Shoaib pecked out a one page summary for the prime minister.

A minion murmurs. The prime minister is now free. The trio enter the inner sanctum. Nawaz bustles a welcome, smiles on the fabled man from the north. He has heard about Shoaib from Sartaj Aziz. Nawaz has shortcomings. So does anyone who gets to the top of the political ladder in Pakistan. But he seems to genuinely want to do something for the rural poor. Perhaps because his own father was a villager once. Nawaz is also quick on the draw. Shoaib, he has decided, is just the man for the job. What job? Shoaib will lead a new national organisation. It will be to Pakistan what AKRSP has been to the Northern Areas.

'Whoa' says Shoaib. 'I can certainly help but I already have a job'. 'We will talk about that later', says Nawaz, who wants to hear how a national rural support programme can be up and running in very short order. Shoaib hands him the paper. It happens to be just what Nawaz wanted. It talks about money, something Nawaz understands very well. To achieve the impossible, Shoaib has spent one billion rupees in Gilgit in ten years, suggests ten billion would do to get things rolling nationally.

Nawaz doesn't even blink. Picks up the telephone and calls Sartaj Aziz, his finance minister. Aziz is there in ten minutes, Nawaz reads him Shoaib's summary, asks, can it be done? Sartaj says, of course, no problem. Good, says Nawaz, why doesn't the finance ministry start the ball rolling? Why not, agrees Sartaj, how about one billion straight away, enough for eight districts for a start, and the rest as you expand into the other ninety or so districts?

Shoaib admits to being shell-shocked.

Ten days later Shoaib's old friend the finance minister telephones again. Nawaz Sharif has summoned every one of his chief ministers and additional secretaries to a meeting and would like Shoaib to attend.

When Shoaib enters the meeting room, about a hundred important heads turn. The prime minister sits at the head of an extended circle of tables. Shoaib pauses. He is not overawed, just uncertain. There appear to be no chairs

available. Where will he sit? Nawaz loves grandstanding gestures, makes one, stands and waves Shoaib to his own chair. Shoaib, of course, demurs, he couldn't possibly ask the prime minister to move, that sort of thing.

Nawaz smiles, gestures again, come, he says, sit in my seat, it is you that everyone wants to hear. He can do this, Nawaz knows he doesn't have to sit at the head of the table to show he is boss, insists Shoaib sit, make a presentation. It became a standing joke as perhaps Nawaz intended. For some years after the meeting those there would laugh when they met Shoaib and say look, there is the man who took the prime minister's chair. Shoaib still finds this very funny.

Shoaib made his presentation, Nawaz got his cleverly stage-managed approval from the Inter-provincial Coordination Committee, and Shoaib's ten billion rupees were extracted from the treasury. Sartaj Aziz had the last laugh—he managed to startle Shoaib—he will make the first cheque out in Shoaib's name.

'For goodness sake, don't', Shoaib cries, 'don't make out a cheque for half-a-billion rupees to me, the prime minister has already approved a name for the new institution, make it out to them'.

Was Sartaj making gentle fun of his friend? Would he really have sent him a cheque for half a billion rupees? Possibly not, but it gave everyone a good laugh. As good as his word, within a few days, Sartaj sent a first of five hundred million rupees. To Shoaib's relief the cheque was made out to the National Rural Support Programme.

And that was the beginning of it all, said Shoaib.

It was also almost the end. Three months later, when the second instalment was due, the political scene changed dramatically. Nawaz was suddenly out and Benazir was in and her party's people wanted the money back. Not only did they seek to undo some of the things Nawaz had done, they found it impossible to believe that much of the five hundred million rupees had not become stuck to someone's sticky fingers.

But not only was the money still intact, Shoaib and Akhter Hameed Khan had followed in AKF's clever footsteps, ensuring Sartaj Aziz's cheque was locked away in an untouchable endowment, and had set up the new rural support organisation as a joint-stock company with an independent and honourable Board of Directors. Stalemate. How this had been done, how Shoaib and his mentor had stood firm in the face of a furious onslaught from Benazir's people, how they had managed to stiffen the spines of wavering board members, how the endowment stood and went on to underpin the future of the organisation is another story. In time we will get to that. Right now what matters is that Nawaz Sharif's intervention had inadvertently given Shoaib's opponents another lever.

Shoaib was needed in Islamabad, they said, his time and his worth to the nation were simply too valuable to waste in Gilgit.

By 1992, such was the disarray caused by the imposition of the strategic development committee, by those 'flown in' to provide 'new directions', that for those who wished to see the end of Shoaib, all that was needed was some pretext that the prince would accept. It came in the form of the letter from Nawaz Sharif, a letter to His Highness asking him to release Shoaib so Nawaz could appoint him to head up his newest enthusiasm, the proposed National Rural Support Programme. Nawaz would make it happen.

Some suggest the prince must have been in a bit of a pickle.

He most certainly would have known all about the infighting of the last couple of years, and although he no doubt received fairly jaundiced reports from his AKF Geneva office and from a number of influential Ismailis in Karachi and the Northern Areas whose noses had been out of joint for some years, he would also have been privy to the massive groundswell of support for Shoaib's AKRSP that still dominated the Northern Areas. He may also have been keen to have some of his pet ideas advanced, ideas that he knew did not entirely enthuse Shoaib. A quandary—he did not want to lose Shoaib but he did not want to alienate important Ismaili elements or entirely disregard the advice of his own development advisers at AKF Geneva.

Those in Geneva and Karachi who sought Shoaib's ouster knew that while he sat in Gilgit he was more or less untouchable. The first step was to winkle Shoaib out of his mountain 'stronghold'. They lobbied hard, eventually persuading the prince to choose a compromise solution. Shoaib's responsibilities could be adjusted to allow him to devote some of his time to provide advice to Nawaz's new national support programme. And so in a move that signalled the beginning of the end for Shoaib, His Highness approved Shoaib's office being transferred to Islamabad. Shoaib's new status? Senior Adviser to the Aga Khan Foundation and Development Director to AKRSP.

Victory smiles in Geneva and Karachi. They know they have won. Shoaib no longer has a real job; he is a king without a kingdom.

Deep breath, Shoaib sighs, *yes, all those people thought my moving to Islamabad was a very good idea.* Pause, *well, they obviously wanted to do their own thing and they thought as long as I remained there they might not be able to do what they wanted to do.* Without the prince's support Shoaib knew his days were numbered. What can he do except mount a rear-guard action and hope that somehow this might do the trick? So he installs a very reluctant Hussain Wali as general manager, *someone who was completely steeped in what we had been doing*, Shoaib's man on the spot. Shoaib still had enough power and influence to do this.

But it was very definitely a temporary rear-guard action.

The old man, AKRSP's conscience, Akhter Hameed Khan, was upset, heartbroken; Shoaib speaks as if he really knows, yes, heartbroken. No beating around the bush for Akhter Hameed Khan, he tells Shaw 'you dismissed me'. Shoaib laughs at his mentor's social audacity. But Akhter Hameed was upset not so much at Shoaib being pushed aside but because a marvellous opportunity was about to be squandered. He believed the people of the north were on the verge of being ready to take the reins, to determine their own development pathway, the only real way development would ever succeed.

Was Shoaib also heartbroken? Yes, he was. No, he wasn't. He cannot make up his mind. For once at a loss to say what he really felt, he had to search for words, found some that might fit, laughed, said *well, you know, God works in strange ways*, suddenly confident again, *I mean suddenly government just poured all this money into the National Rural Support Programme, half a billion rupees, just like that.*

With the new rural support programme as an example, Shoaib began pushing for the same status for AKRSP. Did Shoaib know what he was doing, what might happen? He says he did, which is an extraordinary admission.

Every Board meeting I would make an impassioned appeal to them, look, I would say, let's make AKRSP independent right now, let's ask the donors for funds, let's do what Akhter Hameed and I have done for the national rural support programme, let's make AKRSP autonomous. The Karachi businessmen, Shaw's AKF representatives, even those Ismaili leaders who had once supported Shoaib, all of them must have been appalled. They were being asked to drink from a poisoned chalice. Shoaib was either the traitor, the hidden subversive some said he had always been, or for the more charitable, the poor chap had simply lost his senses, his judgement, and yes, damn it, his loyalty.

There was just no way the Karachi Board or AKF Geneva would let AKRSP go. Apart from anything else the prince's name flew at the masthead. And no one was about to give away the prince or his name.

One night in Geneva, when Bob Shaw had taken Shoaib to dinner, Shoaib says he said to Shaw, *look, think of the new national rural support programme I am involved with, think about it, we have just been given half a billion rupees so I've now got a Board of Directors completely independent of government and we do not have to ask anyone for money.* Shoaib in full flight, dreaming of an AKRSP free of all interference, free to go ahead and deal with the villagers, says to Shaw *why don't we do it? Let's ask the donors for fifteen million dollars for an endowment, let's set AKRSP free.*

Shaw must have been totally floored. More than that, he boiled with anger, 'you are stabbing us in the back' he spat, and walked out of the restaurant leaving Shoaib sitting at the table.

Was Shoaib totally surprised? Had he reached the point of no return, did not really know what else he could do or say? To me he explains how Shaw had been adamant about including the notion of phase-out when AKRSP was first established, and of course Shaw would. Exit strategies or phase-out plans were an ineluctable part of Western development theory. But what if it were not a Western agency undertaking development, what then? Was there then a need to think of pulling out and going home? I wonder though if Shoaib said this to Shaw, said 'hey, Bob, it was your idea, your insistence that the notion of 'phase out' was embedded when AKRSP was first set up and look, I am handing you a way this can be done, a way AKRSP can be handed over to the villagers of the north, be put in the hands of those professionals who want to keep it going in whatever direction it takes, isn't that the end point of all we have been doing?'

No, it wasn't. It was not the point. Not the point at all. The point was power; the point was ownership.

Paving the way. Step back in time. Two incidents.

First incident. In 1989, the chairman of Punyal's Ismaili Council enters Shoaib's office. A couple of cronies accompany him, one a member of the district council. They sit down and after the first sips of tea were taken, and a bit of feet shuffling, reveal why they have come. The local Social Organiser should be promoted, they announce, he should receive a bigger salary. Hunza people get all the plum posts they say, they are your favourites, nobody from Punyal gets anything; you have to do it. And they sit back, waiting for Shoaib to agree.

Didn't he always do what villagers wanted? Not this time. Shoaib would always listen to reason but he would not be bullied. He replies politely that he promotes people on the basis of seniority and performance. When the time is right, the Punyal man's turn will come.

Lips purse; heads are shaken; the Punyal delegation sit tight. They know he does not eject village delegations. Instead, Shoaib stands, says they are welcome to stay as long as they like, more tea will arrive but he is busy and must go. He chuckles at the memory, says they stayed for a while and then left.

Outfoxed? Not quite. A week later, Shoaib is updating the visiting Canadian ambassador. Noise from outside distracts Shoaib's presentation. Someone slides in, casts a worried look at the ambassador; says there is a demonstration outside. There is. A small group carrying placards demanding they talk to the ambassador. Shoaib tells the story to his guest, murmurs there could be trouble, he could arrange a quiet

exit; what does the ambassador want to do? Better than dealing with dispatches from Toronto, the ambassador is delighted to speak with the protestors, show the world what Canadians are made of.

The placards accuse AKRSP of wasting money, of Shoaib playing favourites, of AKRSP doing nothing.

He was very good, says Shoaib. He told them the Canadians have sent many officials to look at what AKRSP is doing. The reports say the money is being well and fairly spent; the benefits to the villagers of the north are immense, that there is no favouritism at all.

Wind out of sails. *And that was it*, laughed Shoaib, *they just packed up their placards and went away*. But they did not forget and they had allies in Karachi. They knew they would not have any influence while Shoaib stayed in Gilgit.

Second incident. Staff, this time.

It is 1991, and Shoaib is under attack. Some feel they have been unfairly left out. Shandana's view—Shoaib's way of determining salary increases appears to have favoured certain staff, left others out. Those who did not see an equivalent pay rise are angered. Were they stirred or was it spontaneous? There are suspicions but no evidence. It is true that some have worked without a contract or remained at intern level for years but these are a minority, people who Shoaib hopes will make good.

Shoaib's view?

For special achievements reward everybody, no exceptions, from cleaners and drivers to the top but annual salary increases were market driven. Coughs, clears his throat, the subject is an uncomfortable one for Shoaib, a man who tries to be fair, who hates confrontation, 'well', he says and then out it comes, *obviously I had some people who had a high market value and it was important to keep these people*. In 1991, Shoaib had looked at his staff list and given salary increases based on his own perceptions of comparative performance, worth, and skill rarity. *There were people I wanted to keep*, he said, *so I made it worth their while to stay*. Some staff whose skills were in plentiful supply professed outrage. They demanded equality.

Shoaib called a meeting, and explained there was not enough money in the budget to treat everyone the same nor would the Board approve spending it if there were. It didn't wash.

Harsh words were spoken.

Shoaib listened. The words hurt. Maybe it was time to go. Waited for silence, said hard words spoken in such anger were not to be borne. It was clear he had lost their respect and confidence. He would go. Leave Gilgit.

He walked out.

Stunned silence. Was this what the dissenters wanted? They milled and argued. They did not know what to do.

Back in his office Shoaib quietly summoned his trusted peon, asked him to please take down his famous name board and then fetch some cartons so he could pack his things and leave. Suleman was appalled, did not know what to do. What he should do soon became apparent. Shoaib laughed in delight at the memory, told of hearing a great commotion, found the corridor swarming with angry villagers, activists mainly. They poured into his office, hanging the name plate back on the door, connecting the telephone, putting books, papers back on shelves, demanding, 'who are the fools who sent you away, we don't want them, we can manage everything, no, you cannot go'. Tears in the eyes of many, tears in Shoaib's eyes too, 'we can't let you go, what are these people doing? What are they to us, they are nothing.'

And that was the end of the story, said Shoaib. But it wasn't. Not quite.

Those who are already thinking how to slide Shoaib out of the general manager's position learn a valuable lesson. In Gilgit, he is impregnable. The village activists would simply not let it happen. There was also the question of the prince's support. But if Shoaib could be moved to Islamabad and if the prince's support was seen to weaken, then they could disguise Shoaib's ouster by making it seem as if he was simply moving on to bigger and better things of his own volition. If this could be done the activists would be confused and being the gentleman he was, Shoaib would not tell them. And so this came to pass. Shoaib's headquarters are moved to Islamabad, with the prince's apparent approval, and no less a figure than Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif openly urges Shoaib to take on nation-wide responsibilities, while in the north the villagers and activists are kept in the dark or fed half-truths.

And if this was the official version, and if the prince did not deny it, then it would take a brave man to stand up and say 'stop, send the GM Sahib back again'.

Haji Fida Mohammad Nashad, a man of influence in Baltistan, swept into the Gilgit Serena Hotel and graced us with his presence. I liked him in part because he had presence, projected self-importance without it seeming to be a conceit. He described Shoaib with extravagance as a *noble man, kind, patient, and humble*, almost irritatingly methodical. A quick learner, the Haji smiled and said, *I still sit on the floor and eat ordinary food just for a sense of friendship*.

It also gains support, wins votes.

And when he had finished talking, when he had run out of good things to say, did he know why Shoaib had left the north, I asked? His shrewd politician's

eyes narrow, pause and then an answer, a casual throw-away, *Oh, I think he left because of an opportunity to work at an international level.* And then he smiled a secret smile which said, 'that's all you will get from me'. And really, why should he tell a comparative stranger what he believed, what he knew. Did it matter now?

It did matter in 1992. And yes, I suppose it matters now.

December 1992, Shoaib quietly packs his bags and leaves for Islamabad. Shoaib cannot bring himself to talk much about the day he left except to say there was no fuss. Mohammad Shah, the keeper of the keys at the Chinar Inn, agreed. There was no fuss, no great ceremony, he said, but 'tears were bursting from his eyes'. From Mohammad Shah's eyes too. To everyone else Shoaib had said he was not really leaving. He would be back.

The poet of the north, Mohammad Abdullah Malang spoke as poets will, said what many others could not say, *after he left the heart went out of our communities, we had lost something wonderful*, and then he had glared fiercely, *if we had known of any people who had pushed Shoaib Sahib out of the Northern Areas we would have taken them away.*

To be dropped over a cliff?

Match point to Karachi and Geneva. Is the game over? Not quite.

Early 1993. Shoaib has finally slipped quietly away. 'Gone to Islamabad', say some puzzled villagers. 'He could not say 'no' to the prime minister', say others, 'he has gone to set up more organisations like ours everywhere in Pakistan'. Heads shake, lips purse. Some have a very good idea what has really happened. There is no word from distant Aiglemont. Their prince has said nothing. The Ismaili villagers will accept what has happened, whatever will come next. Other villagers, the Shias of Nagar and Baltistan, all the other sects who are part of the religious mosaic of the north, these people are totally dismayed, at a loss, what to do, what to believe. Is Shoaib Sahib's departure of his own choosing as is the rumour, or is this a clever Ismaili cover-up?

Naib Khan, the driver, thinks so, says after ten years some of the local Ismaili higher-ups became jealous, they contacted Karachi, and sent petitions to His Highness. They wanted the power Shoaib seemed to have effortlessly gained, power they felt they deserved, not an outsider, not Shoaib. Naib Khan was not alone, but he and those who thought the same were slow to act.

Too late. Before they can do anything, he has gone. It is not all bad. Shoaib has handed over the reins of power to a reluctant Hussain Wali Khan. Shoaib's utterly loyal, totally reliable 'right hand', Hussain Wali is known and trusted by the villagers. A reluctant steward, he is not a happy man. He is a square peg in a

round hole. An engineer who loves his work, a field man happiest when he is working out the details of a complicated project making it as simple as he can. Skilled at quickly estimating how a job might best be done by villagers, skilled at leading a team, he is not a manager. Or at least not the type of compliant systems manager the Board and AKF now want.

But those on the Board and AKF who were happy to see Shoaib go are not unduly worried that Hussain Wali has stepped up to the crease. If the seemingly impregnable GM Sahib can be shifted, ridding themselves of a man like Hussain Wali should be easy.

It is and it isn't. Hussain Wali is no pushover and he knows that if he goes so will Shoaib's AKRSP. Just how involved was Shoaib while Hussain Wali exercised his stewardship?

Very, he laughs ruefully, *it was business as usual. Hussain Wali was more or less in daily contact, I was a very frequent visitor and kept up my village visits. There was hardly any difference.* There was, of course, and everyone knew it. Shoaib's influence was being kept alive by Hussain Wali who managed the organisation like a faithful steward. Sometimes it seemed almost like the old days. It was 'business as usual', or was it?

Hussain Wali weathers two increasingly humiliating years. Some on the Board know how to hurt a man. They pointedly over-ride his appointment as general manager and refer to the position he holds as 'acting'. They subject this intensely likeable and highly practical man to a succession of niggling demands, each one designed to reduce his independence, increase his anger, wound.

Hussain Wali holds out valiantly for two years, but it was very hard.

Shoaib, shaking his head, even now he still found it all so hard to believe that people he thought he knew could behave so vindictively, mount such carefully calculated and insidious harassment, *they made Hussain Wali's life so difficult he just gave it all up, imagine that, a man in his own area with such a good salary just giving it all up.*

When Hussain Wali can take no more and quits, power moves from the villagers to the Board in Karachi. Shoaib, making no bones about it all, *I mean, they just stopped going to the people.*

The Board want a manager not an engineer and certainly not a man who believes in Shoaib, not a man who continues to view Shoaib as the boss, ensures Shoaib's name-board stays on the GM's office door, keeps the office for Shoaib's use as if he might return tomorrow, maintains the rooms at the Chinar Inn ready should Shoaib arrive at any time of the day or night, is in constant

contact. The Board does not want Hussain Wali; they want a manager who will comply with their wishes, who will act as if Shoaib has really gone.

A new broom.

In short, the Board of Directors and AKF want to call the shots. They want AKRSP to more closely mirror the highly structured Aga Khan health and education organisations. They want plans and procedures that will satisfy the World Bank's new evaluation team, ease the worries of the donors, produce paper, write the stodgy, meaningless reports that Western aid bureaucracies feed on, keeps them happy.

So, as we know, Hussain Wali holds out for two years. This surprises many on the Board. But they know how to wait. At last, in 1994, Hussain Wali hands in his resignation. He has had enough. It is what they have been waiting for.

Then, even better, Shoaib plays right into their hands.

During his last years in the north Shoaib had been favourably impressed by a serious young American who managed the Aga Khan health programme, a man called Steven Rasmussen. Not only did the health programme seem to be well run, Rasmussen also attempted to utilise village organisations as agents for the health programme. This was exactly what Shoaib had been hoping would happen. So Shoaib swung his support behind the proposal to appoint Steve if Hussain Wali did not withdraw his resignation. The Board accepted with alacrity. They knew something that Shoaib did not. Rasmussen knew his place. He had served the local Aga Khan hierarchy well, had proven himself a manager who would take orders and direction from a Board. But Shoaib's AKRSP had been designed and customized to serve the dreams and demands of the villagers of the Northern Areas, not the ideas and ambitions of a distant Board of Directors, not the whims and changing consciences of distant donors, not the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva. Rasmussen may not have realized it but he had an impossible task. The momentum could not be maintained, not by a manager who answered to a Board. The results can be seen today. AKRSP is but a pale shadow of the past. Its main activities take place in Ismaili areas. With discrete boundaries and budgets, it gives little trouble to its Board of Directors.

It is entirely manageable.

On a visit to his old Gilgit headquarters in 2007, the voluble Khaleel Tetlay was appalled. Wind drifted paper fluttered in empty corridors, walls were drab and peeling, halls and offices echoed emptily. *At least give the place a coat of paint* he pleaded to Izhar Hunzai, now general manager, *at least look after the damn place a little bit*. Funnily enough, I do not think Shoaib cared all that much about the state of his old offices, but he cared about what he saw in the villages.

The donors may also have been disappointed by the fate of AKRSP, yes, they almost certainly were, but they were probably not all that surprised. Donors do not really expect development to work. For a while AKRSP's amazing success disproved the rule, left them wondering about their role. All they were asked to do was to pay up and sit back and watch the power of the people at work. But it didn't last and so the sceptics were proved right—development doesn't work.

It did though and what happened was an entirely avoidable tragedy. It was also immensely sad. Do the donors know this, do they care? Perhaps they do.

July 1994. The Strategic Development Committee meet in Gilgit. They are at last ready to present their plan. Shoaib has been effectively neutralised, Hussain Wali too, and a new general manager has been appointed, a real manager, one who will follow the Board's directives. There is the usual hearty backslapping and congratulations.

Everyone has been assembled, members of the committee, various specialist consultants, the Board in full array, senior AKRSP staff. Masood ul Mulk is there. The findings of the committee are presented. Masood is astounded. There is a tea break. Masood needs one. What is he to make of the illogical gobbledygook he has just been treated to? He decides to buttonhole one of the leading consultants, ask what is going on. Does so as politely as he can, and Masood can be deceptively polite, deceptively quiet. The consultant smiles, replies 'don't you see, everyone around the table is mad. This is what they want to hear and this is what they will hear from us'. The plan is meaningless.

Officially Development Director to AKRSP, Shoaib's title is also meaningless. Other than visits of a most general sort, he will never again be asked to go to Gilgit and help the new management take AKRSP forward. The businessmen in Karachi and Shaw in Geneva no longer want him there.

He will be a nuisance.

Window dressing—Shoaib remains a member of the Board of Directors, a solitary voice in the wilderness, one against many. He is treated with disdain, with disrespect, his views ignored, discounted. At best he will be tolerated.

It is over.



The Man in the Hat



Shelley at KKH milestone (1990)



Precarious crossing of a flooded river



Dialogue in subzero temperature



A dialogue with villagers



Dialogue with Akhter Hameed Khan



Visiting a PPI with Bob Shaw and Hakim Feerasta



Managers Monthly Workshop Gilgit



Addressing Women Activists



Shahida Jaffrey receiving guests at Visitors Centre



With Ejaz Naik, Lady Noon, Musarrat & helicopter pilots



With Hussain Wali Khan



Aliabad Channel Work Force



Sust Irrigation Tunnel



AKRSP helicopter landing at Shandur Pass



Link Road through Rocks in Chitral



World Bank Evaluation Team



AKRSP Gilgit staff



AKRSP Women Staff

5
SHOAIB SAHIB

Dreaming of Camelot

Some men see things as they are and ask, why? Some men see things as they never were and say—why not!

Edward Kennedy's eulogy to his brother Bobby

Camelot, they say, and in their eyes a dream, their minds a song.

Camelot, ah yes, Camelot, chivalry and courtesy; equality; of tables round where none sat above another; a world where knights set out to serve with honour, serve the people, listen; where people were not afraid; a golden age of peace and prosperity. Camelot could not last; did not. Arthur the King was betrayed, worse, betrayed from within by those he trusted most.

Camelot crumbled, vanished. Its like has never been seen again.

Does Shoaib ever dream? Does he dream of Camelot in the north, a dream that nearly was, of betrayal, lost dreams, lost hope, lost opportunity? Does he dream of a joining, a coming together of many parts, each brilliant in their own way, a magical whole created by one man, by many men and women, treated as equals, all there to serve, a time remembered with great longing, intense regret, an era that will pass into the folk lore of the north, a time they will say, when giants strode the land, a time of hope, of wonder and excitement.

Gone now, gone forever, like Arthur's Camelot, gone into the misty realms of legend. Gone.

Why didn't the world change? Why didn't AKRSP go on, become bigger, better?

The question hangs in the air. Shoaib thinks for a moment, says of course all those who once flocked to Gilgit, all the glitterati of development, all those who said

how brilliant, how amazing it all was, all the people who saw the films, heard him speak, came to him after meetings in America, Canada, so many places, people with tears in their eyes, all those people might have wanted to change the way the world works, and then he shrugged, *I suppose it was just too much.* Cogs in giant wheels, even the most senior people, the wheels ground on relentlessly. Still do.

And of his life, his years in the north, his life now as a senior guru, loved by millions, listened to by leaders everywhere, yes, he agrees and smiles again, *I would say it has all been an obsession.* A magnificent obsession, I ask? He smiles, thinks for a moment and then says, *maybe it was, I don't know, but I have not changed, when I go to the villages now, if I go to one tomorrow it will be the same as it has always been.*

Shy smile, a confession, *I have always remained steadfast.*

You see, he says again and again, never impatient no matter how many times he has to tell me, *there are only three important elements in all that I have done—the willingness of communities to work together; the presence of honest and competent activists; and a true and totally flexible support organisation.* That was what AKRSP was he says, a truly flexible support organisation, an organisation for the people. But times have now changed and so should AKRSP he says, so should their view of the north. What is needed now is far less emphasis on AKRSP, far more on organisations of the poor, *on supra-village organisations, clusters, groups, call them what you want; this is what is needed.*

Is AKRSP still needed, I ask?

Of course it is he says with a patient smile, it is needed as much as it ever was, needed to respond to requests for specific technical support from organisations of the poor, to offer access to new technologies, new ideas way out of the range of most villagers, *off the screen* he says, and laughs because he has used 'modern jargon' moves on says, to offer services such as forging links to credit institutions, to technical agencies, to suppliers and marketers, *if I were to ever go back to Gilgit that is what I would do.*

But then he shakes his head as if telling himself to stop being an old fool, to stop dreaming of the impossible. *No,* he says, and smiles an apology. Who is he apologising to? I am not sure. Says *I do not think I will ever go back.* But anyone can see he could be tempted.

Many are those who comment on Shoaib's unvarying dialogues, how he would hammer away, his words an unchanging mantra, utterly reliable. Masood has a slightly different take on Shoaib's dialogues. Izhar Hunzai, fidgeting, impatient, now AKRSP's general manager, said Shoaib never varied, became almost boring. Others agree but Masood says no, Tariq Husain too, both say

Shoaib adjusted what he had to say to suit his audience, their level of sophistication. So who is right? Shoaib may have been single-tracked at the outset, changing only when the message had become indelibly imprinted in people's minds, developing variability, sometimes almost infinitesimally nuanced changes, when he gained confidence in his audience, when village organisations had become an almost unstoppable movement.

And anyway, does it matter? Shoaib's messages worked like magic and village people never once complained of boredom.

Valley noises carry in the high clear air of a mountain evening, the knock of ball on bat, small boys scurry, cricket played in deadly earnest on a rare flat isthmus of land, the ball of knotted rope arcing out and down, hundreds of metres into the depths of the nullah below. 'Six' yells the umpire: two small boys swagger back to makeshift wickets, others leap down the nullah slopes, mountain goats, Marco Polo sheep.

Poplars bare of leaves spike the landscape like the poles of beached sailing ships abandoned among the tiny terraced fields. Smoke curls from khaki brown mud and stone houses snuggled down, waiting for winter, flat roofs heaped with fodder, winter wood. In the autumn-tattered gardens of the hotel a few jaded roses, marigolds still bright, patches of purple verbena, and the flash of iridescent green as a cheeky long-tailed bird, bright as a chessboard, stabs at the ground.

The mother of Yasmin, sister to Izhar the young scallywag, Izhar the Hunza boy who now heads the remnants of Shoaib's once vibrant mountain domain, serene and lovely she sat with us on the veranda of the Hunza Serena hotel, our backdrop the enormous landscape. The day fades, sun sliding behind the great ring of mountains, air snapping with sudden cold. The mother of Yasmin smiled and slowly shook her head. *It was all so much better once, so much better when Shoaib Sahib was here, yes it has all gone, the great days are gone*, sepia-tinted memories of the past, dreams.

The hotel's watchman smiles, a mini-mountain man, face of weathered walnut brown creased in parchment pages, each one a story, ageless, teeth white as snow, red rose, blood red tucked in his pakhol, a slow shy smile as the mother of Yasmin passes, dips her head. He searches the pockets of his Gilgiti jacket, finds a small sweet apple, two, offers them. Of course he would. He is a mountain man.

Why of course?

The ebullient Muzaffaruddin, a village herd boy going places, his village one of the most remote; Muzaffaruddin has already seen the world, been to universities, can see a professional career pathway within reach, smiles and

shakes his head when I tell him this story. He has something to say. Says serving food to visitors was not a practice embedded in the traditional culture of the mountains; that it all began in the days of the Raj; agrees, *yes, food might have been served to passing feudal rulers but to strangers?* Sometimes, and sometimes not.

No one else has ever said this before and I do not really want to believe this. But what if Muzaffaruddin is right? Does it matter if he is? It does not because I know that no matter the past, the people of these mountains now have a wonderful sense of self, a wonderful sense of hospitality, and it never fails to warm your heart. I wonder though, if tourism will change it all.

Shoaib thought it might, warned of the temptress tourism, how fickle she can be, how spirit-hungry hordes would descend on the wondrous mountains, casual despoilers, everything changes. But money beckoned, the lure of profit being paid to shepherd visitors not sheep, lead open-mouthed visitors through incredible mountain landscapes they knew as home. Karimabad is now a tourist town. The bazaar choked with shops stuffed with trinkets, hotels of every size and shape from ten rupee flea-traps to the quiet Anglo-Indian bungalow elegance of the Serena or the squared walls and glinting tinted glass of the mir's hotel above, concreted, looming like the block-house of a coastal gun emplacement. High in the mountains, alpine pastures are now the hunting grounds of the rich, herdsmen their guides.

Will it all last? Perhaps, and perhaps not. Is it what the people want? Again perhaps, and perhaps not.

People in the high hunting villages are paid well to guide a huntsman, but in the towns it is the elite, leaders and businessmen, who have most to gain. Is Shoaib saddened? Perhaps not, after all he was once a hunter. An eternal optimist he chooses to see the bright side, shrugs and says, *well, if this is what the people want, so be it.* All so different, so incredibly different to the Hunza he found at the end of a perilous road clinging to the cliff face above the ice-muted river, a town where pack horses from China pushed through narrow cobbled streets of the single-street bazaar, the sheer white log-beamed walls of the Baltit Fort four-square above, protective, farm house rooftops gold with drying apricots.

Where it all began.

Does Shoaib wake some mornings wondering what went wrong, was there something, some golden chance he did not see, missed? Humayan the *bon vivant* ambassador chuckles when he says of Shoaib his lifelong friend, that he was indeed a sober fellow as a student, already married, his sights on his future career, too earnest then for the jolly Humayan.

Do sober men dream, do serious fellows wake up in the morning grieving for what might have been? We know Shoaib grieves for his lost daughter, his lost grandchildren, grieves as deeply as a man can, but does he also grieve for the past, for the wonderful organisation he helped bring to life in the northern mountains of his troubled country?

He does, yes, he does.

But then he gets out of his bed and remembers all the other bright stars that now burn in the firmament of his imagination, of the new rural support organisations working in some of the most socially difficult and remote areas of Pakistan, of Masood in the dangerously conservative Pakhtun heartland, of Sono deep in the deserts of western Sindh, bandit country all around, of all the other offshoots of his imagination, rural support organisations, credit agencies, so many people and ideas, and in India, the brightest star of them all, the women's organisation of Andhra Pradesh.

We know already it had not been always easy, the pathway far from smooth, but such thoughts give Shoaib strength, firm his resolve. So he breakfasts lightly from the tray Ishaq has placed on the low table in his room, dons a beautifully pressed safari suit, one of many, or if it is the cool season, a roll-neck sweater and tweed jacket, and he is ready to face the world.

There were those in opposition, those who were enemies, for men like Shoaib there always will be but perhaps the secretive were the worst. In the north a few Ismaili notables, a few local politician's noses out of joint at the adulation this interloper enjoyed with their people; or perhaps some hard-eyed Sunni conservatives who at least made no secret of their opposition, the contractors out of pocket, the government officials out of their depth, but all who had been, all who might have been an enemy or an opponent to Shoaib avoided us. But one did not, a well known, well regarded Sunni *maulana* agreed to meet us, sent messages to the Gilgit Serena agreeing times, places to meet, slipped and slid for two whole weeks, always there, just out of reach until a definite appointment was made only to be cancelled at the last minute due to an unfortunate death in Diamer. The *maulana* rushed away to offer condolences, as of course he had to. And then silence until a final hasty message arrived—'called to Islamabad on urgent business' and that was the end of it. At least the mir did not beat around the bush—he simply sent a brief message saying no. At least we knew where we stood. No nonsense—I liked that about Mir Ghazanfar.

When Sarah, Shoaib's sparkling eyed granddaughter first arrived in Islamabad after Falaknaz's death, she says that she was in such a mess, so utterly appalled and miserable about the sudden and unwanted changes in her life, so wrapped up in her miseries, *I did not have much time for Daddy* she says ruefully. When she was nearly

eighteen she went to Gilgit, stayed in the hostel. There were interns from all over the world. This *was when the light bulb went on in my head* she laughed her lovely singer's laugh, *until then I had been wrapped up in myself but in Gilgit, listening to everyone talk I thought 'hey, hold on, this is going to be huge, this is something else.'*

This is Camelot.

Camelot, the name, the idea, may mean little to Sahib Nadir Khan our bustling Chitrali lawyer, but he knew he had been part of something very special. Cocks his head in his lawyerly way, thinks, says yes, you could say Shoaib was a strange person, no other personal interests that he could see. Had he ever discussed poetry with Shoaib? A man who seems unafraid to speak his mind, Sahib Nadir Khan looks at me in surprise. No, he hadn't. Should he have? Mountain men are natural born poets but is Nadir Khan one? Says he doesn't know about poetry but he knows Shoaib hunted a bit in the early days but not since his daughter died. And Shoaib hadn't. Was there a reason? Perhaps there was. In her terrible grief Musarrat had once cried out that her daughter was taken from her because of all the animals and birds Shoaib had killed.

Unreasonable? Yes, but grief is never reasonable because Musarrat had also hunted, used to go out with Shoaib in the early days, was said to be a very good shot. On one such day she said, Shoaib promised to buy her a new target rifle if she could hit a small bird perched on a distant branch. Accepting the challenge, she fired. The bird vanished but it was a very long way off so Shoaib went to look. *You know he came back* she laughed, *and said nothing. I thought 'good, I have missed the poor bird'. A few days later he came back from his office with a parcel. He said it was a present. I opened it and found a new .22 rifle. You know he still did not admit anything. He just went away laughing. I felt sorry for the poor bird. I never shot anything again.*

Shoaib had, but not after Musarrat's cry. He did not hunt again.

Nadir Khan knows nothing about this, shrugs, women's business, says what Shoaib had achieved in Chitral was like a miracle, says he will never really know just how it was done, adds it has never been the same since, downhill all the way, especially now, especially since Masood left, more and more disputes, little accomplished, the organisation shrinking. He frowns and thinks, brightens, says he is sure it is all still there, it has to be, and it could all come to life again. Masood nods, smiles, agrees, says give any of Shoaib's villages a good reason and there they will all be again, working together as if they always had. Sahib Nadir Khan the lawyer, the realist frowns, says maybe, says the problem is this: a man like Shoaib will never be found again. Laughs, glances at Masood, says maybe Masood could step back in. Masood has no intention of stepping back in, shrugs, smiles, says, *times have changed.*

Have times changed?

Was it all absolutely unique, a once and once only window of opportunity?

It was Tariq Husain, Shoaib's word-master who is said to have first written of the invisible power vacuum that existed in the north when he arrived on that ice cold December day in 1982, a vacuum that Shoaib gradually filled with his new people's organisation. The power of the feudal lords of the northern mountains, the mirs, rajahs and mehtars, had been replaced, said Tariq, by a government unable to reach out and fill the gaps they had created.

This idea that Shoaib's arrival was fortuitous fits well with Shoaib's own seldom voiced feelings, the importance of synchronicity, of being able to recognise it, of things happening when they are ready to happen.

Well, no two ways about it, the idea that there had been a power gap or vacuum into which the Aga Khan's newest organisation naturally flowed was taken up and repeated as these things will be, sometimes by authors who barely knew the north at all, by donor missions needing a preliminary scene-setting paragraph or two for their back-to-office reports, repeated and re-quoted until someone might say to Tariq, have you heard about the theory of the power vacuum in the north, repeated until it became historical fact, something that now appears by rote in any piece on the north.

Masood however believes the situation was never as simple as this. And he should know. His family ruled Chitral for half a millennium.

No question that the power of the feudal lords was gradually curtailed from the 1950s onward but this did not happen in one fell sweep across the entire north. Masood argues that for all practical purposes the power of the Chitrali mehtars came to an end in 1954 when the mehtar was killed in an air crash, whereas in Gilgit, the power of the feudal rulers was still extant until 1971. Masood's alternative scenario is this.

When Shoaib began his furiously energetic eye-opening travels into the mountain villages, he found a people still locked in the past, incredibly poor, people for whom the awful hunger of spring was an annual event. Even in the late 1980s, had you happened to be in the valleys of the Kafir Kalash in early spring you might wake one morning to the thudding beat of drums, walk out to your verandah, see the great mulberry trees swaying, branches swarming with small children, a rain of green berries falling onto cloths women had spread below, of everyone, children, women, even some younger men squatting to stuff their mouths, juice running down their chins, the first fresh fruit, fresh food since the onset of winter—the hungry days, the miserable belly-clenching nights of late winter and early spring were over.

So it was in all the valleys once.

Poor, dirt poor, hungry poor, the villagers possessed a rare commodity, invisible, something lost long ago down on the plains, says Masood. Village after village, communities had worked together to survive in this immensely challenging, totally overwhelming environment, worked together for a millennium or more. Villages existed, villagers survived because of the irrigation channels they had carved out together with antelope horn and hardened stakes, the precious fuel wood areas they husbanded, the grazing lands they managed, raids on passing caravans, all of it together, communally, unified under the rule of their sometimes hard-handed feudal lords.

It was this one thing, wrote Masood, this sense of community, this deeply embedded notion that enabled his people, all the people of the north to survive.

Shoaib's ideas, his approach however was different. The lords of the northern valleys, the mirs, the mehtars, the rajahs all of them had commanded, 'let this be done', and it was. And then there were the outlying 'penal colonies', men who broke the law, offended a ruler, banished, sometimes with their families, to open up new lands, hard, heart breaking settlements hacked out of the rock and scree, hard men needed, lives of hardship, hope for the future. One thing was always clear. Those who lived in the mountains of the north, the bandit farmers, the caravan raiders, the poppy growers, the shepherds, all of them realised they had to work together in order to survive.

Sometimes the mir, the mehtar asked too much, gave too little. But still the men of the mountains tried with tools so primitive, with hearts so angry or resentful, they failed.

Shoaib's AKRSP brought something startling, something so new it was hard to believe. The 'man in the hat' did not order, did not command, instead he asked, what is it you most need, most want? He said, tell me and I will show you how we can work together, how you can achieve this thing. It will be for you to decide how it will be shared, how much everyone must contribute, and remember, it will be yours, for no one else but you and yours.

There was no force, never a hint of force, of having to 'or else'.

All Shoaib asked of the suspicious, rag-tag gatherings of villagers was that they had to work together, form a partnership with the new organisation he and the prince had started, meet regularly, organise, save. He would provide the tools, some of the means, they the sweat of their brows. He did, they did, and a brave new world was born. It was, says Masood in his dry direct way, the first great example of the devolution of authority to the local level, the amazing benefits that result.

No argument, however, with Tariq on one further point. If Shoaib were trying to start AKRSP in the Northern Areas right now with all the various socio-economic and political changes that have occurred, the great highway that snakes through the northern mountains into China, to the world's 'war on terrorism', the story would in all probability be a very different one. Or, and here Tariq laughed, *if we had all been sent to Punjab or Sindh to start AKRSP it would have been a very different story*; perhaps a very sharp, short story, minnows gobbled up by big-league sharks.

Shoaib's secret ingredient for success.

Not so secret he insists, many know it, those in business live or die by it, no matter where in the world, no matter which country, the secret, he smiles is 'finding the right people'. And of course, his own mentor Akhter Hameed had 'found' Shoaib, and then, with the prince's approval, so had Shaw, for each one of these men Shoaib had been the right man in the right spot at the right time. In his turn Shoaib has found others, men and women, for other roles, *like Raju in India* he says, *without Raju in India I could have done very little*, he nods, smiles, *nothing is more important than finding the right person.*

What went wrong in the north? After Shoaib, after Hussain Wali, no one ever found the right person, the right man.

The secret of AKRSP's flying start?

Easy, says our eminent Ismaili, *the first advantage was beginning in areas where little had happened before, areas where a political vacuum had appeared*, smiles, *but the key point*, he continues with quiet emphasis, *it all began in districts that were primarily Ismaili; they would do what their Imam asked. And there you have it*, our eminent Ismaili insists, *in a nutshell*. Adds, *followers of many Muslim sects are very keen to respect the wishes of their leader, their Imam, and foremost among such communities are the Ismailis*. Smiles, sits back, rests his case.

Shoaib agrees (as we know, every time the question is asked), says of course he used His Highness's name, shamelessly, he laughs, absolutely shamelessly until it snowballed, until some of the more enlightened Shia leaders of Nagar and Baltistan weighed in. Shoaib hedges when there is any hint of criticism of the prince. *Well*, he says, as if everyone should know this, *he had very general ideas of course and was always very supportive but he could not get into any detail*. Ah yes, detail, in Shoaib's world view princes cannot be expected to descend to detail, deal with trivia. But then again, the prince was known to be a details man so perhaps he had.

Was it easy?

Not at all, insists our eminent Ismaili, the people of the north are far from subservient, can indeed be very difficult. How does he know? He looks at me with a pitying smile. No need to ask for details. Move on, ask another question, did some village people ever become 'unruly', threaten to sabotage the programme, 'had the local Ismaili hierarchy been required to weigh in, to say "calm down, this is a man who has been appointed by His Highness"'?

He nods, says they had, decides not to mention how some of these same leaders grumbled themselves; how those with a narrow view on life resented funds being spent in non-Ismaili areas; how some became jealous of Shoaib's huge popularity with village people, his closeness to their Imam, the way he could so easily sideline the Ismaili power brokers of Karachi.

Of course there were leaders of other sects, some of the Sunni mullahs of southern Chitral, of the Chilas valleys who were by nature fiercely suspicious of almost any outside influence, while on the sidelines stood thwarted contractors of all religious persuasions who wanted AKRSP project funds to flow through their own sticky fingers, were angered when it eluded them.

I sometimes write blithely of the 'Northern Areas' as if this land of massive mountains was inhabited by one people who shared a common outlook on life. Yet as we know, within Gilgit District live the descendants of the bandit empire of the Mirs of Hunza who once paid tribute to the Emperors of China, in the valleys of the Rajahs of Yasin thick with poppy are the bleakly suspicious mullahs of the Chilas valley, and far away, across the bitter cold ridges of Baltistan lay another kingdom, another Islamic sect whose trade caravans carried apricots and other produce to Leh, perched high in the Himalayan province of Ladakh. Over the Shandur pass is yet another, the old principality of Chitral whose rulers once looked to the court of Kabul, whose valley kingdom took in the high Ismaili villages to the north, Sunnis to the south and of course the fabled valleys of the Kafir Kalash whose fair complexioned people some believe descend from Alexander's lost legions. Shoaib's kingdom, the Northern Areas, the valleys whose religious affinities paved the way for Shoaib's almost instant success, were as close to uniformity as chalk is from cheese.

They had only one thing in common, a thirst for survival. There was also the matter of governance, the accidents of recent history. As Masood writes, in the true Northern Areas, in Gilgit and Baltistan, Shoaib found his organisation was a big and fairly rich fish in rather a small pond. Although the Northern Areas came under the general control of the politically sensitive Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, all heads of department were located in Gilgit and sat at a table under the chairmanship of the all-powerful commissioner. Once a commissioner himself, Shoaib was respected as an elder statesman, his views counted, his opinions were listened to, AKRSP was a power to be reckoned with, a position that is very rare for non-governmental organisations.

Chitral, on the other hand, was an extremely isolated relatively forgotten district within the larger North West Frontier Province. What went on there was of little importance to department heads and provincial officers who sat in Peshawar. Shoaib also happened to open his office in Chitral just after inter-communal rioting had left more than a dozen people dead, the first ever such event. The programme had to earn, inch by inch, the grudging respect of all the political and administrative forces in the district and the province. Shoaib understood this very well, says Masood, so did Hussain Wali. Those who followed as general manager did not. Keeping the local administration on side was also an art form of which Shoaib was a master artist. Masood calls it 'managing jealousies', took his lead from Shoaib, and for example always had two vehicles available on the instant to the deputy commissioner's office *should the need arise* such as the unexpected arrival of an important official visitor. When in 1996, a new and hostile provincial government took a dim view of AKRSP, only strong support among Chitral's locally elected leadership enabled Masood to manage the hostility. *But* says Masood *it was far from easy.*

The freedom to take these sort of decisions, *to manage the external environment in which government was by far the largest player* was in Masood's words, *something Shoaib attached highest importance to.* Once Shoaib was out of the picture, once Masood had also left, the situation changed. In Chitral, the deputy commissioner was often 'cold shouldered'. Masood is absolutely certain that it was the loss of this ability which contributed significantly to AKRSP itself losing ground, losing the support of government officers.

Under Shoaib this would not have happened. Most times he had a deft understanding of local politics. What Masood's story tells is that with his contacts, his reputation, and his understanding, Shoaib was sorely missed.

By everyone?

The village of Nasirabad is celebrating. The mir is the guest of honour, old men with roses in their pakhols dance in a slow circle; a new village project has brought clean, piped drinking water to the village from a spring high in the mountains. It is also a homecoming. Young men dressed in professional office gear, grey trousers, white shirts, neat haircuts, not a single sun-browned face, hardly a crease, a wrinkle, had they heard of Shoaib? Well mannered, they immediately cease talking to each other and address the question. Yes, they all say, of course we have heard of him, our fathers and mothers talk of him all the time, of the wonderful things he helped them achieve. Yes, they all agree, Shoaib was undoubtedly a good man, but we were boys, we hardly knew him.

And that was all, a good man, good for their fathers, good because the canals, new roads, new orchards, had paid their school fees, onward to university, up and onwards to new opportunities, new careers. Yes, Nasirabad was home and someday they might live there but not yet. The world beckoned. The future they saw was not working newly irrigated fields, not wielding a pick and shovel, not lighting dangerous explosive charges and sprinting for cover, tunnelling a new irrigation canal through the mountains or hacking out a road to an isolated village. What these young men wanted as they talked and laughed and yes, eyed off a few of the prettier village girls, what these well spoken former village boys wanted was to be professionals, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, engineers. Not one of them wanted to be a farmer, a mountain man

Back in Gilgit, dining in the Serena hotel one evening are a group of starry-eyed newly hatched Italian graduates, wildlife managers they say, out from their famously medieval Italian university to save the remaining Gilgit wilderness. When he hears what these young Europeans intend to do, our village guide cannot help grinning. He would like to see these young Europeans out on a winter mountain; he would like to see if they could even save themselves. But good luck to them. They are welcome to try.

Tariq Husain says people offer many explanations for Shoaib's success, that such talk inevitably raises the question: was Shoaib a charismatic leader? *Maybe he was,* says Tariq, *but I never ever heard anyone call him charismatic when he arrived in Gilgit, when he started walking to the villagers, and nobody mentioned it during all the years he committed to the cause of the people, nobody said anything like that before he had international recognition.*

So is Shoaib charismatic, is he one of those rare individuals who can inspire devotion and enthusiasm, does he have an immensely attractive aura, great charm? Embarrassed by the idea, Shoaib waves it away. No, no, he protests, I just worked very hard.

And of course he had, but there was more to it than that. Hussain Wali once said Shoaib cared for the village people of the north more than he cared for himself. They responded, would turn out in their hundreds no matter how miserable the day, snow, bitter wind, none of this mattered if the GM Sahib was coming. Is that charisma? Was there an extraordinary power in Shoaib, something that gripped the imagination, commanded attention? Or was it this—Shoaib admired the courage and endurance of the small hardy men of the mountains, valued their companionship, took heart from their good humour in the face of adversity, and to an extent that few can understand, he trusted them and they knew it.

Musarrat believes Shoaib had qualities that equated to charisma, says Shoaib had something special, says his head was always in the clouds, says her job was to bring him down to earth; occasionally. Shoaib laughs, says he doesn't

know about being special, laughs even more and says yes, she did bring him down to earth; *sometimes the landing was quite hard.* And then he shrugs and grins again, *although few people would think this, the hardship of my going to Gilgit was all hers.* And in many ways it was. There had been times when Musarrat had wanted Shoaib to take another course in life, live in England for example, *but she really knew my heart was not there, but yes,* he said and his eyes twinkled, *she did try a bit, in those first two years in Gilgit she tried to make me change but after that she gave up.*

Did he have time for a private life of any sort, I ask again. Shoaib laughs, a bit, and laughs again, *Musarrat used to visit and I enjoyed that* he said, *and of course I used to catch up on all my sleep on Sundays,* chortling as if admitting something quite risqué, *I never got up before two o'clock in the afternoon.* Few dared to interrupt this sleep-in, *and* said Shoaib, *Riaz the manager was always very protective.* And Shoaib deeply missed his daughters, cherished every minute when they came to visit, gave them chances, gave them experiences, that were his gift but all the time made sure that nothing they did could be seen as favouritism.

So, charismatic Shoaib may have been, but there was one issue he never really resolved—what to do about women, employing them, finding money-making opportunities in the villages? The question hung in the air. Donors pushed the matter, pushed notions of equal opportunities, equal rights. As if Shoaib didn't have enough on his plate, as if the whole thing were easy to resolve, could be solved just like that, as if he could walk over religious sensitivities, change long held cultural views just like that, as if women as a special issue were uppermost in his mind when he arrived in the north.

Shoaib shrugs, agrees, says AKRSP had struggled to find effective programmes for women, throws up his hands, says in defence, *I mean,* he says hunting for the right words, *I mean women were nowhere in my mind when I went there.* And why should they have been given the immensity of the task he was confronted with. He set out to deal with families and if that meant working through men at first, fine, that is what he would do.

And it was not easy. If he were to employ women, first he had to arrange a separate office and of course, somewhere to live. One of the few times Shoaib is uncomfortable; the idea that perhaps he had not done enough for women bothers him. He thinks it is untrue but cannot rid himself of the faint niggle at the back of his mind. What if it is true, what if he could have done more? *Oh well* he says, *no one is perfect* and with that thought, brightens.

Shoaib argues this way, you will have to understand the situation; *I don't think everyone does. It was like this. I was about to go in and implement a 'hard' programme in an area where there had only been 'soft' programmes before,*

government and others offering free hand-outs, and here I was saying I was offering a partnership agreement that required a lot of involvement and a lot of work. I was not in a sellers' market at all; I was in fact dependent on what my clientele wanted. And at first, when I went to villages, no women were present, none at all, only men, so at the outset I worked with men. Women's organisations came much later, once the men were satisfied it was all straight forward, all above board, that the organisations really were to be under their control, he shrugs, a touch of apology in his voice and smiles, he knows what the critics say but they were not there, in fact they are never there, not at the 'coal face'.

And you know he says, and then pauses, then sure of himself again resumes, *you know, had I demanded that women be present at the beginning, that would have upset the apple cart right away, no dialogues, lots of suspicion* and then he brightens again, sits back, says with a laugh *and in any case, it all happened automatically, I didn't have to do anything.*

One fine day Shoaib says, still smiling *a letter arrived from a village, a letter from all the women.* They had seen what the men were doing, thought it looked good, had started to organise themselves, hold weekly meetings, collect weekly savings. Now they asked, 'why don't you come and tell us what to do next'. It was a surprise, something out of the blue, he says. It was also an opportunity not to be missed.

Shoaib didn't miss. He seldom did.

So there we were, suddenly we were away he laughs in delight, *the whole thing grew, women's organisations popping up everywhere, like mushrooms.* But what would these new organisations do, that was the problem? Men had their canals, their roads, their syphons, the trick was to find something, some income earning project that women could do, on their own, without men. It had never been done before. The hunt was on.

Chickens, vegetable gardens, orchards all came and went, all had some success but most of the ideas came from outside rather than from within, from the village women, and none were as visibly inspiring as the amazing bridges, canals, tunnels and roads that so impressed the donors. But the men were happy even if Shoaib could not think of much for women to do. So were most village women, saying 'we are a two-wheeled vehicle, the bridges and canals help both wheels'.

Donors worried though. Shoaib worried too. It was the only small dark cloud on an otherwise bright horizon. And sure, more vegetables, fatter healthier chickens, more eggs meant a better household diet, healthier children, fewer deficiency complaints, and variety in orchards production, better methods of drying apricots added to a household's income. But the niggle never quite went

away. It was this: when you look at the amazing infrastructure projects a handful of chickens or grit-free dried apricots seem to be small change.

One problem. Many of the things on the shopping lists of women, reticulated water, sanitation, health, education, all these were social sector items and did not generate income. Shoaib's brief had been to stay out of this sector, not to step on the toes of other Aga Khan organisations, or of government's. He had to be quick on his feet though. *If the women wanted drinking water I would ask how this would increase a family's income and although there are ways in which economists can sort of prove that it may do this, such as saving time or less time at home sick, it is very roundabout.* Shoaib sighed, *it was never easy, it was a struggle to find effective income earning projects for women, a struggle not to jump in and do something about latrines or drinking water.* And when nothing else was obvious, someone inevitably began to talk of handicrafts and indeed Musarrat sought to promote this. But until Chitral's Shubinak project was launched, projects that aimed to capitalise on the craft skills of women were generally dismal flops, government and private initiatives alike. Poor marketing, unsalable products, no quality control were part of the problem.

Then in Gilgit a light bulb flashed on in someone's head. One way around this impasse, the thinking went, was to insist on the open involvement of women when a major project was being selected. Had this been done before? Maybe not, so let's see what happens when it is. So off to Yasin went the management team where the men had already said what the village wanted, said it perhaps a little too quickly, yes, they knew what they wanted, had asked the women and it was a sawmill. The women assembled, the men shuffled their feet, looked a little uncomfortable; a sawmill, the women chorused shrilly, why would we want a sawmill? We want a flour mill. Back to the drawing board went a chastened management team.

Of course, said Shoaib, this didn't happen everywhere or all the time but after that we made an effort to make sure women were in agreement when a project had been selected. Shoaib laughed again, *after this some of the men got even trickier. They quickly realised they could form a women's organisation and then use it to advance their own agenda. Unless we were careful they got away with it too.* And in an amusedly resigned 'would-you-believe-it' tone Shoaib had laughed and said, *after all those years in Gilgit of wondering what to do and how to do it, I found in Andhra I worked only with women. Men there are largely subservient to the women now in many economic ways.* The women of Andhra Pradesh (India), Shoaib said, were far better at seeing what they needed and going for it, but all this is another story, *and* said Shoaib shrugging again, *really, I don't see this happening in Pakistan, the environment is not here, the opportunities are not here.*

Tariq Husain agrees to some extent but also argues there was just so much to do, and that in time women's turn would have come. Tariq laughs, *Meiko at the World Bank used to make fun of Shoaib and say for him there were no women in the villages. But,* says Tariq of Shoaib, really he was from a past that hadn't a clue about women. He didn't know much about agriculture either; he thought only of infrastructure, he understood canals and roads. And even today, if someone takes him to task about this knowledge gap, Shoaib infuriatingly agrees, says really he had little idea about agriculture and absolutely no idea about a women's programme, still doesn't, says cheerfully *well, if you want these things done find me someone who can do them, find me someone who can think of a programme for village women, find me some village women who can say what it is they want.*

Masood however believes that in the early years it was impressive simply that there were women working in the offices. Most were exceptional in some way like Sartaj Qadir in Chitral, a woman who managed to retain respect, hold on to her deeply held religious beliefs and still hold down a job. That her father was a liberal man no doubt helped. Most women staff however, was initially recruited from outside the north. Their tasks were also very general and they were safely based in an office. Human resources, greeting and meeting special visitors, administration, that was more or less it. Women were rarely recruited to lead other programmes, take to the field. Later this changed to include a sprinkling of junior female technical officers, agriculturalists, veterinarians, foresters, and after Shoaib was long gone, one failed attempt to place a female as head of one of the short-lived field management units, an appointment Shoaib would never have made without a lot of consultation with staff and community leaders. In 1997, women staff in fact had to be removed from general field posts in Baltistan because of directives passed by religious leaders. With Shoaib gone, management had overlooked the need to negotiate such postings with religious groups. They perhaps imagined that sort of thing was all in the past. It wasn't, of course. It was all in the future.

Apart from having to walk a very delicate line with religious leaders, employing women in the workplace in the north is very costly. Women need separate offices, separate vehicles, and very trustworthy drivers. Sahib Nadir Khan, ever the optimist, extravagant in his praise, says that what Shoaib did about women in Chitral, in the whole organisation, in fact, having them in the office, starting women's organisations, was a miracle.

In 1992, another miracle was needed. In Islamabad, Shoaib noticed he was beginning to be short of breath on his customary daily climb in the nearby Margalla Hills. An electrocardiogram showed nothing but his legs on a walk were lead-like and the pain was increasing, *I could not even keep up with Roohi*

he said. The doctors were sure his heart was failing. So was Shoaib. To prove it he needed an angiogram.

It was not the best of times to have a faulty heart. In Gilgit events were piling up, coming to a head, Shoaib felt he simply could not just walk away, plead health problems, he was not that sort of man. He needed to be well, appear well, so he said nothing and worked on. What if he had just dropped dead one day, I asked. Shoaib had laughed heartily; *it would be God's will.*

The year 1993 began badly for Shoaib. Maybe his weak heart was another reason he had not fought harder, had left Hussain Wali in his place to hold the fort. Shoaib was wounded and did not really know if the wound was a mortal one. There was always the chance too, even if it was a small one; if Hussain Wali could hold on long enough, the Board in Karachi would realise how wrong they had been, and he could quietly return. A damaged heart spins off all sorts of strange side effects including feelings of doom, depression. He had lost Falaknaz, her two children, a near mortal blow, then he had lost his brilliant star of the north AKRSP, and to cap it all, without warning, Benazir's new government was hounding him to return the half billion rupee endowment her predecessor and political opponent Nawaz Sharif had given the NRSP. Shelley, tears in her eyes said *it was all just so awful, it took so much out of him; it was all we talked about then.* In his darkest moments he was now plagued by a secret worry: would he be able to continue working, support his family?

Shoaib waited until May of 1993 when his annual leave was due. In London he had the angiogram. The result? An artery was badly clogged, and a heart by-pass operation was urgently required. *Otherwise you would have been right, I really might have dropped dead,* Shoaib laughed, perhaps relieved that something could be done. *A Mr Keats did the operation, a doctor not the poet* Shoaib chuckled at his pun and dismissed the whole medical procedure and the aftermath as a highly amusing incident. *Imagine this* he says, vastly amused by the idea, *my heart out on a table like a piece of wood in a carpenters shop, a machine keeping me alive, a machine, imagine that* wiping away tears of laughter. Three weeks and Shoaib was ready to return to Islamabad. He was beginning to walk briskly again; maybe he could climb a mountain soon.

Musarrat wanted Shoaib to stay on longer, take a few more gentle walks in the park with Tim, *a wonderful son-in-law* says Shoaib. *But so much was waiting for me,* things to do, money to be earned, another life to lead. In England he was nothing, could do nothing. It was simply a place to come for repairs and recuperation. Back in the subcontinent again, back where he is known, where he is able to walk into any office, where he is recognised. Shoaib is this huge figure, this enormous walnut tree, revered, says Izhar Hunzai.

Tariq Husain dreams, so do many others. They dream of a wonderful past. *It can never be the same again* says Tariq Husain, *never,* takes a thoughtful bite, remembers, sits forward says, *you know, in the first few years in Gilgit we were like one big family.* And then it all comes tumbling out again, the stories. He is not telling us, he is telling himself. *That first office,* he laughs, *you should have seen it, just two very cold rooms in a shop in the bazaar.* Shakes his head, smiles at memories of the very old kerosene heater that gave out more fumes than heat and how sometimes it was better to just work outside, gloved and blanketed, how more often than not there was no electricity all day. Says Feroz Shah would sit in the Hunza Inn covered in quilts, dreams, says in a distant voice how at night they would write their notes by lantern light, how they all lived like this for months until they moved into an office with a generator and a mess, but still there was this enormous spirit of adventure, how they made their own rules as they went along.

There was just so much to do, and he laughs again: they had no time to dwell on the appalling conditions. Dreams some more, says how in later years at the Chinar Inn when Shoaib had finished eating his frugal dinner he would lie on his bed busy working on his files, munching fruit, sometimes Musarrat would be on one side if she was there, a daughter in a chair, Maliha and Tariq and a couple of others sitting around, talking. Says, once Shoaib turned yellow because he ate too many papayas, a huge joke, *the yellow man of the mountains* Tariq laughs.

Tariq still dreaming, remembers how they made rules and procedures through consultation, through group consensus and compromise, laughs at the memory of big fights with the Board and the Aga Khan Foundation people in Geneva, says how in Gilgit Shoaib did not ride roughshod over anyone, how he improvised all the time, how there were some who resented this and complained, how he would always listen and sometimes adjust. Down in Karachi or over in Geneva *they could not believe how fast we were moving* Tariq laughs again, thought we might have been fudging it, asked 'how can you spend so much so quickly'. But really, it was easy he says, *you just had to be there and see the pace at which we all worked.*

Those closest to Shoaib believe everything happened very quickly after Falaknaz's death, went downhill faster than they could ever have imagined. How the two, Shoaib and his organisation, were indivisible, how what happened to one happened to the other, no they all say, it can never be the same again. In the villages Shoaib's people say the same, the dream is dead. When the GM Sahib left so did AKRSP.

Shah Gharib has seen his Hunza village change out of sight. There are irrigation canals, piped water, schools, health clinics, orchards and so much

more. Shah Gharib has the features of an Afghan Hazara. Apple-cheeked, eyes with the slightest hint of an epicanthic fold, one of Shoaib's men to the core, he is an activist of the old school. He knows about loss. He was one of those who danced with the other old men at the village of Nasirabad, clad in long white embroidered shokas, white pakhols with flowers in the brim, circling slowly, swords held high, the dance of another era, gone now. The young men in their trousers and white shirts, jackets over their arms, gathered in knots to talk of business opportunities. They admired the dancing elders but did not seek to dance themselves. They were no longer interested.

Trying to mobilise his village even before Shoaib arrived, Shah Gharib had failed. *Before the GM Sahib came the people were deaf to me* he said smiling, *he opened their ears*. Then he spoke as so many have, of Shoaib refusing gifts, of allowing everyone to speak, *even silly people*, of how fast the village organisations grew, of how slow things are now, of Shoaib Sahib *offering services with his heart*, of the sadness of his leaving. Did he know why Shoaib left; did he want to say more? No, he decided and shook his head, *but we really miss him, it is just not the same now.*

The list of those who wanted to talk of Shoaib, sometimes travelling from distant villages, inviting us into their lives, fills page after page of my notebook. All of them want to speak of their memories, make sure the world hears what they have to say about a man they came to love.

The village poet Abdullah Malang was covered in dust and mortar when he first met Shoaib, said *but he did not mind*; the arch-activist Ahmed Jami Sakhi curled his lip, said Shoaib was driven out by politics, by people who should have known better, says Shoaib was the best, says how badly hurt Shoaib was, how the dream, his dream is finished; Ikramullah Jan believes he owes Shoaib everything, a humble man, he is recognised not for his antecedents but because he has worked for Shoaib. One of those who are able to combine pride and humility, Ikram paused to think and then added, *how can someone like me summarize a man like Shoaib Sahib, how?* And then he smiled, he had thought of something, *Shoaib Sultan is a believer*, nodding to himself to confirm the rightness of this statement, *yes, he is a believer and now so are we, all of us, not just workers but believers.* And having said this Ikram sat back and smiled. He was finished. If enough people still believed, was the dream dead? If we too were believers we would understand. If not, then the chances are we would not write a very good book. Only a believer could do that.

Despite the blows fate had delivered, the utter calamity of Falaknaz's death, Shaw's desertion and the Board's moves to oust him, Shoaib still took time to think of old friends. In 1991 for example he still had time to take a grieving Dr. Shahida and give meaning to her life again. Shahida's husband Jaffrey, the

urbane international banker, had suffered a massive heart attack and not only was Shahida bereft, to her, Pakistan was almost a foreign country. Musarrat apparently had reservations about Shahida, thought Shoaib was burdening himself with a 'crying woman', but all Shahida needed was something worthwhile to do. That was Shoaib's gift.

When Shahida arrived in Gilgit in 1990, the women's hostel still only had electricity three times a week, for three hours in the evening. For the first time in her life Shahida could not just flick a switch, instead she had to deal with living by lantern light, being warmed by kerosene heaters. A plosive *hah*, a shoulder shrug, *all my designer clothes from France or Italy smelt of kerosene, it was the perfume of the north, and something definitely had to be done about the toilets.*

Something would be done.

Off in the helicopter next day Shahida entered a new world. A world where every time the helicopter landed in a cloud of dust and flying chickens the entire village would be there *and you know, Shoaib would just step out, and there were all these poor people with dirty clothes and he would shake their hands, hug every one. It was freezing and I just sat on the ground and watched as he talked to them. You could see they loved him. He knew all their names, all their problems, their families. He talked to all these poor, winter-dirty villagers as if they were people.*

That day, the helicopter took in five different villages and when it ended Shahida was a changed person. The kerosene fumes, the freezing conditions faded, the toilets could of course be cleaned, that day Shahida began her own journey, one that has taken her far, taken her to a women's university in Balochistan where perhaps only the aura of her second husband, a Balochi noble, Sikandar Hayat Jamali keeps her safe; that and her own formidable presence. Shahida almost glares, daring me to contradict her, says she owes Shoaib more than she can ever repay. '*He picked me up, showed me what I could do with my life. He helped me stand on my own two feet again when I had completely broken down. How many people would bother to do that? How many people would bother with a sobbing widow'?* A sobbing widow? Hard to imagine and right now you would never guess. She laughs again, her voice almost booms, saying oh yes, she was, but not now, that when she is angry the world knows it, and I imagine it does, but when Shoaib is angry he is very quiet, but that the world knows it even more. Were there any rumours? *Of course there were* says Shahida, *there are always those sort of people; he was a warm and caring man to everyone, but he was also very, very conscious of his reputation, very correct*, and then her eyes twinkled, *and so of course was I.*

In 1998, Shahida built her own beautiful retreat in Gilgit. Like Shoaib, Shahida's Gilgit is a place of dreams.

As the ultra-bright daughter of Humayan, Shoaib's cousin and batch mate, Shandana would have been hard put to escape AKRSP. Although she had a rocky start, leaving Gilgit after three weeks because, as she said in her no nonsense manner *there was this huge boring training class*, challenged by Shoaib she went back and stayed for four years. She became one of Shoaib's 'young people'. There were people from all over the world staying in the hostel, the talk was amazing and exciting, and the field work was something else, *I loved the field work. It was wonderful; you can blame the hostel for many of the very best ideas*. She says she thinks some people may have thought it tough because there were serious electricity problems, no television, water shortages, and this in a land that ran with water, *but at that age none of it mattered*. And the talk was amazing, as Tim le Breton remembers, *there were a lot of very intelligent young people with nothing much to do except to sit around and talk so of course there were grumbles, of course there were some outrageous things said, but there were also a lot of very interesting ideas*. The hostel was also mixed, *except for bedrooms of course* said Shandana grinning cheekily, *which caused a lot of gossip in the bazaar and scandalised the local religious hierarchy because really, it was unusual even elsewhere in Pakistan.*

Shoaib would drop in two or three times a week, sometimes after a walk, *for a cup of tea* said Shandana, so would Hussain Wali, *and even if you were only an intern you felt Shoaib cared because he would ask about your work: listen even if he had heard it all before.* A generator appeared, they only had to ask, and then a television set, *he did not hesitate for a minute if we asked, he was not in any way a scrooge, he wanted us to be as comfortable as possible but we had to ask, always said how would he know what we wanted.* Of course, Shandana grimaced wrinkling her nose, *the kerosene heaters were always awful, smelly and temperamental, and the fumes made your head heavy but really we didn't care.* Neither did Shoaib, not about his own comfort.

Hazir Shah from Yasin we already know. A fine old man but now rather deaf. We had to shout. Yes, he said, the GM Sahib never cared much about himself. Once, Shoaib had flown straight back from Geneva, hopped in his jeep intending to head out to a village immediately. Shoaib was hungry and Hazir says he begged him to take food in his house, told Shoaib not to buy biscuits at a booth as they were old and stale. Shoaib had laughed, waved Hazir's protests away, of course he wouldn't take Hazir's food, so there was the GM Sahib straight from the elegant restaurants of Geneva said Hazir, walking along, munching on a packet of old biscuits without a care in the world, as if they were the finest food he had ever eaten.

Something new. Another insight.

Shandana said Shoaib constantly set 'little character tests'. Once he airily said the helicopter would drop Shandana off at Jaglot and that 'some arrangement would be made after that'. Shandana admits to considerable nervousness. Jaglot was in the middle of a hard-core conservative Sunni area. She was duly deposited and there of course a jeep was waiting. *He used to do this sometimes*, she smiled, *often with new people to help him assess how you would behave if things got tough.*

It was the village of Gultheri that finally jolted Shandana, opened her eyes to what life meant to a northern mountain woman. Perhaps it was another one of Shoaib's tests because the helicopter had been sent to evacuate a critically ill woman. Shandana was on it just for the ride; or so she thought. Although it was April, the village was still frozen solid; the snow still two metres deep. The village was close to Indian held territory so there was an army outpost nearby, warm and well supplied but in the village it was the end of the long winter so fuel wood supplies were low and food bins were nearly empty. Said Shandana in a very quiet voice, *everyone was cold, hungry and dirty. The women kept clutching at my warm clothes, feeling my clean hair; I just could not believe that such a place existed. Why would anyone choose to live there, I asked myself again and again?* Shandana says she never ever forgot Gultheri; when things are tough she remembers that somewhere, high in the mountains, women are still living in villages like Gultheri. *It could be me*, she says.

Shandana also disagrees with Shoaib, does not think people are the same everywhere, believes at the beginning the people of the north were different, simpler, more honest and open, more straightforward, so very different to the brooding feudal villages of Punjab or Sindh. And of course, she says, it was easier working with Ismaili communities, far from easy on her first field visit to a Sunni area near Jaglot. There was an invisible barrier she said, particularly in the Sunni areas, not so much in Shia Baltistan, but the Sunni areas were difficult, perhaps even impossible. Shandana tells of walking behind an older hill man as they climbed to the meeting place, trying to start a conversation only to be told abruptly and rudely to stop talking, to *go and talk to the women*. To the old man's surprise Shandana stood her ground, said *the way you treat your women they learn nothing and so know nothing so I am talking to you*. Shandana won her point. The men sat and listened to her. After all she was a Northern Frontier woman.

When in 1993, Hussain Wali had reluctantly stepped in to 'hold the fort', Shandana says Shoaib's influence was still huge. *We never really felt he had left because he was there so often* she laughs. She says she knew Shoaib had not wanted to leave and that Hussain Wali was there as a reluctant 'stand-in', but

that it was only much later that she became privy to all the reasons why. One day at the Chinar Inn, she cannot remember exactly why she was there, but she clearly remembers Shoaib saying bitterly, 'all this (AKRSP's decline) happened because of them (AKRSP's Board), I would never have just left'. *That was the time* she said, *when the penny dropped, when I realised he had actually been forced out. Perhaps only a few like Hussain Wali really knew.* Shandana thinks Izhar knew but he says no, *well, maybe Izhar didn't know* she says, *maybe he (Shoaib) did not want anyone to know that he had not wanted to leave, maybe he did not want to say it because there may have been repercussions.* Maybe.

After he left, AKRSP went quite off-course she says, adding quickly, *although I could be wrong* very aware of her current position where she must be seen to be totally fair, *but now at last he openly says 'look, it is not working, and* (this to the AKRSP Board) *I have been telling you why it won't work for many years. It is time you listened to me'. Right now* she says *the AKRSP Board is listening at last to Shoaib, saying 'Yes, you were right. What can we do'?* And this is Shandana's point. Shoaib has infinite patience. It has taken twelve long years for this admission, for the AKRSP Board to admit Shoaib has been right. For all that time he endured the harsh criticisms, being ignored, did not give up his dream; he knew he was right. And this is how Shandana sees Shoaib, how many people see Shoaib: A man of conviction; a man who can wait; a man who believes in his dream; a man who will never give up.

Maintaining the dream has not been easy. Many of those we interviewed spoke of Shoaib's ability to 'move between worlds', of his being as at home in a village as he is in the offices of the world's top international organisations, the most prestigious universities; how his ethical approach to leadership was impressive; how he would not bend the rules, do something underhand, how he would say *well, if people do not like what I am doing bad luck, find somebody else*, which, as one eminent Ismaili notable said, *this is an exceptional attribute in our part of the world.*

There have been times, said our eminent informant, when ethical circumstances demanded Shoaib take a stand and he always took that stand, sometimes at considerable cost to himself, and this has not been easy. In Pakistan, people expect favours, expect rules to be bent if you have the power to bend them, but he did not. *I, and many like me would rather deal with a man like this than anyone else.*

No doubt at all. Shoaib engendered admiration; he also commanded fierce loyalties.

He could do this very quickly, said Masood who never forgets a favour or a slight. Once, in the early days, Masood was commissioned to carry out a study.

He completed it, six months passed, and he remained unpaid. Shoaib heard about it, said immediately, *withdraw the money from AKRSP, I will sort it out.* He did. Masood surprises me, sits back, smiles, quotes Thomas Babington Macaulay on Clive of India, *'when he forded deep waters/ He made a bridge/ The lame could hobble and the blind'* and says, *that is what Shoaib has done, forded deep waters, made a bridge over which the poor could walk where they could not walk before.* There is a poet in every man of the north, even in the soul of princes.

Shoaib's eldest daughter Roohi speaks of Maliha as another powerful woman, quiet, sometimes very quiet, but strong nevertheless, equally forceful, says *still waters run deep.* Maliha smiles when I speak of Shoaib's dream, says she is not really a dreamer but was always deeply impressed by his total commitment to a simple formula, and how the simplicity and consistency of the message was what village people appreciated. She said how Shoaib has been saying the same thing since 1982 and his commitment to it is very inspiring, how he talks about it with great passion, if he hadn't it would not have spread like wildfire, how you need that kind of belief if you are to be someone like Shoaib, and then she smiled, said *I don't have it; I am a bit of a sceptic.* However, like so many of Shoaib's 'bright stars', she questions whether his simple formula can handle the next generation of issues, those that come once you have got the community together and working.

What really happened to AKRSP? Why is it a pale shadow of its former self? Has it fulfilled its destiny? Is it no longer needed by the people of the north?

Jump forward to the mid 1990s. Hussain Wali has come and gone, disappointed and disheartened. Sahib Nadir Khan, our Chitrali lawyer, said when it was clear Shoaib was leaving, he, Nadir Khan went to Masood ul Mulk, told him he should be the next general manager. Masood declined. He did not want to become enmeshed in Ismaili power-plays because by that time it was clear that the Board in Karachi and the Aga Khan Foundation office in Geneva had taken over. Masood doubted he could take AKRSP back, did not want to start a fight he knew would be inevitable. Masood also had a vision for Chitral, a vision that would take electricity to the valleys. He stayed with his vision until it was a reality. Then he also left.

Shoaib is harassed, heckled, his ideas belittled at Board meetings and elsewhere. Mean words are spoken, as we know, reducing some of Shoaib's few supporters on the Board to tears, astounding others. Shoaib endures them all in silence; he is a gentleman of the old school. The new general manager Stephen Rasmussen is one of the attackers. A sometimes troubled man he was brave during the 'golden handshake' affair when hundreds of staff were dismissed or paid to leave, when angry protesters blockaded the Gilgit offices, when death

threats arrived in unmarked envelopes. Ironically, in the years after Shoaib's departure, donor funding was at a peak—AKRSP was literally awash with money. No question that Rasmussen tried his best to carry out the Board's directives. All sorts of ideas were tried and failed including starting up a number of commercial enterprises, a coal mine, seed production, enterprises the Board and the new general manager were convinced would be able to be spun out of AKRSP as independent businesses. This was a huge departure from Shoaib's day, from Shoaib's basic formula. AKRSP became caught up in the same old development game as everyone else, creating organisations for the people and then wondering why they failed and why the people did not want them, why support was so listless.

The idea of setting up farm management units out in the field starts out with fanfare. They are meant to improve the delivery of goods and services. It is however a case of taking a wrong idea to its logical conclusion. If the new guru, Professor Geoff Wood, was right and village organisations had passed their use-by date, and if Shaw was also right with his 'terra incognita' allegations, then AKRSP needed to address its weaknesses. The delivery of goods and services was thought to be one of them, even Shandana thought so at the time although she was not an advocate, not one of those who dreamed up the idea. But nobody likes the units. Not the villagers, and certainly not the new graduate staff who find themselves way out in the valleys where there is no television, no electricity, and where the living is hard, cold and friendless. They also do not know who they should report to. Unit managers may have local experience, but many have fewer professional qualifications than some of their staff. Unwilling to answer to a manager less qualified than they are many of the unit's staff report directly to their technical section heads back at headquarters, by-passing the unit managers. The whole thing degenerates into a messy, ungovernable affair.

Reporting falls into disarray. As Khaleel Tetlay says, *a lot of week old newspapers are read*. Any excuse for a trip to regional headquarters taken. Some of the new technical staff try of course but it is an uphill battle. Most of the good ones look for other opportunities.

Villagers don't like them either. They didn't ask for field management units to be established and anyway, they believe their own skills and those of their trained activists are as good if not better than those grudgingly offered by the new graduates; that is if the new technical officers can be found at their posts, something that becomes increasingly infrequent. Villagers also resent losing their social organisers, resent having another level placed between them and the people who count: those who make the big decisions back at regional headquarters. Field management units gradually sink into oblivion, abandoned

by staff, ignored by villagers, used as unlovely storerooms. Sitting in his lovely house on the Kargha Nullah near Gilgit, Hussain Wali shrugs, calls them a flop.

Some districts, some village communities soldiered on. Chitral remains quietly brilliant under the independent and gifted Masood ul Mulk; Hunza also more or less goes it alone. In Chitral, and despite initial opposition from central management in Gilgit and from donors who have tried and failed, Masood takes on the idea of village managed mini-hydroelectric generating plants. Using Shoaib's methods of working through the villages the idea exceeds Masood's wildest expectations. Mistakes are made of course but are easily corrected because light and power are what the people want. They laugh off setbacks. One by one, villages in the valleys of Chitral begin to twinkle with hundreds of fluorescent lights, each small power plant maintained and serviced by village specialists. So significant is this achievement that as we already know, it snares a prestigious international prize—the prestigious Ashenden Award.

Then Shoaib's replacement, the man who was merciless in his criticism at Board meetings, Steven Rasmussen, finds his day is over. He has done all that was asked of him but not only have some of the various AKRSP-sponsored enterprises not lived up to expectations, the organisation itself seems to be faltering. Even worse, donors are beginning to jump ship. Rasmussen takes the fall. Upset and confused he knows he has been a good servant but he has not been good enough. AKRSP flies on for a time, living on past glories, and then like a dying comet slowly flames out, dropping out of sight back into the northern mountains. It sits there now under a new general manager, an older Izhar Hunzai, once one of Shoaib's bright young men, once at the top but now a minor member of the Aga Khan Development Network.

Where is it going? Nowhere. That is where it is going.

Shoaib quietly, passionately argues that there were two issues, two interventions which quenched the dream, which led AKRSP to become a pale shadow of its former self. One of these was led by Geoff Wood, a British academic, one of the few people about whom Shoaib seems unable to find one good word, and the other was the bank, the First Microfinance Bank, dream-child of the Karachi businessmen.

Masood has a story to tell. He thinks it was either 1993 or 1994 when news filtered over to Chitral of a British PhD student, a girl called Julie Lawson, whose provocative activities were too much for the Gilgit office. They had decided to 'bundle her out'. A potential embarrassment for AKRSP, a solution was sought. The word went out and as Masood says, *the British government had been very kind to Chitral so I was willing to take her off their hands.*

Masood arranged for Lawson to finish her work at Booni, a mainly Ismaili enclave nestled below the gateway to the Shandur Pass, whose people were known to be outspoken and argumentative. Shortly after Lawson had been re-assigned to Booni her academic supervisor arrived, introduced himself as Professor Wood from Bath University in England. Masood made little of the visit. He had never heard of Bath University but no matter, visitors were welcome, so were new ideas. Masood absorbs ideas like a sponge, spits out those that make no sense builds on those that do. Wood had done a lot of his early work in Bangladesh and Masood was happy to talk to him about his experiences, share ideas, as he did with all potentially interesting visitors. After Wood left, Masood gave no more thought to the visit.

Next thing Masood knows is that one Fayyaz, a monitoring and evaluation staff member, came *huffing and puffing into my office and began apologising for what he had done*. Masood says he didn't have a clue what Fayyaz was talking about so he settled back to see if any sense could be made out of the situation.

Fayyaz had been sent to a village called Bang, whose people were notorious for being argumentative. He was sent there to write a note about how the area's Social Organiser had settled a particularly virulent dispute. Masood thought the experience might be an eye-opener. It was; Fayyaz said the whole trip had been a revelation. It had changed his entire view of life. He had come to apologise. It was not only his views on village organisations that had been mistaken: before he went off on the field trip he had made another mistake, a big one. He had helped the English Professor Wood and Wood's student Lawson to write a secret note to the British aid office in Islamabad, a note that said unless there were major changes in AKRSP the organisation was likely to end up an ossified nonentity like its mentor in Comilla; that village organisations were now redundant; that the entire approach needed to be rethought.

Masood says he was stunned. All this had happened under his watch and he had known nothing about it, had not been consulted. Fayyaz left the office.

There was, however, little Masood could do except to try and bring things out into the open. Perhaps Wood had some ideas they could take on board. So he wrote to the Aga Khan Fund, suggested they should use some of their consultancy funds to bring Wood back, defend his views. Was this a mistake? Masood shrugs. If it hadn't been Wood it would have been someone else, he believes.

So enter Geoff Wood again, by all accounts a jolly, quite personable man, someone who enjoyed life, made people laugh. An improbable giant killer but Shoaib believes with all his heart, that is exactly what Wood did, kill a giant, destroy AKRSP.

As Masood already knew, Wood had cut his teeth in the social hothouse of rural Bangladesh. He arrived there in 1973-74, young and ambitious and imbued with left-wing ideals. The story he told Masood was that he took himself hot foot to Comilla where in a very short time he was able to conclude that Akhter Hameed Khan's ideas were now outdated and irrelevant. He claimed that the Comilla model had accentuated the stratification of society, had benefited the rich and the smart and left the poor and landless out in the cold. The poor and landless, Wood said, could not be served by the same institution that worked for land holders. His answer was for specific non-governmental organisations to be given the responsibility of supporting the landless, looking after women and so on, said Masood. In doing this, Wood apparently claimed that he had undone all the work Akhter Hameed had ever done in Comilla.

A professor now, Wood brought these same ideas with him to the Northern Areas and took immediate aim at the concept of Village Organisations. He posited such organisations could never deal with the huge differentiation that occurred between and within villages. Shoaib's model he said, had run its race, should be abandoned. Wood was wrong, says Masood, there was no single, monolithic village model. Each village made its own modifications, and adapted their organisation to suit their particular circumstances. What Shoaib had done was to give each village organisation the task of looking after their own poor, their own disadvantaged members, so that special outside organizations for the poor were not only simply unnecessary, their need was based on the assumption that village people cannot be trusted, that the poor need to be helped by outsiders.

Masood was not alone. The idea that a village organisation was a non-representative forum was nonsense, something that was simply not true, said Hussain Wali, *maybe some people missed out when new land was developed; perhaps some new arrivals did not have enough land; maybe there were widows; but these were matters the village organisation took care of because the people concerned were not strangers, they were family. Such matters simply cannot be managed from outside, never, even if the donors think they should be. What* asked Hussain Wali, *do they do about the poorest of the poor in their own countries? Do they do well?* Good question.

The most important strengths of the village organisations, strengths Shoaib cultivated, were the ability to have confidence in their own ideas and priorities; a willingness to negotiate with outside agencies from a position of confidence; and to refuse any form of assistance that did not fit the combined village's ideas of what that village needed and the direction it wanted to go. Wood apparently refused to believe that a village organisation could and would be totally inclusive. Instead, he wanted outside agencies to deal selectively with those they considered the poorest of the poor.

AKRSP swallowed Wood's theory whole. From his base at the University of Bath, Wood then set up special staff training courses which the British Government was happy to fund. Everyone was happy. Wood the jolly academic puffs away on his pipe, the air aromatic with tobacco smoke. He talks well, is a socially cheerful man, makes friends easily, people like him. He likes them in return, likes the subcontinent, likes Pakistan. His months in the spectacularly sited Hindu Kush Heights Hotel are sheer bliss. He can smoke his pipe until the bowl burns hot, take a mountain stroll. When he lectures no one interrupts, everyone listens, no one asks questions. He presents his lectures as he would to his students at Bath University, as if the lectures were a buffet meal. Select what you like, go hungry if you want; the choice is yours. Unaccustomed to this free-wheeling mode of teaching, many indeed go hungry.

Wood's six-week courses were supposed to teach staff to interact sensitively with villagers but what some ask, had AKRSP staff been doing for ten years under Shoaib, and a further two years under Hussain Wali? Interacting insensitively? And can an English professor tell them how to deal with their own people? He does not use the villages as teaching places.

Wood, says Masood, had little idea of the tremendous variability among village organisations, that they are far from being a single entity, yet he wants to tear down the notion of village organisations. Wood offers an explanation in an academic paper he calls 'Developing the Art and Avoiding the Totem'. In this paper he posits that in the Northern Areas, the organisation (AKRSP), is the most important element in the development equation. Against this Wood said, village organisations were just a totem, a magical formula that no longer worked. This makes Shoaib furious because he says Wood had entirely missed the point that it was not AKRSP's role to move on unless asked to do so by the villages. Says Shoaib time and again, *it is the role of organizations for the poor to respond to organizations of the poor and not the other way around.* This has always been a classic mistake in Western development thinking, the assumed supremacy of organizations for the poor. Few read Wood's paper; fewer still understand it, some are even mystified when they consult their dictionaries: there are no totem poles in Northern Area villages. *It was all utterly shocking* Masood writes, *AKRSP was about to enter a new phase with the largest funding ever and this new guru wanted to 'finish off' the social organisers, the programme's main interface with the communities.*

Some social organisers are sent to Lahore's University of Management Sciences. While many social organisers had done a brilliant job in the field, knew intuitively how to make things work in a village context, they were totally lost when asked to read and comment on the Harvard Business Review. Says Masood, many had rarely read a newspaper let alone a learned journal. University staff

members were irritated at AKRSP bothering to send people who were so unprepared, so out of their depth. The result was highly negative—Social Organisers became even more uncertain of themselves and their self-confidence, self-belief plummeted. Unable to resist the onslaught, Masood writes, they tamely surrendered. Wood rests his case. Says Masood, as the process of 'unlearning' with Geoff Wood continued, it was not surprising to find livestock specialists (promoted) as AKRSP's top academic sociologists and managers.

What alternative did Wood offer? 'None' he replied when asked, 'not my job, up to you to work out one'. Masood believes Wood's entire 'attack' was based on his misconception that there was only one type of village organisation. In actuality there was a 'rich variability', an enormous diversity between village organisations, each one reflecting the reasons for the organisation's establishment and the local cultural outlook of the members. 'But we failed to make this clear', he writes. Outsiders thus had a vision of hundreds of look-alike village organisations when the opposite was true. There were of course some that were created for a single purpose such as a road, a bridge or a microhydel, while others were created to take the entire village forward. Some seemed to disappear at times only to reappear when a new venture was afoot. Others became themselves the venture.

'The evolution of village organisations' writes Masood, 'has been very complex and varied from place to place', and adds that the experience of setting up an organisation does not just die out. Those villages where a village organisation has been in operation can always revive it if they wish. This, says Masood, is perhaps Shoaib's ultimate legacy.

Masood says Wood once said with a laugh, 'when Shoaib went to his first village he asked the villagers what were their needs, when I went to my first village I asked how was everyone related to one another'. Says Masood quietly, *one set out to build an organisation to serve the people, the other to x-ray the people and tear down the organisation leaving nothing in its place.* Masood says he frequently pushed Wood, said criticism is easy, give us some solutions. Wood just cheerfully puffed on his pipe and made his stock reply, 'that is your business, not mine'.

Wood's student Lawson was also a critic, but later as she travelled the world, she admitted Masood had been absolutely right. He had said she would never find anything like AKRSP anywhere. She hadn't.

Shoaib is bitter about Wood, *you know* he starts, as bitter and angry as he ever gets, *you... they... just*, he cannot go on, recovers and says bitterly, *that learned gentleman, what was his name*, he knows of course but the words stick in his throat, *ah yes, Wood, that was his name.*

He speaks of Wood as a wrecker, as convincing a ready-to-listen Board that village organisations had reached their use-by date, *how could they believe this*, he splutters. He masters his rage, the first and only time he has been like this in all the weeks we have been together, asks again in a low quiet voice, *how could they?* He forgets, after all Wood is English, and a professor. The donors believed him too.

Shoaib says he challenged Wood once at a Board meeting, one of the few where both were present. Shoaib says he demanded to know exactly what Wood proposed should replace village organisations, says he was utterly shocked by Wood's blithe reply, a carbon copy of what Wood had said to Masood, 'not my job, I have just been telling people to think out of the box, do something different'. Can you believe this, Shoaib said, I was rendered speechless, I just sat there the wind completely taken out of my sails thinking how could anyone be so carelessly destructive, destroy a working organisation, something very beautiful, walk away and not give one suggestion how it might be rebuilt again, shakes his head, says so quietly we have to strain to here the words, how could he?

Shoaib believes this was the beginning of the end, that Wood's activities sounded the death knell for AKRSP. But he is still optimistic, thinks that it is all still there ready to resurface, that the system has so much resilience that once taken up by villagers it can readily resurface. Masood agrees. Tariq Husain says Wood saw only one part of the whole, that yes, the poorest of the poor were not singled out for special attention because it was not necessary, says *we were not involved in social security, not involved in giving work to the unemployed; we had income generating programmes for those who could work and nothing much for those who could not. But we were starting to think about it, about specially targeted activities, not social sector stuff like health or water, but other ideas*. In any case, he argues, social service is a government function. Village organisations were perfect agents through which special government or other agencies could work, hand in hand.

There was no need at all to get rid of them. Entirely counter-productive in fact. Any fool could see that. Perhaps Wood did, he was not a fool. Perhaps he did, because by the third six-week course Wood was apparently having second thoughts about what he had wrought, admitting that perhaps, for the Northern Areas environment, the village organisation model might in fact be totally appropriate.

It is a huge admission, but a bit too late.

The die had been cast and AKRSP was now teetering on the edge of a slippery slope, damage done and whether he knew it or not, Wood had been used. Shoaib had been very nicely discredited.

Eventually the relationship between Wood and AKRSP soured. He wrote a book helped by some AKRSP staff and a couple of bright new graduates. There were also some studies, on migration, inter-generational poverty, and looking at whether there are some who win and some who lose when a new irrigation canal is built, which is exactly why Shoaib always demanded everyone's agreement, demanded everyone should talk every issue out before any project started including how to compensate anyone who stood to lose. The studies were of little interest to the villagers and had no impact at all on their future.

After Wood left, there were some token attempts to focus concern on the poorest of the poor. Three pilot projects were initiated. The villagers were quite receptive, and worked with AKRSP to identify their poorest families in order to channel resources and services to them. And why wouldn't they? They had nothing to lose; everything to gain. If someone else would look after the poor and the disadvantaged in a village it would certainly be a help, but if not they would manage as they always had. Village organisations were quite capable of doing this all by themselves and they knew it. The projects fizzled out and there it all ended.

Exit the Professor.

Was it all over? Not quite. There was a backlash, slow in coming, but a backlash nevertheless. Increasingly, AKRSP's staff felt Wood had needlessly belittled and denigrated their ideas. They bitterly resented being told they were wrong when they knew very well they were not. The antipathy grew to the point where an alarmed Board and a worried general manager fell back on Shoaib. They knew there was no one else whom the staff would listen to, no one else who could defuse this potentially explosive situation. Not wanting to see his beloved organisation self-destruct, Shoaib stepped into the breach, explaining somewhat ingenuously that all that Wood had done was just an academic exercise, it had been nothing more than an academic analysis, was not meant to really change anything. Staff listened, exhaled, went back to work, the situation calmed. Shoaib walked away knowing he had fudged, believing it was for the best.

Well, that was the professor, the man whom Shoaib can hardly bring himself to speak of; now for the bank. It was always about money, right from the very beginning. Like villagers watching a magician pulling rabbits out of a hat, the Karachi businessmen were utterly gobsmacked, no other word for it, by the growing mountain of rupees the poor villagers of the north put into the bank. *Savings, ah yes savings*, Shoaib laughed, *the Ismaili villagers, the first ones I went to, said 'our Imam didn't send you here to ask for our money'. Then it would all begin* said Shoaib, the slow, often tediously slow patient explanations, that nobody was taking anyone's money, that savings were a way to power.

Ha, Shoaib said, the plosive exclamation brings memories of Musarrat *in the non-Ismaili areas they were even more uncharitable saying we were just trying to get donations for the Ismaili Imam and they were not about to hand over their hard earned money for that.*

But eventually they did, everyone did. Savings became a point of honour. And so the totals grew and grew. At the same time, credit was hard to come by for a villager; for a bag of fertiliser, for a few tools.

Shoaib delved into his old boy network and turned up a trump. A former Brahmanbaria duck shooting friend, Rashid, was a man of influence—he happened to be chairman of the country's Banking Council. In Gilgit a scheme had been devised where farmers could borrow six thousand rupees. Aimed to help small farmers, not one loan had been taken out. Villagers had no collateral acceptable to the bank, and who needed six thousand rupees anyway? An astronomical amount, most village farmers needed a few hundred rupees not six thousand. Ever precise, Shoaib says the amount was exactly two hundred and thirty-nine rupees. So two hundred and thirty-nine it is. But if the banks cannot handle such small loans, was there another way?

Shoaib has an idea. Gathering-in one Saifur Rehman, the vice-president of Habib Bank, Shoaib took him out to the villages. *See what I mean* said Shoaib, *they only need small amounts but what if Habib Bank could give AKRSP a single largish wholesale loan which the organisation would then on-lend to villages as smaller group loans.* Saifur said he would ask Rashid for permission. He did not know Rashid was Shoaib's duck hunting friend from way back. Shoaib thought this very funny for of course Rashid would give the green light to the deal. That is what old duck hunting chums are for.

So Habib Bank happily handed over a quarter of a million rupees and the whole AKRSP village credit scheme was born. *Just think*, said Shoaib smiling, *this is how it all started, just think how it has all grown.* And grown it has. In 2006, Habib Bank had happily approved a four billion rupee line of credit for one of Shoaib's later rural support organisations, the National Rural Support Programme, all to be on-loaned to small borrowers.

Back to the 1980s. *In order to take the next step* said Shoaib, *I had to lay my job on the line. It was the only time I offered my resignation to the Board.* Shoaib wanted to loan village organisations an amount equivalent to their savings, charge a rate of interest equivalent to the rate they were earning on their savings accounts and use the savings accounts as collateral. As these accounts earned a similar rate of interest, the loans were in effect no cost. *It was up to them what they did with the loan,* Shoaib shrugged, *up to them to decide who among their members could be trusted, who would make good use of a small loan.* As this was a matter of policy, Shoaib could not really proceed without the agreement of both the Board in Karachi and Shaw in Geneva.

To Shoaib's consternation they balked.

Shaw thought the idea was retrogressive, that asking the villagers to put their savings on the line was not the right thing to do. Shoaib replied by asking if Shaw realised that at the moment the villagers' money was at the disposal of a commercial bank, that this was the very bank that lent to the businessmen of Karachi and Punjab. Did this make sense? Using the savings of poor villagers to finance the operations of rich industrialists? How would he explain this to donors? Wouldn't it make sense to show the villagers how to use their savings in their own backyard?

Shoaib got his way.

He was still too valuable, too close to the prince. If they let him resign, all of them from Karachi to Geneva would end up with egg on their faces. So they backed down, grudgingly. Were they happy? No they weren't Shoaib had laughed, they were not happy at all. Shoaib says none of them ever understood, approved of or for that matter trusted unconventional banking, and if nothing else Shoaib's proposal was unconventional. It was, agrees Shoaib, a battle in the boardroom, a real battle where Shoaib had to use his threatened resignation to prevail.

Almost magically, the new arrangement worked. In the villages Shoaib was the ultimate trusted umpire. They knew no one could withdraw any money without Shoaib's signature and he would only sign if every member of an organisation came and told him to sign. It was Shoaib and not the Board who was guarantor. Shoaib also appointed a full time auditor to monitor the accounts. *After Shoaib left*, he says, *they let slack into the system so there were some defaults especially in Baltistan*, but he added *in my time we only ever exerted pressure, we kept a close eye on all the accounts, and we had lots of forewarning if things were going off the rails. And there were no foreclosures, for how could we punish everyone for one person's faults?* All this slowly changed after Shoaib. *They just became lax*, says Shoaib *and you simply cannot afford this, you have to maintain vigilance, scrutiny all the time and everyone has to know this.*

The three wise men of Yorjogh nodded their heads, pursed their lips, said how good it was at the beginning but that later on too many people defaulted and 'we all had to pay', that this was a bitter pill to swallow, it had never happened while Shoaib Sahib sat in Gilgit, never.

The credit programme grew and grew and Shoaib and his people began casting about for ideas on where to go next. Was a village bank possible? In

1989, Shoaib invited Ron and Mary, the principals of Chicago's hugely successful people's bank, the Shore Bank, to come to Gilgit and help devise a workable village banking system. The Board and Shaw in Geneva nodded politely, read the report and shelved it. They had other ideas.

What next? The villagers say they are not interested in a commercial bank. They know real banks are fairly useless as far as their needs are concerned. They have heard the local manager of Habib Bank say that he simply cannot afford to write a loan for 239 rupees, that it would cost more to make the loan than the bank would earn in interest.

The Board does not listen. His Highness, they think, wants a bank; they want a bank, they understand banks; they think they know better than a bunch of villagers, people whose fathers, brothers are seasonal labourers in some of their factories. So a bank it will be. Will it benefit the villagers? Hopefully it will but a bank's job is also to make a profit. It might not help everyone.

Time after time, at almost every Board meeting, Shoaib will stand and make a plea not to go ahead with the idea of a commercial bank. The other Board members hear him out, wait until he sits down and then continue their discussions on how to set up the bank. The way they decide to finance it made Shoaib despair. They took one of his ideas and turned it to their benefit.

Sometime in the 1980s, Shoaib had persuaded the donors to allow him to establish a savings incentive scheme. For every rupee the villagers saved Shoaib would add a further rupee from donor contributions. By December 1992, the combined savings of the villagers of the north exceeded three hundred million rupees. This meant that a matching three hundred million of donor contributions had also been banked. Amounts like this would make any businessman worth his salt sit up and take note, very close note. And those who sat on the Board in Karachi were nothing if not good businessmen. A few hundred million rupees would go a long way to capitalise a bank. So that, we are told, is what they did. They dipped into the donor contributions, which by the time they were ready to establish their bank had grown to four hundred million rupees, transferred three hundred million rupees, money the villagers believed was really theirs, threw in another two hundred million rupees from a special Aga Khan fund and bingo: they had created a bank, a commercial bank.

The shareholders, of course, were AKRSP and another Aga Khan organisation. Shoaib shakes his head, grimaces, says, so there you are; the bank is essentially a commercial venture controlled by the Board of AKRSP and the Aga Khan Foundation. Villagers have no say in it at all and yet it was their money.

The idea of a commercial bank was always a contentious issue with Shoaib's bright young people. They also had heard the local manager of the

Habib Bank saying to anyone who would listen that there was no way he could send his staff trooping out to remote villages, process miniscule loans, it was just too costly. *A bank's job was to make money* he said, *not throw it away.*

Shoaib's bright young people believed the way forward was instead to keep tweaking the existing credit programme. Wrote Shandana Khan of that time, a bank was obviously part of the Aga Khan Foundation's great game plan and was totally in line with the thinking fashionable in development circles of the time.

Sitting in front of the fire in Masood's beautiful bungalow at Ayun, Sahib Nadir Khan the lawyer makes another appearance in this book, smiles and refuses to be drawn on a subject he believes his prince approves. He clears his throat, thinks, says *oh yes, the bank is a great success, already has branches all over Chitral, in Mastuj, Booni and Garam Chashma. Yes* he says, *no doubt it will be a great success*, moves on to another subject. It does not sound like he believes what he has just said.

Nor do they in the villages. *That bank*! Could the three wise men of Garam Chashma show more scorn?

They shrug, wave a dismissive hand, snort, *hah, even though our town is the Tehsil headquarters they have built a branch at Shoghor, at the entrance to the Karimabad valley.* And so they have. We went to see it and there it sits, a grand new stone walled building distancing itself from the grubby *chaikhanas* clustered around the tiny icy windswept jeep stop crouching at the bottom of the enormous Karimabad valley. It is an extraordinary juxtaposition. It sets out to impress, to awe those who dare to enter. And who would? It looks so modern, so clean, does a villager have to remove his leaking gumboots, squelch across the tiles, across the carpet, in socks if he is lucky but more than likely barefooted, squelch into the manager's office? Inside the building half a dozen clean, neatly dressed young men sit about behind desks sipping tea. There are no customers lined up to deposit or withdraw funds, not a single villager or shopkeeper; would a humble villager dare to ask for an audience with the manager?

In 1993, Masood took the consultants, whose task it was to find out how best to set up a bank, to Arandu ravine. The visitors perched uncomfortably on rocks surrounded by guards and armed tribesmen, said, 'you all know what wonderful work AKRSP has done; now we will provide you with a bank'. Silence, and then a question, what will a bank do for us? Will it bring drinking water to our villages?

Hah huff the three wise men of Garam Chashma again, the AKRSP credit system used to be fine, and then they exchange glances and add quickly, except interest rates were always too high, and we were all blamed if one person defaulted. This is the second time they have said this so obviously it still niggles. I

ask if this had happened very often. No, not that often, not very much at all they say and then they laugh, it was a good try. They haven't finished with the bank though, the best thing was that AKRSP came to us says Mohammad Wali while the others nod in agreement, we could get small loans and there was very little paperwork while this new bank does nothing to meet our needs, nothing at all.

Inevitably, the establishment of the bank saw a temporary resurgence of the anti-AKRSP lobby. Vitriolic tracts appeared, some crude others not. Nobody admits to writing them but there are those on both sides of the fence with axes to grind, grudges remembered. 'Flea bites' say the Board dismissively. Does anyone believe them? Who knows? As he always has, Shoaib finds such things utterly distasteful; Masood holds one example as if it were some noisome rag, passes it to me. It is. But throw enough mud and some of it will stick.

The manager of AKRSP's Gilgit office in 2007, a young man sure he is going places, Muzaffaruddin is not afraid to speak his mind; he dined with us one night at the Gilgit Serena hotel. Says despite Shoaib being sometimes highly critical they all want him back whenever he will come. He is loved. About the bank Muzaffaruddin clearly remembers a very upset Shoaib saying in 2002 'with such a limited framework I have no hope'. When Shoaib was helping to create new rural support organisations throughout the country he favoured the idea of a bank, says Muzaffaruddin, of creating a bank out of a rural support organisation, one with a social conscience, a people's bank. But it did not quite work out that way and so he withdrew. And when he found that microcredit was not to be an option offered by the Northern Areas bank Muzaffaruddin says 'his hopes were entirely dashed'.

What happened next? Alright says Muzaffaruddin, it was like this. With the entry of the new bank into the Northern Areas, a bank controlled by AKRSP's Board, all other microcredit activities ceased and when AKRSP stopped credit coverage, the number of villagers who had access to credit of any sort dropped from the hundreds of thousands to a few hundred credit-worthy people who lived in geographic proximity to a branch. The carefully crafted link between savings and credit, a link established by countless meetings, countless visits was broken and with it one of the key motivations for saving. Not knowing what else to do, many village organisations apparently simply handed back the accumulated savings of a decade or more to individual members. Very few opened an account in the new AKRSP controlled bank and most of the remnant savings are still in other banks. Why would anyone bother to move them? All that paperwork and no gain. For all his other faults, the previous general manager had really pushed microfinance and if that had been his role under Shoaib perhaps AKRSP would have been a very different organisation today. Together they may have been able to come up with something other than the bank.

Muzaffaruddin shrugs, *the disintegration of village organisations because of a breakdown in the savings programme is our biggest failure* he says, frustrated because there is little he can do about it. He believes that in Gilgit district alone, more than half of the previously vigorous and well established village organisations are in trouble. One positive, most of the women's organisations are still working well, their savings intact, perhaps, he says, because women are more stable, more in contact with the community. Savings, he says, are moving to women's organisations. And he should know. Gilgit is his patch.

And there you go, the end. In India, in Andhra Pradesh, Shoaib didn't even start with men. He began with women. That was the way it was. It has worked amazingly well but that is another story.

Shoaib does not believe it is the end, says look, the village organisations still hold a lot of cash, this is a huge asset and it should be used for productive purposes. As AKRSP is no longer offering any other form of credit, these savings are an opportunity begging for a solution. Shoaib says the answer in the north is in valley organisations. He cites Andhra Pradesh where a village banking system at the Mandal sub-district level is working beautifully, so why wouldn't it work in the north. *Yes* he says, and his voice gains strength, *all it needs is for AKRSP to once again become auditors, vigilant watchdogs,* brightens even more, says *look, we did it for years, the skills are all there, it could be done again*. Then he remembers, it is all in the past, will the Board listen to him?

They probably won't. Shandana believes that no matter how positive Izhar Hunzai may sound these days, AKRSP are dragging their feet on the issue of valley organisations. It is all about power, she thinks, it would mean surrendering a great deal of power to the new supra-village organisations, something AKRSP's Board has always resisted. Up in the valleys some are going ahead anyway, sometimes though on a track Shoaib thinks is wrong. One group employs and pays professionals to run the organisation, make decisions, tell the people what will be done. Shoaib thinks they might as well be a business. He is very disappointed, but was thrilled with the organisation fronted by the three wise men of Garam Chashma. *The best thing about our valley organisation* said Mohammad Wali, *is that even if people are too busy to think ahead, we can take the time to do so*. Amir Wali and Durdana Shah nod their heads in agreement. They and others on their committee all think a road to Central Asia would really set the economy of Garam Chashma going. *It is a big idea*, they say, *too big for one village, but not too big for us all*. It is wonderful to see their enthusiasm, their confidence, a road to Central Asia? But then again, why not? Engineers once thought the Soust tunnel was impossible.

The suggestion that under his watch AKRSP was not being professional makes Shoaib as angry as he ever gets. The staff was not professional, the approach was not professional, *what on earth did they mean* he growls? And then he changes in an instant. 'Had he been a manager', I ask? He says with a laugh he has no idea. This was the way he ran AKRSP he says, it was to unfailingly hold weekly programme planning meetings for management where all issues were on the table; to hold monthly managers' conferences for village organisations; monthly workshops for field staff following each managers' conference to deal with issues brought up by the villagers. Shoaib says this formula was religiously followed so that everyone knew what was going on, information flowed and the villager's needs were able to be instantly responded to. The minutes of every meeting were written up along with actions to be taken, Shoaib shrugged, *and that is how everyone knew what was happening, knew what they were supposed to do; was he being a manager, wasn't this a professional approach?* Simple but effective. *If you don't have this sort of interaction the organisation ceases to be effective* he insists. Everything in front of everybody. No secret meetings, no backbiting in the corridors. That is how Shoaib managed AKRSP.

Tim is a somewhat enigmatic young man, husband to Shelley. A native of Jersey in the Channel Islands, with a degree from Oxford and MBA from INSEAD, Tim is now based in Monaco and travels the world in pursuit of deals in the world of oil exploration and supply. It was a job in the oil fields that first took him to Pakistan where he met and fell in love with Shelley, removed himself from the world of commerce for a time and impressed by AKRSP, and of course with Shoaib's full collusion, in 1991 took up a position as an intern and staff member in Gilgit.

He stayed for nearly two years. They were years Tim vividly remembers. He speaks well, saying in his quiet and unassuming way, *I was impressed because the chap* (Shoaib) *had mobilized four million people across the Northern Areas and Chitral which tells you what sort of an organizer and manager he was. In my relatively short career I had not come across this sort of thing ever before.* He paused, was I with him? I was, went on, *of course Shoaib had a huge support network he could draw upon, and draw upon them he did, from his extensive old boy network in government, in business, and internationally, including the Aga Khan.* But, Tim added before I could ask the question, *it was his guidance and drive that put it all together.*

Had AKRSP outgrown Shoaib and was a new style of management needed to carry the organisation forward, *I definitely do not think so* Tim says, *it* (AKRSP) *was working extremely well.* And Tim had a very good comparative yardstick. He had worked for four years within a highly structured and efficient

oil services company and said he was amazed and refreshed to find an organisation such as AKRSP just as efficient as the very best private enterprise without the heavy management structure and rules of most organizations. *No doubt at all AKRSP was very effective and efficient* he adds, describing the organisation Shoaib created as walking with the skill of a circus acrobat along the high wire, of providing the services communities require without actually managing those communities, *of course projects needed managing* said Tim, *but not communities.* This is what Shoaib did.

Tim dismisses the arguments of Shoaib's detractors that there was any need at all for more structure, for closer management of the style that donors and financing institution are most comfortable with. *It was just not necessary,* he adds quietly shaking his head, *there was a relatively tiny close-knit cadre of dedicated, highly motivated and self-managing people at AKRSP; there was just no need to impose a constricting structure on this group.*

Of Shoaib, Tim believes he provided a level of inspirational leadership that would be the envy of most management motivational groups, and that the lessons of his leadership were constantly reinforced by a stream of amazingly positive feedback from village communities. It was an unbeatable recipe for success.

In Tim's view, Shoaib and his team had a style of management entirely appropriate and totally suited to achieve what they had set out to do. It was a 'best fit' situation in management terms. He is also quietly but firmly dismissive of the bureaucratic management tools the donors plagued Shoaib to deploy in his later years as general manager, methods that Rasmussen, the more compliant general manager who followed on from Shoaib, put into practice, 'it was really a matter of demanding AKRSP use donor bureaucratic sledgehammers to break fairly small nuts'. An outwardly undemonstrative man, Tim added quietly, it was all unnecessary. There were already very good evaluative processes in place for example and staff and management seemed to work well, and anyway, any approach had to gel with the villages and Shoaib's approach certainly did this.

As an interesting aside, Tim thinks that Shoaib deliberately set out to groom Pakistan's bureaucracy to accept the ideas of social mobilisation, that he knows very well what he wants but will wait until just the right moment to act. *Shoaib's model is leadership for change* he quietly states, *not leadership for power.* It takes time for people to understand this model but when they do things start to work like magic. Tim also does not see Shoaib as acting opportunistically, although I do. Rather, Tim sees Shoaib as managing a whole range of different streams, each running parallel to the other, and that when the time is right, Shoaib joins selected streams together so that funding, political will-power, ideas, and a whole lot of other streams all seem to magically coalesce.

In Tim's view, the only magic if you like, is Shoaib's ability to decide when the time is exactly right for this to happen. It is the same with the best leaders in the business world, they are masters at seizing the moment, and this, according to Tim is exactly what Shoaib did.

Masood once wrote 'something needs to be said about the clarity of vision in AKRSP', so I will try. It was a simple vision, clearly stated and understood. Everyone from the top to the lowest level, everyone in the village communities knew what AKRSP was out to achieve and how it intended it would be done; the message was simple and absolutely clear and it never wavered, never changed. So why did Shoaib's detractors think there was no vision, why did Shaw think the vision had been lost? Perhaps it was the same as Shoaib's style of management: it was just too different from the norm, something his detractors could not see, could not share.

With Shoaib gone, it was almost as if the Board had pressed AKRSP's self-destruct button. Like the Titanic, the organisation slowly lost way, fragmented; some parts managed to survive, others sank. It was disastrously depressing, so much lost opportunity; the end of a dream. And Shoaib would be kept away.

Much later, when he finally severed ties with the Aga Khan Foundation, the prince insisted that the United Nations, who were to be Shoaib's new employers, allow the allocation of least ten per cent of his time in the service of AKRSP. Sad as he ever gets, and despite Shaw's meeting with the UN Resident Representative in Islamabad to set this up, Shoaib shook his head, said something we already know, *but you know, they never once asked me for my time, not once.* Not the Board in Karachi, not Shaw from his office in Geneva, and not their man in Gilgit, the new general manager Steven Rasmussen. Shoaib watched as the dream died, as power moved from the mountain villages down to Karachi, across the world to Geneva. Powerless.

I mean Shoaib said shaking his head in disbelief that anyone could be so stupid, so intransigent, *they just stopped going to the people.*

This has not been a happy chapter. There have been few good things to say about the actions of the Aga Khan Foundation's people in Geneva or Pakistan, few good things to say about the Board of Directors who wanted Shoaib reined in, and wanted more say in what happened in the north. But they had been good once, had been very supportive even if at times there had been grumbles. And indeed, Shoaib's state of mind after Falaknaz's death was a worry to everyone. But it should not have been. As those who knew him best were sure, eventually he recovered and was able to go on, like steel from the forge he emerged stronger, wiser, more flexible perhaps, and of course indelibly mellow.

And perhaps Shoaib had seemed to be creating a kingdom in the north, maybe the Board and Shaw were sidelined to an extent, did not receive as much credit for their contributions as they believed was due, as they would have liked. Maybe Shoaib thought they would all understand. Perhaps also Shaw and others really did think Shoaib had run his race, that he had taken AKRSP as far as he could and it was time for him to hand on the baton, to stand down with grace and become a senior statesman.

And for all their other faults AKF were never financially mean with Shoaib, or anyone else for that matter, were always generous whether it was a salary package Shoaib had decided upon for a staff member, a separation payment, or a gratuity. Money was never much of an issue; they could afford to be generous and more often than not they were. So Shoaib was not 'hung out to dry' as his civil service enemies had tried to do. Instead, he was given a seat on the Board and although he became the focus of vitriolic attacks led, we are told, by the new general manager Rasmussen, he was never dismissed. He is in fact still there. And if we believe what we are told the wheel has turned full circle—members of the current Board are beginning to see how badly mistaken Shoaib's detractors had been; are beginning to ask for guidance for the future. Or so they say. *Finally* Shoaib says smiling the tired triumphant smile of a long distance runner crossing the finishing line *finally the idea was taken to Geneva in 2006, taken all the way to Aiglemont, the idea that organisations for the poor have a very different role to play than organisations of the poor.* Shoaib says the prince was delighted; it was the most exciting development he had heard of in a long time. All eight of the Aga Khan programmes throughout the world were immediately commanded, said Shoaib, to take the concept on board, quickly decide whether they are organisations of or for the poor and then act accordingly. Let's hope they have.

Is Shoaib being an optimist? Of course he is; that is the way he lives.

Dreams they are. Dreams of Camelot. In Shoaib's world dreams never die.

The Doomsday Clock

The Doomsday Clock is a symbolic clock face, maintained since 1947 by the board of directors of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* at the University of Chicago. The closer the clock is to midnight, the closer the world is estimated to be to global disaster, catastrophic destruction, the figurative midnight. In 1947, during the Cold War, the clock was set at seven minutes to midnight. Through the years the hands have subsequently been advanced or wound back depending on the state of the world, particularly the likelihood of nuclear war. Originally, the analogy represented the threat of global nuclear war, but since 2007 it has

also reflected two other factors—the potential effects of climate-changing technologies and new developments in the life sciences and nanotechnology with the potential to inflict irrevocable harm. Cocooned perhaps in their university environment, the directors of Chicago University's *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* have however overlooked an increasingly significant 'fourth factor'—world poverty.

Should poverty be an indicator for the Doomsday Clock? Ask the poor.

Ask the poor, why on earth should we ask the poor? Why would anyone ask the poor what they need, what they want? Surely there are wiser, better heads who can answer these sort of questions. Pakistan has millions of poor and no one asks them, and the situation is going from bad to worse.

The world-wide war on terrorism reaches into the North West Frontier Province, starts with a few skirmishes in 2004, quickly escalates into full-scale fighting, the Pakistan army versus battle-honed Islamic militants. The tribal areas are no longer just bandit country, they are a war zone. The fighting kills thousands during the next few years, displaces nearly four million. Misery abounds.

In Peshawar, there are random rocket attacks. Masood shrugs, points to the hole in the ground where one crash-landed a short distance from his office, a near miss. He does not believe his organisation was specially targeted. Everything, everyone is a target, banditry is rife, kidnappings common, parents fear for the safety of their children, make sure they are escorted to school.

In the nearby tribal areas, outraged editorial articles tell us, American predator drones roam the rocky hills. And then Swat is taken over by radical Islamists determined to introduce Sharia law. There are executions, killings, peace-making convoys are ambushed, the Wali's son is killed, policemen beheaded, unthinkable events. Has to be Uzbek Talib everyone says; can't be a Swati. They just don't do things like that. Thousands flee, many of the towns are reduced to rubble but the valley won back.

December 2007, a triumphant motorcade to welcome Benazir's return to Karachi is torn apart by a massive car bomb. Hundreds are killed; Karachi reeks of fear. Kunwar Idris meets us in a darkened office, whispers dispiritedly. Sunday luncheon served at the venerable Sindh Club is a falsely bright affair. Everyone is doing their best to keep up their spirits.

The country limps on from one suicide bomb blast to another; hundreds of innocent bystanders are killed almost on a daily basis, Peshawar and its environs, parts of the entire province becomes bandit country. Attacks also take place in the Punjab and Sindh, gunmen and suicide bombings are the order of the day. A truck loaded with explosives takes out Islamabad's famous Marriot

Hotel, atomises the unfortunate security guards, kills staff and guests, blows out the windows in Falaknaz House a block away from the hotel.

As 2007 draws to a close Benazir will not stop campaigning. The caretaker government appointed to hold the fort until the elections says they cannot protect her, protest Benazir takes too many risks. In December 2007 the country is brought to a standstill. Benazir is assassinated in Rawalpindi. Everyone is stunned. What will happen next? A dangerous hush descends and then slowly, very slowly the country breathes again. Nine months later, in September 2008, Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir's widower, is sworn in as the country's new president.

In her Bangkok apartment Roohi's eyes flash in anger, she is a no-holds-barred sort of person. She believes that in 1994 Zardari was one of those who approved the harassment of her father over the half-billion rupees Nawaz Sharif had granted as start-up funds for the National Rural Support Programme. But in politics yesterday's enemy can be today's friend. President himself now, perhaps Zardari sees Shoaib and his rural support programmes as at least one touch of spring amid an otherwise bleak and wintry sky. Untouched, encouraged even, Shoaib works on.

The year 2008 is far from auspicious, gets worse.

From their base in Pakistan, Islamic militants filter across the border into India, find their way to Mumbai. The marvellous Taj Mahal Hotel goes up in flames, a famous restaurant is shredded, one hundred and seventy-five people are killed, Indians and foreigners, all but one of the attackers, it doesn't matter to the terrorists, the freedom fighters, whatever will make an impact, a headline, a blow against the wrongs they believe happen every day in Kashmir. But it doesn't solve anything.

Tension between the two countries escalates, then settle back. Zardari condemns the attacks. The same people possibly killed his wife. Politicians on both sides start talking again. Then the unbelievable happens. Cricket, the nation's passion becomes a target. The Sri Lankan team are attacked by gunmen in Lahore on their way to the second of a Test series against Pakistan. What is the world coming to, ask the sports columnists? Is nothing sacred anymore? Games certainly aren't.

In April of 2010, the North West Frontier Province vanishes, is replaced by the name 'Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa'. The map-makers work overtime. The words do not sit easily on foreigners' tongues but no doubt everyone will soon get used to the change. They will have to. The deal is done, and anyway, of the twenty-one million people in the province about two-thirds are ethnic Pashtuns. But still the editorials in national newspapers describe the move as a dangerous precedent; say the country should not be reduced to an ethnic jigsaw puzzle

where one piece can be dislodged by the smallest of mishaps. Reuters picks up the story in an international newsflash, so do the BBC and many other news agencies—*Pakistan's ethnic jigsaw shaken by the re-naming of the Frontier!*

The weather proves to be equally unsettled.

In July 2010 the heavens open, monsoon rains fall with unprecedented ferocity. The war-torn valley of Swat is now devastated by the sheer weight of rain. Soon the entire country is affected. Water pours down the Indus inundating the plains of Punjab and Sindh. Massive flooding follows, Sindh becomes an enormous inland sea. Fifteen, twenty million people, nobody really knows, are displaced report the news agencies, at least fifteen hundred killed, the great river barrages, intricate one-hundred-year-old irrigation systems threatened. Nobody knows what will be left when the waters eventually subside; the damage bill is likely to run into the billions. Aid is urgently needed, government dithers, say the local newspapers, bureaucrats are stunned by the enormity of the disaster. The armed forces attempt to deal with the situation. They have resources but they are simply not geared up to act as rescue workers. They try. Do the best they can. Camps are set up.

The world hesitates. Help is slow to arrive. The Americans wake up first. They realise the terrorists' shop-front organisations are already in there helping. They cannot let this happen, cannot let the people believe the Islamists are the only ones who will help, so they send in their own teams.

When aid agency staff arrives in Sindh they discover a new reality. Children are dying in large numbers and they shouldn't be, not yet anyway. The children haven't been without food or clean water for all that long? The answer is stark.

Those who are dying are the children of tenant farmers from feudal estates, tenants of larger land owners, their families are the poorest of the poor. Many children are desperately malnourished. Have been for years, are a fraction of the body weight of a normal child. With little resistance they die. Mothers wail and tear their hair; fathers squat on the ground with hopeless eyes. This is Sindh. Losing children happens all the time. In all this chaos, all this suffering, where were Shoaib's rural support organisations? Is Sindh a social wasteland because in an earlier disaster they had been first to respond.

The 2005 earthquake.

Killing a staggering 80,000, the massive quake displaced millions more in the country's northern mountains. Within hours the rural support organisations responded magnificently; at village level where everything else was failing, where houses had been destroyed, people killed and injured, amazingly village organisations remained intact. Those villagers where social mobilisation had

taken root were quickest off the mark, their recovery was orderly, their self-discipline remarkable.

First the earthquake, then the bombings, now the flood; in June 2009 the UN estimates Pakistan's refugee crisis is the worst in a decade. By August 2010 it is the worst ever. What next indeed? Are the mullahs right? Is this God's wrath? Were those who tried to impose Islamic law in Swat right? No, say the people of Swat, the floods terrified us but the Taliban were worse.

Meanwhile as Pakistan lurches from one disaster to another, the world's economy doubles in size, then the global financial meltdown causes financial havoc everywhere. Pakistan is not exempt, the Karachi stock market plummets. Fortunes are lost. This means little to the poor. Over the last ten years the price of wheat has shot up by a factor of six, from 7 rupees per kilogram to 40, the same for sugar which now sells for 70 rupees a kilogram. What if you are one of those bringing home sixty-five rupees a day? Bellies are rarely full, tea unsweetened, malnourishment is rife, frustrations mount.

Writing of the decade, the journalist Saad Khan paints a dismal picture, of increasing poverty, of democracy still mired in controversy, of corrupt political leadership seemingly oblivious of the plight of ordinary Pakistanis, of security being defined by three words: Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the army's ISI, the highly secretive Inter-Services Intelligence agency. The country, he writes, is picking up the tabs of past misadventures in India and Afghanistan, suicide bombings so frequent that people are surprised if a day passes without a blast. 'Only the ISI' writes Khan, 'really know how to put the genie back in the bottle' and asks 'have they mislaid the cork'? 'Most affected are ordinary people, and they', says Saad Khan, 'despite all that is happening around them continue to breed like rabbits'. He throws up his hands in despair. What can you do with a country like this?

Shoaib still thinks he has an answer, has not given up hope.

Sitting high in the northern mountains, high also in the opinion of those who count in the development world, as the 1990s began Shoaib dreamed of taking social mobilisation to the country. The big question: Would this mean a greater, larger, country-wide Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, or a series of independent look-alikes? Although there was some enthusiasm at the beginning for the big organisation, wiser counsel prevailed. It was to be the latter. The prince and his senior advisers knew just how far they could push Ismaili success.

Shoaib proved the point himself in Charsaddah, the home district of one of Shoaib's greatest supporters, the Sherpao family. The district also happens to be very conservative, very solidly Sunni Pushtun. Previously, USAID had promised to underwrite a rural support organisation. Still in command at AKRSP and so

with a helicopter at his disposal, Shoaib took the opportunity while the helicopter happened to be in Islamabad to hold some initial dialogues. Picking up the additional chief secretary in Peshawar, the recently appointed chairman of the new organisation, he instructed the pilots to fly to Charsaddah, happily held three dialogues and then blithely flew on to Chitral. What he had forgotten was the helicopter. It was of course emblazoned with the name of the Ismaili Imam, the Aga Khan. Not even those who might otherwise wish to do so could ignore the helicopter and the writing emblazoned on its tail-boom. The helicopter was just too big a splash. Rumours began to spread like wildfire. What was an Ismaili-owned helicopter doing in a Sunni area? *The whole thing* said Masood, *took years to quieten down*. He thinks there is still a residual memory.

Damage done, Shoaib is still embarrassed. But the incident proved the prince's point. When it comes to religious matters, you can't be too careful. Back now to Shoaib sitting in his northern mountains wondering what to do.

He knows other attempts had been made in the past to take social mobilisation to the entire country, knows also that they quietly fizzled out, failed, such as Sartaj Aziz's ideas of treating village organisations as the lowest organised tier of government. Shoaib says it was like trying to mix oil and water, trying to mix local government which is an elected representative body with community organisations. He sighs, says what people so often fail to recognise is that there are two components to social mobilisation, the concept and the programme. The concepts were applicable anywhere and this had been proven in nineteenth century Europe, then later in Japan, Taiwan, Comilla, South Korea's Saemaul Undong, the Northern Areas, Andhra Pradesh. *Look*, he says, *what could be more different than the mountains of the north, the flood plains of Comilla, the Deccan plateau of India? Communities in each of these areas accepted the concept but the programme they chose to implement and the way they chose to implement it was very different.*

Sits back, says, *yes, you cannot change the conceptual package but the programme package has infinite variations*, sighs, says *yes, it has been a battle, there have always been critics and detractors*, those who thought they could do better, go further, faster and with far less fuss than Shoaib or any of the new rural support programmes can. Masood tells of one, a keen bright young officer in the planning division in Peshawar. Tasked by his additional chief secretary, a man who had previously boasted that what had taken Shoaib ten years to achieve, he could do in six months, he devised a programme where government would form partnerships with the sixty small and variably capable non-government organisations registered with the Social Welfare department, to undertake social organisation. The young officer talked up his ideas with the

Asian Development Bank who listened and took the bait. Funds were promised and a private company was also hired.

It was a recipe for disaster. Nearly all of the non-governmental organisations were too small and too poorly organised. The private firm also proved to be totally inadequate to the task. It all fizzled out. Perhaps in part to compensate for the failure, the 'bright young officer' had also written a clever paper arguing that Shoaib's methods of initiating social mobilisation was no longer relevant; posed that all that had been achieved in the Northern Areas was history, more than history, it was from the age of dinosaurs.

Easily the fellow's intellectual equal, of his own volition, Shoaib smiled, *Masood wrote a measured response, answering his contemporary point by point.* The young officer, Shoaib said, also attempted to strengthen his case by stage-managing a loaded evaluation of Shoaib's organisation in the north, wrote a ten-page terms of reference.

You see what I was up against sometimes shrugged Shoaib; *if only I had managed to see that young man first he might have had other ideas.*

Critics and detractors, many appeared briefly and then vanished. Some remained in place, simmering. Shoaib will still stiffen when Geoff Wood's name is mentioned; a man he thinks needlessly brought the Aga Khan Rural Support Organisation to its knees, *an iconoclast, a chimera* he says as angry as he ever is, shakes his head in disbelief, says again, how could any man give no thought, have no idea how an organisation might be rebuilt, reshaped once he had helped pull it down.

Shoaib may treat Geoff Wood with disdain, but he holds no grudges against Stephen Rasmussen, nor does he do anything but shrug his shoulders at the actions of other Board members, believes they were only doing what they thought was right. No, he says, there is no one he really dislikes, some he pities, some he wishes had been more broad-minded, less influenced by others, but no one he dislikes. When I remind Shoaib of Bandial, he is genuinely surprised. Says, maybe Bandial has changed, mellowed, because not once in all the years has he ever told me to my face he had anything against me. Then Shoaib remembers the time when, flying back from Lahore, he found himself sitting beside Vaqar Ahmed, the man he calls 'that famous establishment secretary who had wanted to hang me'. The two got talking, and after the niceties had been exhausted, Shoaib decided to ask Vaqar straight out, look, why did you initiate that enquiry, what was behind it? The former establishment secretary was not at all fazed; he told Shoaib it was not only the secret police reports, the intelligence files describing leftist activities and leanings, there were others who talked about you all the time, had strong opinions. Shoaib says he was utterly astonished, said

to Vaqar that surely his actions in trying to help the poor spoke truly of the way he thought. But the retired former senior bureaucrat had shrugged and said, *well, how could anybody know what really was in your heart, perhaps the chief secretary thought you would unseat him one day.* And that was it. Nobody could believe that such a talented man as Shoaib, with such high political connections would be satisfied for long at the academy. Nobody gave a second thought to the farmers of Daudzai.

Shoaib could only shake his head.

I do not know how truthfully Shoaib speaks when he says he would like to end his days in his rooms at the Chinar Inn. Maybe it is simply wishful thinking? But close to his heart, Shoaib is always ready to talk about his years in the north, will turn the conversation to those magic years, as he says, at the drop of a hat. And despite the hurt, despite being ignored unless there was a crisis, Shoaib cannot stay away. He has journeyed back to the north on his own initiative time and again. Each time he has returned to Islamabad dispirited.

In 2005 however, the prince was scheduled to fly in, the earthquake had brought him. Worried perhaps by AKRSP's worsening decline, galvanized into action by thoughts of having to answer to their prince, the new Board turned to Shoaib, promised to listen, asked if bygones could be bygones. Shoaib says of course he met His Highness, he always did, told the prince of his years in the wilderness, of trying to be heard, that finally the penny had dropped with the new Board, and that if changes were proposed Shoaib would be grateful if His Highness would approve.

Eternally hopeful, Shoaib says the last time he was in the Northern Areas he told Izhar Hunzai, the general manager, and the others to hand over the money to organisations of the people, to just let them get on with it, that some will do it very well and some not, but whatever happens it will be the beginning of bigger things. Shoaib says *we have lost some time but I am quite hopeful it will happen.* He always is.

Shandana is doubtful of a revival in the north, shrugs, says yes, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme of today is a pale shadow of its former past, perhaps it has simply run its race? Grand words are still spoken, still appear in print, but the reality of the programme today, Shandana shrugs, *well, that is another story.*

When Shoaib first set out to replicate the organisation he had developed in the Northern Areas, to create a brand new network of like-minded rural support organisations throughout Pakistan, he ran into opposition from an unexpected quarter. His mentor thought it was a bad idea, counselled instead that Shoaib should build on the existing plethora of non-government organisations, many of whom were

looking for something solid, something worthwhile to justify their continued existence, to attract funding. Shoaib disagreed, would not have it, argued most such organisations were totally unsuited to the task he had in mind, were urban rather than rural, were very small, had poor financial oversight, were starved of funds and would do almost anything to attract money. Many also had limited horizons and concerns he believed, and some limited themselves to a single rights-based issue.

Let's make this a little clearer. Shoaib the humanist, a truly lovely man, is all for human rights; it is just that he has never encouraged any of the rural support programmes he has led or helped bring to life to focus solely on one particular issue. Shoaib also has a very practical streak and although he rarely is confrontational and seeks ways around a problem instead of just running right over the top of it, he can be stubborn. So yes, rural support organisations promote human rights, human values, but with a few exceptions Shoaib does not think 'waving a flag' about any one issue, making that one issue the *raison d'etre* of your organisation is particularly helpful.

As Masood so clearly puts it, rural support programmes work to address the basic rights of people by focusing on building organisations of the poor. *There is no flag-waving* says Shoaib, and Masood agrees, *waving flags sometimes needlessly upsets government.* And needlessly upsetting government does not help improve the incomes of the rural poor. *So we try not to* although sometimes upsetting government is unavoidable, but says Shoaib, *it does not pay to do this deliberately.*

Anyway, Shoaib said, *would they listen if I went and said look, what you are doing is all very well and good, but what you should do is what I say? I would be told 'thank you but no thank you', and most probably not politely at all*, and then he laughed, and we laughed with him. Far easier to start from scratch, select the right leaders, the right staff, said Shoaib, than to spend endless hours fruitlessly trying to convince some very small non-government organisation to change the way it does business, to start all over again. Says Shoaib with a shrug, Akhter Hameed Khan remained obdurate maintaining Shoaib would end up creating a giant unworkable monolith, a waste of time and money.

It is hard to put a finger on anything, to say this or that is the reason why none of the newer rural support organisations in Pakistan, not one has the glamour or has even come close to generating the same level of international charisma, the amazing achievements of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in the heydays of the 1980s, or of Shoaib's even bigger, better offspring, the hugely successful movement in Andhra Pradesh. There is none of the excitement, no stream of bright, very often privileged young people from all the countries of the world, all making the pilgrimage to the north, happily putting up with the cold, with kerosene lanterns, with dust and bitter cold, full of ideas, of idealism, there are far fewer of the amazingly exciting people's organisations

that sprouted with the speed of mushrooms after rain, there is no stream of glittering international visitors, no flood of donor money, people knocking on the doors offering more.

The new rural support organisations in Pakistan do not sit so firmly, so tightly within any community, they are not so dominant, so influential; they have nowhere near the status or the political significance and clout that Shoaib's organisation in Gilgit once wielded. They are, if you like, super non-governmental organisations. There is also a question of territory. The first rural support programme to emerge outside the north took on the country. With the half billion rupee endowment and more promised, what else could the organisation be named than the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP)?

A National Rural Support Programme? The entire country? A very big mouthful. Is it to be the new standard-bearer? No, it isn't, it is nothing at all like Shoaib's AKRSP.

Provincial interests began to think about having their own programmes. In fairly short order, apart from the already operational Sarhad in Peshawar, other organisations began to emerge in the Punjab, in Sindh and in Balochistan, and all overlap occasionally with the organisation that is really Nawaz's own, Sartaj Aziz's own. Fortunately perhaps, the national organisation has focused on microcredit leaving open other windows of opportunity. However, almost inevitably, there is competition although the national programme's endowment and its proximity to federal government offices provide a vital competitive edge. In Peshawar, the organisation Masood took over and then resurrected is at a disadvantage. He has had to compromise, accept government contracts to carry out specific tasks hoping he can conjure up a margin to use for social mobilisation. But he does not have the funds to take a holistic approach as Shoaib was able to do in the Northern Areas, as the national organisation should be able to do but doesn't always. Masood shrugs, does what he has to do.

Based in Islamabad, and although cushioned by its endowment, the national programme still argues that its funds are not sufficient to take an entirely independent line. So this would-be national programme competes with other provincial support organisations for government and donor funds. It is hard for an outsider to understand it all.

Rural support programmes in Sindh and Punjab also benefit from endowments gifted by their provincial governments but their effectiveness is limited by other factors. In Sindh, civil unrest and deeply rooted feudalism create huge barriers to social mobilisation. In Punjab the organisation has been taken down a very different pathway, while in Balochistan, there are personality conflicts, disagreements with former donors. Most have a rocky ride, some more than others.

In all this, in the hatching of one rural support programme after another, what has been Shoaib's role? Is he hands-on as he was in the north, does he spend a lot of time in the field as he did in Andhra Pradesh?

He makes field visits of course but they tend to be grand affairs, reminiscent perhaps of those he once organised in the north for visiting dignitaries, or of his grandfather's inspection tours. But no, he is no longer hands-on; there are too many organisations to be everywhere at once, too many decisions needing to be made on the instant, too many requests to attend an important function, an ambassadorial dinner, a ministerial meeting. Shoaib has become an elder statesman, a hugely respected guru. Staff members whisper in his presence, lower their gaze, admire from a respectful distance, rarely dare to speak up against any of his ideas. Robust debate has vanished. Shoaib shakes his head. He says he does not know why his people do this now, do as we have seen, stand quietly in his presence, hands clasped, heads a little bowed, speaking only when spoken to.

But I know why. They act as they do because they know they are in the presence of their guru.

The Shoaib of today is in constant demand, besieged with requests to sit on this board, this committee or that, speak at functions, his name included when diplomatic social secretaries, ministerial aides draw up their invitation lists, lunches, dinners, receptions, national days, 'ah yes, include his daughter Afshan too? Oh well, if we must'. Humayan we know has told Shoaib to stop hogging the limelight, to step aside and let someone else, some of his younger people, take their turn on all the committees, all the boards. But even if he wanted to, Shoaib cannot. All the rural support programmes, all the private and public committees want the original article, Shoaib Sultan Khan. Nobody else will do. This at once pleases and displeases Shoaib. He shrugs and flashes a slightly shamefaced grin, asks *what can I do?*

It is an empty question; rhetorical. Shoaib knows exactly what he can and should do. He is not actually asking anyone else for an answer, he is really asking himself. One day he will give an answer. It may surprise many.

I ask if the down-country rural support organisations are only pale shadows of an Aga Khan Rural Support Programme that is also now a pale shadow? Tariq Husain we know has his answer ready on the instant, says 'yes' without even pausing to think. Says you can place all the newer rural support programmes, place all their achievements in a row and still they would not outshine Gilgit, not by a long chalk. Next morning in the living room of Falaknaz House, warmed by a bowl of soup, Shoaib does not answer the question immediately. He thinks, says perhaps Sarhad in Peshawar was a pale

shadow, but only at first, not now, not since Masood has breathed new life, new vigour into the organisation, and he will not countenance the idea that the national organisation is a pale shadow. No, Shoaib says, definitely not.

Shoaib talks again of the hectic years when he was working with the United Nations regional poverty alleviation programme, trying at the same time to provide support to the emerging support organisations in Pakistan. He laughs, says it was like playing a game of hopscotch. Whenever a new organisation emerged he would allocate more time to it than to the others, hopping back and forth, says he was quite good at hopscotch as a child. This worked with some, not with others.

In Punjab, Shoaib had known the man in question for ten years, hand-picked him for the job as head of the newly endowed Punjab Rural Support Programme, thought they were on the same wavelength, says, he had the right words alright but when asked to do things, he did them in ways that would never work. For once in his life Shoaib had a mighty falling out, call it a clash of personalities, head to head, Shoaib could see no common ground. Within three months, Shoaib said goodbye to him and took over as chief executive in addition to the chairmanship. *I think he is my only enemy* sighs Shoaib, *at least from his side not mine. No, he has not forgiven me, has not let go, and sadly he waits for any opportunity to knock me down*, sighs, *but people know all this and take whatever he says with a grain of salt.* He is wrong, of course, quite wrong that this man is his only enemy, there are others, but this man, a man of consequence in Punjab, a man whose pride has been wounded, is certainly one.

After laying the foundation, Shoaib selected another chief executive. Unfortunately, after some time, the chief executive officer wanted the new rural support organisation to concentrate on government's hobby horse, establishing village health units, the reason perhaps why they handed over their half billion rupees. Shoaib is able to chuckle about it now, says *oh yes, they went overboard: they did not want productive programmes even though government had handed out heaps to line irrigation canals* (to reduce losses by seepage) *and cut down water wastage, they wanted a village health programme, and yes, we eventually helped them do this.* Initially, Shoaib wanted the organisation to take a holistic approach, wanted an emphasis on economic productivity, but he gave in with extreme reluctance having precipitated a potentially very damaging confrontation with a man whose dinner guests were other top government officials.

Surprising everyone, Shoaib sacked the man, his second chief executive. *Yes I did,* Shoaib says with a sigh, *I got rid of him, but then after a year, I had to get him back.* Something Shandana admires immensely—reinstating a very angry man who insisted on doing things his way. So the organisation continues to concentrate on health. If a health programme is all that is on offer, villagers will take it. And anyway, the poor of Punjab are quite used to being told what it is they need.

So the reinstated chief executive continues to go his own way, denigrates Shoaib and his ideas as waffle whenever he has the chance, sniffs at social mobilisation, says health is the way to go, says all this talk with villagers is meaningless, says action is the best way to go, not asking questions.

More often than not surefooted, in 1997, Shoaib stood in a cowpat again, this time incensing the country's non-governmental organisations.

With Sartaj Aziz, he said, he foolishly *proclaimed from the highest pulpit* that none of the rural support programmes, and certainly not the new Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, were truly non-governmental organisations totally independent of government. Wave a red rag at a bull. Other non-governmental organisations were outraged. Shoaib, they chorused, was trying to undermine their worth. Shoaib hurriedly organised a peace-making workshop inviting everyone, said 'look, maybe it is because I was a civil servant for twenty-five years, maybe it is due to how closely we worked with the Northern Areas government, with the government of Andhra Pradesh, but one matter I am sure about, totally rock-solid sure is this: you cannot have country-wide poverty-reduction programmes without government's involvement. That is the way it is in India, and that is the way it is here. That is all I meant.'

And of human rights, Shoaib says *yes, although we may not wave the flag, we do not ever countenance immoral or incorrect behaviour.* But if the villagers, if the people themselves want to campaign for some aspect of human rights, want to stop something they believe is damaging their chances such as the anti-araki campaign in Andhra Pradesh, Shoaib says *we will support that totally, but not in any political way, not with any political agenda at all. Just let it come from the people.* But the non-governmental organisations would not quite leave it there, said hang on, whatever you may say, when you organise a village isn't that empowering people, giving them the idea that they can seek their rights? Fine, said Shoaib, that may be so but let it come from the people not from us, we want to work with legitimate governments if we can, not frighten them off.

The meeting's spin-off affects not only non-governmental organisations. Most of the rural support programmes take a very good look at the way they do business. Nearly all increase their effort to work with government. Shoaib says *good, just so long as it does not compromise in any way the belief in social mobilisation, the ability to put this belief into practice.* If government will go along with this Shoaib sees no problem in accepting funding and resources from government. That is the ideal scenario. The reality is a little different. Over in Peshawar, Masood's cash-strapped programme has to work with government, accept projects that are pretty well straight forward, no-frills construction, aim to use any accrued profit to carry out social mobilisation. Has to do this in order to survive, keep going.

Shoaib agrees, says it is more than just a matter of keeping funds flowing, it can also be a matter of survival, says keeping government on-side is very important, quotes the Urdu fable, says with a smile *if you decide to live in the river don't pick a fight with the crocodile.* And this has been Shoaib's message to every one of his people. Let us work with government, not against them.

We already know how the National Rural Support Programme came into life; about Nawaz Sharif's impatience, the impatience of a man in a hurry; how in 1992 Sartaj Aziz drafted the appropriate letters, memoranda, Nawaz added his signature and the first half-billion was on its way. We know also the furore this caused, how some of the senior bureaucrats bridled, were appalled, handing over a billion rupees just like that. We know also Sartaj was right to push it all through in a hurry. He knew how fickle politics can be. A year later Nawaz was out, Benazir was in and her people demanded the return of the half billion. We know also what a close run thing it was, we have heard the stories, how Shoaib and his mentor, Akhter Hameed Khan, worked to stiffen a wavering board, how after months of worrying uncertainty the day was won; how the money was able to be locked away in an untouchable endowment yielding ninety million rupees a year; how as a measure of Shoaib's universal respect, the cause was helped by some well placed silent supporters within Benazir's government who quietly said that Shoaib should be left to get on with the good work, that the best thing would be to quietly drop any ideas of commanding the money be returned.

Agha Ali Javad was there in the thick of things, newly appointed as finance manager of the National Rural Support Programme when the demand came to hand back the endowment to government. There were many anxious months. Javad said that within the programme there was a lot of anxious debate, a lot of hand-wringing, should the grant be tied up in an endowment fund as Akhter Hameed Khan had so emphatically advised, or should it be spent as soon as possible as Nawaz Sharif had intended.

Shoaib's reputation, he says, finally carried the day.

Nawaz Sharif's cheque however, was highly vulnerable for quite some time and was not actually tied up as an endowment until Benazir's cabinet acquiesced to the idea. At any time before this says Javad, the half-billion rupees *might have been snatched back.*

While the affair was in full cry, while the pressure mounted, while Shoaib and his mentor rushed from one member to another, cajoling, persuading, as Javad says trying their very best to stop this board member or that from caving in, Shoaib *projected nothing but confidence.* Akhter Hameed Khan of course affected aloof disdain, as if he was dealing with a bunch of crooked moneylenders.

But we did not feel as if we would lose says Javad, *we all met and volunteered to work for no pay if this was necessary. We decided to step up the pace, increase our commitment to the communities. So we began signing partnership agreements as fast as we could, 'this is what the money is for' we said, not for our organisation but for village people. Maybe it helped* says Javad, *but even if it did not influence the big men in government it helped us. We knew we were doing the right thing; we wanted to show the big men that nothing could stop us. In all this Shoaib was our inspiration.*

Agha Ali Javad remembers his first impression of Shoaib was one of amazement. Here was this towering figure strolling about talking to everyone, acting like a fond uncle, a father. The first thing I discovered about the organisation I had joined, he says, was that instead of wasting my time in the corporate world as an accountant, instead of working with USAID, I should have joined much earlier. Javad laughs, so many people in rural support organisations laugh, and says *do you know the Americans had twenty-six handbooks, everything was covered, almost any situation was included in their rule books. Literally, they worked by the book.* Smiles, he still remembers the wonder of it all, says *at the National Rural Support Programme we were in effect writing our own rule-books,* slim volumes at that, *rules that could be changed if it made sense to do so. Whenever Shoaib sat in on a meeting, we were all very comfortable. We did not think 'oh, here comes the big boss, we had better be quiet', instead Shoaib would encourage us to air our views, have our say, take our own decisions.* Muted by Tariq Husain's standards, deferentially polite compared with the take-no-prisoners debates that sometimes raged in Gilgit, Javad and his colleagues spoke up, had their say. For them it was a new and exciting experience.

The USAID environment, says Javad, was very, very rigid, *working with Shoaib required a complete change, to become flexible in thinking and actions, to be innovative, take off the straitjacket.* Javad has 'unlearned', says he has not spoken like this before, continues, *here we go to the people, the communities. They tell us what they want and we do it even if our technical people say it cannot be done. Shoaib will just say 'see if you can find a way' and a way is found. We all feel each of us are experts in our own fields and that we are allowed to do what we think is best, what we are trained to do. Other organisations use the log-frame matrix. These sound good in theory but in practice they only lock you in, outputs have to follow inputs and objectives and all that nonsense. Here, we follow Shoaib's ideas, we focus on releasing the power of the people, of listening to what the people want to do, not what some outsider thinks will be best for them.*

Does Shoaib have any weak points, I ask, and wonder if Javad will answer? He does.

Yes, he says, *Shoaib Sahib can be too kind, too compassionate, too concerned with humanitarian matters, always concerned about the lowest denominator, that a cook or a* chowkidar *be given another chance and it is very hard to say no to him. He will ring me up and say 'look, can't you do this just for me', how can I refuse. And anyway, none of us really want to see the family of a poor man suffer, we all would like to see such a person be given another chance. Shoaib Sahib helps us to do this, gives us a reason to break a rule. Take, for example, a situation where a person is facing dismissal for some reason,* he explains, *we can say, 'look this is your last chance, it is Shoaib Sahib who is giving you the chance, if you fail again you will be letting Shoaib Sahib down'. Nobody wants to do that,* and he laughs. Then he becomes serious, says he wants to say one last thing, that working in the corporate sector, working with a donor agency, was like working with a body. It was alright but somehow you felt something was missing. He now knows exactly what was missing, *it was a soul, he says; now I feel like I am working with a body that has a soul.*

Emotional stuff; passionate people. Can you imagine a Western financial manager, an accountant, sitting in some aid office saying such a thing?

Choosing to concentrate on microcredit, the organisation leveraged the endowment (set up from the money released by Nawaz Sharif earlier) as collateral to borrow funds to on-lend to villagers. Shoaib is an apologist of the high interest rates they had to charge on loans, saying it was either that or eat into the endowment. However, when the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund came into being, Shoaib says the organisation was able to reduce interest rates, and diversify into other activities. In its various hand-outs, the organisation is cited as the largest rural support programme in terms of its network of community or village organisations and the number of families benefiting from its microcredit facility, training facilities, and community physical infrastructure projects. The organisation has also provided support to a number of others during their start-up phases, exactly what Shoaib hoped it might do.

Tariq Husain, however, says diversification has been minimal and agrees with Masood that the National Rural Support Programme is really a microcredit providing organisation, a good one, but that is what it does. Shoaib takes immediate exception to Tariq's claim, argues this is not true. *Look at Bahawalpur*, he says, a town in southern Punjab, *the programme there has generated enough resources in five years to become entirely holistic, to start working with the ultra-poor.* A one-off, argues Tariq, he has not found anything of the kind elsewhere. Unfazed by Shoaib's defence, schooled as he has been in the rough-and-tumble no-holds-barred debates that raged some Gilgit winter

evenings where unlike the present, Shoaib's views were challenged, Tariq has not found anything of the kind wherever he has looked, *and this is not because I haven't tried* he laughs. *Oh no, I have tried alright, field trip after field trip.*

These days vice-chancellor of Lahore's Beaconhouse University, Sartaj Aziz's days are jam-packed with appointments. He squeezes us in, of course he does, seems totally relaxed, signs the papers his secretary whisks across his desk, talks unhurriedly with us, thoughtfully and well as if he has all the time in the world, ignores the frenetic activity around him. Microcredit is indeed very important he says, gives added leverage to the rural support organisations, smiles, says *for example we started the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund on a small scale and then as it grew larger encouraged the management to work with rural support organisations, all of them.* A little encouragement was probably needed. Astute, socially conscious bankers like Kamal Hyat whom we will shortly meet quickly realised that the network of semi-independent rural support programmes represented one of the better client options, that loan funds would be used honestly and reasonably effectively. The resulting partnerships are far more sustainable Sartaj believes, than those engineered by the government funded and controlled Kushal Pakistan Fund, again an organisation we will shortly encounter.

Rashid Bajwa agrees. He is now chief executive of the National Rural Support Programme, one of those young people Shoaib watched carefully, and then brought into the fold. A former civil service officer, one of the elite, Rashid picked up where Najma left off, just when the 'endowment affair' was beginning to heat up. Rashid tries but cannot entirely escape his civil service training and so his style is sometimes criticised by those who see themselves as purists, arch-practitioners of social mobilisation. Rashid is also hoist on the petard of the name of his support organisation. With a national mandate, does his organisation compete with provincial rural support organisations for working space?

It does. Rashid is quietly ambitious, is reluctant to concede an inch of hard-won territory and so there is indeed overlap. It is not a sensible situation but it is one that Shoaib is reluctant to change. So when Rashid refuses to grant independence to the Institute of Rural Management, a partially supported subsidiary, Shoaib sighs but does not intervene.

Alright, says Rashid, when asked by the institute's director, when pushed by others at meetings to do the logical thing, by all means go your own way but not with my money. And of course this is impossible. The institute cannot yet stand alone on the income derived from training courses. The result is that perhaps the best and most capable of the other organisations tend to arrange their own training programmes; the institute is left with orientation courses for

the National Rural Support Programme's newest recruits, or providing training programmes for the weaker support organisations.

This grieves Shoaib. He would dearly love to see the institute grow into an internationally recognised and accredited training centre, one where the theory of social mobilisation is taught, where post-graduate courses are offered, where the world's best and brightest might gather. He has no idea when this will happen, whether it will happen. He lives in hope, waits for the right moment to manifest his dreams, waits for some synchronistic event, hopes he will not have to wait too long, knows he is running out of time.

Rashid's own story is familiar. A medical graduate, he won entry to the prestigious Civil Service Academy. Tariq Siddiqi was still the director; do I need to say more? Which organisation was used for the case study in the rural development course, and where were the academicians sent for exposure? Posted to Sindh, Rashid forgot all about the Northern Areas only to be packed off to Gilgit, in haste, as a replacement, in 1988. A reflection of how embedded is his training still, Rashid refers to the dreadful affair when a private *lashkar* attacked villages as 'ethnic riots'. At least the weather was a lot cooler, he laughs.

Posted to Hunza, the brief of his commissioner rang in his ears, do not sit around, get out, spend time in the field, get in touch with the pulse of the people. Fine, he was happy to do just that but his official jeep was long dead, a pile of junk. Would he have to start out on foot? Not very dignified, not putting government's best foot forward, what would the villagers think? One of Shoaib's social organiser's came to the rescue, taking Rashid with him wherever he went. Rashid grinned, and said what he hadn't realised at the time was that this was the beginning of his on-the-job training programme.

Summoned back to Gilgit, Rashid met Shoaib. There must have been some spark in this young assistant commissioner that attracted Shoaib, or was it simply that Shoaib believed those who might one day hold high office, such people should understand and support social mobilisation. Rashid said tensions were still high, there were many demands, urgent pending cases to be quickly resolved to defuse tensions; magistrates needed transport. Shoaib's response was to put the Gilgit fleet at the administration's disposal. Rashid was impressed, more so as he never had to write an official request. A phone call was all that was needed.

Visitors! Rashid says all the visiting dignitaries, the glittering array of very important people were a headache for the administration, how as the most junior officer he was attached to delegations, how time and again he found himself sitting through yet another one of Shoaib's presentations. They were always the same, Rashid smiles, the message never varied. Rather than finding this boring, Rashid said he began to absorb the message, was impressed that it never changed.

He had become an unwitting convert.

From Gilgit, Rashid was promoted and posted to Punjab. He remembers being very happy. Punjab was his home. On his way he called on Shoaib, a courtesy. Was this a mistake, I asked? Rashid grins again, *who knows* he says? Shoaib had seen the young man in action in Gilgit, had been impressed, offered him a job and sent him to talk to Najma who was then heading up the National Rural Support Programme.

Why did I accept, says Rashid? *Well, already I had changed from medicine to the civil service. I had made one big change, why not another*? Rashid laughed then, some of his initial reserve slipped away, and said, *well, if you make one wrong turn in your life you might as well try and correct it*. Did he mean leaving medicine for the civil service, changing from serving people to ruling them? I suppose he did.

Najma he had met in Gilgit, but he did not realise her wily ways.

She told him he would be posted as a programme officer. *I agreed* says Rashid, laughing at how easily she had dealt with him. It was only later he found this put him at the lowest rung on the ladder. Rashid served out his apprenticeship working under one of Shoaib's oldest hands, Mutahir Shah, in Rawalpindi. He did not see a lot of Shoaib. Too lower tier, he laughs, but Shoaib obviously kept watch on Rashid.

One thing Rashid learned, Shoaib was very sound on numbers, liked to hear them in presentations. So was Rashid. From Akhter Hameed Khan's visits Rashid says he learned another aspect, how to dissect a programme that had not gone well, how to turn failure into an opportunity for learning.

Rashid's take on responsibility, on territory, is that with Shoaib, there has been a very careful carving out of areas into those where the National Rural Support Programme worked and those where it would not. He admits there is still some overlap but dismisses any idea that there is competition, or that comparisons are made, but here he is wrong. We work with anyone, he says, if a programme fits with what we are doing, the way we think then we become partners.

It is as simple as that, he says, and cites Punjab, an organisation his own helped to start. The Punjab organisation, he says, focuses more on health than any other sector and does not work in southern Punjab so we do, as well as working the microcredit angle in any district we can. Rashid leans across his desk, what he is about to say is obviously important to him, his manner says 'write this down'. He says he believes it is important to reach down to the household, not just the village but the household, says *there is no better product that will reach into a household than microcredit*. His largest partner organisation? Probably the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, a major source of microcredit funding.

This then is the story of the National Rural Support Programme, an emphasis on microcredit, reaching down to the lowest denominator, discounting to an extent organisations of the poor, trusting the individual not the group, Rashid's story.

Activists? A slight hesitation. Rashid does not have quite the same level of faith in activists as Shoaib does, as Raju does. He says yes, he saw how successful uneducated activists were in Andhra Pradesh, then pauses, orders his thoughts, says *it was not new to us; we had tried the same thing*. Pauses to think, says *we once made a mistake, we gave activists the responsibility for everything including microfinance*, pauses briefly, *it was a mistake*. Rashid's belief is that a line has to be drawn, a capabilities line. On one side are the things you can expect an activist to do, on the other those things that ask too much.

Rashid knows Shoaib does not agree, but is reluctant to take the step, to relinquish power, to become a true servant of the people, leader of an organisation for the poor taking its directives from organisations of the poor. His whole life, his childhood in Punjab, his medical training where service meant deciding what should be done to save a life, life as an elite civil servant where he was the one making decisions, meting out justice, deciding what was best for his people, this was all still there. Yes, he wanted to serve but he did not really want to be told how to serve. But he will sit with villagers, feel for them, and do his best to help them, so all is not yet lost. Perhaps Shoaib understands this better than most. Rashid has yet to 'unlearn'.

And yes, although Rashid talks of the importance of reaching down to the level of the household, and there are lists of the village organisations in the districts where his organisation operates, what about the next level up? Shoaib says, yes, of course, they are there, he has seen them; as we already know, Tariq Husain not only questions whether the National Rural Support Programme is anything more than a microcredit provider, also says local support organisations, (grouped village organisations) in any of the districts where the National Rural Support Programme works are a figment of the imagination. So who is right, Tariq Husain, now an independent consultant who has no reason at all to lie, who says he would love to find a fully functioning, fully operational local support organisation, the next level up, an organisation the equal of a Mandal Samakya in Andhra Pradesh. Is Tariq Husain right? Or is Shoaib's version correct, the official version of the National Rural Support Programme? I am inclined to believe Tariq. Perhaps Shoaib is seeing what he wants to see, what he wants to believe, perhaps he is wearing rose tinted glasses. Or perhaps Shoaib is just being encouraging. He knows very well that sometimes what he is taken to see is theatre, put on especially for him, but he perhaps thinks if he says often enough *there it is, I have seen it working*, one day it will be. Rashid and his people will be obliged to make it so.

Tariq thinks there is something else, and he has said so before, that while Shoaib may believe with total conviction that local support organisations are the way to go, this conviction is not shared by everyone, people who are followers on every other count. He feels that Shoaib's towering presence makes it difficult for anyone to come out and say, no, you are wrong. Thus, the myth is perpetuated, the emperor has no clothes.

There is, however, no questioning Rashid's loyalty or belief, or those of his staff. Shoaib is the guru, the teacher, a man admired as much, more than any other, perhaps too much. Shoaib is the superman who, in the Northern Areas, was always half an hour ahead of anyone on a climb, whether staff or visitor. Shoaib would leave them all huffing and puffing in his wake; Shoaib is the man who took visitors and staff to Hanuchal canal, scary, laughs Rashid, very scary, but everybody had to do this, pass the test, a man's test.

Rashid's admiration is arrow straight his stories apocryphal. Shoaib is a real man, a living legend, not just a gentle sit-on-the-ground-and-talk-to-peasants sort of man, he was someone who would stroll casually along dangerously high, dangerously narrow canals, shrug off a helicopter crash, climb with the mountain men, poetry on his lips, weep over a disaster, over unnecessary deaths, a man who would not run when the *lashkar* howled over the hills into Gilgit, a leader, a real man.

There is no doubting the affection and regard Shoaib has for Rashid, and for all those who work in the various rural support organisations. He will brush away any criticisms, say no, no, Rashid's heart is in the right place, just the man to head up the national organisation, sees Rashid as he sees so many people, so many projects, as he sees the National Rural Support Programme, as I think he still sees himself, as a work in progress.

Left high and dry when, as Shoaib says, overnight the Americans pulled out when the Pressler Amendment was enforced, pockets completely empty, the Peshawar-based Sarhad Rural Support Organisation was cut adrift. From a position of sturdy independence, overnight the organisation joined all those at the mercy of any donor who might look their way, scrabbling for the funding crumbs of government.

Riches to rags, the Sarhad programme hobbled along until Masood arrived, having left the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in despair, thrown into the deep end in Peshawar by Shoaib. His first priority: restore life to the programme. He is lucky. As Shoaib said when I first asked him about the Sarhad programme, *well the Board is there and Masood is there*, and then he stopped and shrugged as if to say what else need be said? The chairperson of his Board is a paradox. In this supposed heartland of conservatism, the chairperson is a keen-

minded woman whose skills have been honed in the diplomatic world. Before Masood arrives however, the organisation comes perilously close to folding, something Shoaib's detractors sit waiting in the wings to happen, to pounce, to say I told you so, social mobilisation, rural support organisations are a flop.

Oh yes, Shoaib had said one day, *it was a close run thing keeping Sarhad alive. Of course we had champions, but there were also those who just wanted us to fail, go down, give up, vanish. They had their reasons.* Shoaib shrugs, says *maybe we had got in their way, showed up their inadequacies, angered their religious beliefs.* Maybe many things. Says *I will give you an example.* Lachi.

Not a happy experience, as someone said, an afterthought, tacked onto Shoaib's United Nations regional poverty alleviation programme as Pakistan's case study, a learning process where nobody learned very much at all. People were very poor but that might well have been a positive. What wasn't a positive is that Shoaib initially placed an old friend in charge; sometimes you pay a price for loyalty to old friends.

In Lachi, Shoaib did.

Who says Lachi was a failure says Shoaib quite sharply? *It wasn't a failure it was a learning experience, just like that young chap who thought we should build windmills all over the north. We let him try for two years until he gave up, said best use water power. Was that wrong*? Shoaib asks *what if he had been right? And if we had never experimented, never taken risks, where would we be?*

It was only ever a research and development programme says Shoaib as if everyone should have known, *I said concentrate resources and achieve maximum coverage in a small area and so they did.* Donors however, do not like experiments, become irritated when they find that is what they have been funding; and that was the story of Lachi.

Once a grazing area, Lachi was slap-bang in the middle of a fast growing social and environmental disaster zone, arid area smallholder farming. What Shoaib really wanted, he says was to develop an effective arid zone natural resource management strategy. But as nobody has ever really come to grips with what the experts mean by natural resource management as applied to arid area smallholder farmers, the objective was at best, very vague. An environmentally difficult area; a vague and waffly objective; what else can you throw in to make it more difficult for Sarhad. Ah yes, what about a very important resident farmer, a former chief secretary, what about a man no sane project manager will dare contradict.

The British poured in several million pounds and away went the project. It started well, 60-70 per cent of the villagers in a relatively small area joined up,

began to dig a succession of mini-dams to collect and store run-off from the occasional heavy storms. The technology has been around for several thousand years— the idea is that the ponded run-off although transitory prolonged the ability to graze larger areas, and helped recharge vitally important wells. This latter may, or may not be a valid assumption but has a good ring to it. There was also greatly improved interaction with government including the local Union Council, which pleased the former chief minister, all of which was par for the course, nothing exceptional for social mobilisation. What could possibly go wrong with such a seemingly straightforward project?

Well, unfortunately, Shoaib says, the project employed a well-meaning professor from the dry-land (*Barani*) university who, instead of implementing practical experiments, set about producing a manual. This took two years, but was about as useful to local farmers as a set of water-wings. Shoaib laughs dryly, says *maybe I should blame Steve Jones*, the cheerful English consultant who seems to have a foot in many camps, *because he also brought in all sorts of foreign consultants.* A lot of reports were written, gather dust, there is lots of dust in *barani* areas.

Shoaib laughs again; he knows he is out of his comfort zone. So is just about everybody. Look at the shelves of any international research organisation, see if you can find a paper which solves the problems of smallholder farmers trying to eke out a living in the arid fringes of anywhere, of making sure they do not starve every now and then, do not wreck the environment with their goats or their ploughs. And it is not for lack of trying. Most donors, most development agencies, even the World Bank have had a go then walked away when they failed. Arid zones have proven to be the hardest nut to crack in any development programme. Smallholder farming does not fit well with low and unreliable rainfall.

Maybe he was too busy, maybe he was over-extended, maybe he just did not know how to deal with the situation, but Shoaib says, *yes, all those consultants came with their own ideas and for three years I left the technical aspects of Lachi to sink or swim. I thought if Steve Jones wants to do things his way then best let him*, shrugs, smiles, says *he who pays the piper calls the tune.*

A further complication was the presence of the former chief secretary, still powerful, still influential, looking for something to fill his time. Enough so that Masood with his sensible grasp of politics and the art of the possible quietly backed away from involvement at the time saying, look, the former chief secretary Mr. Azam is there, a man who later re-emerged as finance minister, *he is there and who am I to tell him what to do.*

And then there were the donors, the British on one side, and Shoaib's own United Nations agency on the other, sniping away at one another, the British

because they were the paymasters, and the UN because they ran the whole regional programme, saw it as their flagship, with neither wanting to accept responsibility for a sub-project both saw as a potential failure. But eventually when Lachi became a whisper, when the money ran out and the chief secretary moved on to greater things, the programme came close to drying out entirely. So did Sarhad. This is why.

Situation report—the initial British funding for Lachi was due to run out. Alarm bells did not ring; it happens all the time, business as usual in the developing world.

Nobody was really fussed, says Shoaib. In such cases, almost invariably, government will negotiate some sort of follow-on agreement with someone in order not to lose momentum, not to create anger amongst the people, not to upset the political apple cart. Sarhad needed work, seemed to be sitting pretty with experienced staff and some resources; Feroz Shah, who led Sarhad at the time, was confident they could pick up the Lachi project and run with it. It would keep them going, allow Sarhad to engage in social mobilisation as an unpaid add-on, and keep Sarhad alive until more funding could be secured to relieve its perilous financial state.

In Peshawar, however, was a chief secretary, a deeply religious man with very definite views. A man of unwavering conviction and certainty, he was not afraid to say publicly and often *he* (Shoaib) *was such a good officer but he has been destroyed by the Aga Khan Foundation.*

Maybe the Charsaddah fiasco played a role here, but whatever it was, the chief secretary made one thing quite clear. As far as he was concerned, Shoaib was permanently tainted. Any organisation he was associated with was *persona non grata* and he would exercise the considerable powers at his disposal to make this very clear.

When the chief secretary heard that Sarhad was the prime candidate for follow-on funding for the Barani project, and there were those who made sure he heard this message loud and clear, a very strong willed man, brushing away as irrelevant any protest from the villagers, he acted. He issued an order that the exact day funding for the Lachi project ended, everything, staff salaries, vehicles, equipment, all activities would cease, and all resources would be disbursed.

The order spelt financial disaster for Sarhad; the end. Dumbstruck, Feroz Shah took the fall, but all was not lost. With Shoaib's behind-the-scenes support, Masood was recruited as the new chief executive. He knew what he had inherited. It was an organisation that was apparently on its last legs. Or was it?

A name on most important invitation lists, diplomatic dinners, government receptions, Shoaib would groan but reach for his best suit, seeing such occasions not as a pleasant form of social relaxation, a chance to chat, but as work, a time when influence might be won, attention gained. While Sarhad reeled, while government functionaries seized chairs, desks, bath towels from Sarhad's project offices, a dinner invitation arrived in the post, a small affair at the house of World Bank's country director. A light bulb flashed in Shoaib's mind. Surely Kamal Hyat would also be a guest.

This was important. Kamal's newly established organisation, the Poverty Alleviation Fund was responsible for disbursing loans for projects targeting the poor. He had at his disposal $70 million dollars or more of World Bank money. And sure enough, Kamal was there. Shoaib made sure they had time to talk, said before Kamal made up his mind about his loan policies, perhaps he should come out and see what Shoaib's rural support programmes were doing. Never one to delay taking a decision or seizing an opportunity Kamal agreed, fine, what about the day after tomorrow.

Shoaib hunted out a telephone, roused an embattled Feroz Shah, said 'tell me where I can take Kamal Hyat and his chairman?' A day return trip from Islamabad; that is all the time they can afford.

Haripur, said Feroz immediately, *they have a liberal Union Council, not Pashtun but Hindko-speakers, and Haripur is a place where women's organisations seem to be highly successful.* So out went Shoaib and Kamal along with Hussain Dawood, talking as they drove, *and as usual* said Shoaib, *it was the people who made the difference.* He says Kamal and Hussain Dawood were completely bowled over, agreed without a moment's hesitation when Shoaib suggested this was the sort of programme Kamal's new institution should support. So, before the Lachi hand-over date arrived, before Sarhad faced extinction, the poverty alleviation fund rode in to the rescue funding a raft of projects Sarhad's staff had hurriedly prepared.

Defeated, the chief secretary grumbled and retreated. Lachi would trickle on; Sarhad would survive. *It was a close run thing*, laughed Shoaib, *but that is what is so good about Kamal Hyat's fund*, he says, *it is not at all under the control of provincial governments, they cannot lay down the law, make Kamal do what they want.* Of course, given time, pressures can always be applied, and at the federal level, and although not under direct government control and supposedly entirely independent, Kamal must walk a very careful line; to not outrage anyone with power, and maintain a strictly unbiased independence, maintain total probity. He is the man to do it. *Yes*, says Shoaib, *since the poverty alleviation fund arrived on the scene it is very hard for one trouble maker at provincial level to totally block or wreck things.*

Synchronicity, yes, synchronicity, Shoaib laughs, *it was all due to synchronicity.* If he had not gone to the World Bank dinner, if Kamal Hyat and Hussain Dawood had not been there, if he had not seized the moment, taken them to Haripur, he laughs, *we all know what would have happened.* Says a little more seriously, *but you know coincidences have been a feature of my life, at every point when things seemed totally black something has happened, some remarkable coincidence occurred, things suddenly fell into place, and I have been able to go on. Right now* Shoaib says, *take the endorsement by government of social mobilisation, if Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz had not telephoned, had not gone with me to the villages we would have got nowhere with social mobilisation and government; if Nawaz Sharif had not been watching CNN when I was given the Magsaysay award, we would never have received an endowment for the National Rural Support Programme; if Rocky Staples of USAID had not come to Gilgit, even though the Americans subsequently pulled out, Sarhad would never have even got off the ground;* and then Shoaib pauses and smiles, says, *if I had not met an austere old man, shared a compartment on the Green Arrow train with a man who was already a legend all those years ago, I do not think I would be doing what I am doing now.*

So many coincidences, so many opportunities, seeing them is the trick, seizing them, having the courage to act, that is the crux, that has been how Shoaib's life has worked. Delighted with this train of thought Shoaib laughs, *you never know when the next one will come your way, there could be one right now, tomorrow, any day, and nothing may come of it for a very long time.* Planning, action, and then patience. Shoaib is very good at all three.

It is not easy for Masood sitting in Peshawar, not as easy as it is for Rashid Bajwa in Islamabad. His is not a favoured organisation with an endowment and a country-wide mandate; he is not a short walk from Shoaib's house on Aga Khan Road, his organisation does not have add-ons such as the Institute for Rural Management and the semi-independent Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme. Masood has none of these, and as an additional hazard, he has to tread a careful line dealing with banditry and lawlessness among other ills. Increasingly chaotic, an area where radical Islam claims more power every day, where a war is being fought almost on your doorstep, government versus the tribal Taliban, the Americans versus Al Qaeda, where suicide and other bombings are so common he can no longer afford to worry about them, Masood describes his daily life as like flying with a fourth rate airline. Its planes will probably make the journey, but there is always a risk that the one you are on will fall out of the sky. There is nothing you can do about it. You have to keep on going.

Cool and collected in thought and action, Masood is up to the job, does it well, extremely well. With no financial cushion, working in dangerous and suspect areas, he cannot afford to pick and choose between one project and another. If the money is

there he will generally take it. He talks quietly, says *some donors accept your vision and you can act holistically, include social mobilisation and other aspects; but there are others who want things done in a particular way, no add-ons. They either don't believe in social mobilisation or do not think it is necessary; say 'just train that batch of government officers or build the mini-dams, nothing else'. They just fund a very small part of your vision* he says, *but you take the money because perhaps you can do it so efficiently that there will be some left over to act in a partly holistic way, add some aspects of social mobilisation. Or perhaps not, but the projects pay the salaries of your staff, keep the organisation ticking along.* And if you refuse too often to do a no-frills project *that is it* shrugs Masood, *you run the risk of not getting any donor, any government support at all.*

The perpetual struggle, how to attract and pay for the best and most capable staff; how

to pay for the best equipment and material support. The challenge Masood faces every day. The dilemma is this, he explains. I close my eyes. It could be Shoaib speaking. It is Masood. Social mobilisation is a long-term affair, he says, it is uncertain; there are no defined time-lines. It can go very fast or can take years, social mobilisation cannot, should not be rushed. It should take just as long as it takes, as long as people want it to take, until everyone is in agreement, remember how it took ten years in one Chitrali village, in village Mogh he laughs. Such uncertainty, such an undefined end point does not sit easily with donors, with government, anyone who wants a definite, precisely defined project time-line.

Yes, he agrees, *even with an endowment, unlike the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme which was always awash with donor funds, underwritten by His Highness, you will always have to do some things you would rather not do such as build a road or put in a water system just to get enough funds to support your basic endowment funding. No rural support programme is exempt.* Masood smiles, says *for us, the whole province is an opportunity,* he smiles again, *others see it as a catastrophe.*

While doing all he can to build his own endowment rupee by rupee, Masood says endowments can lead to complacency, to adapting to a certain cash flow, safe and secure, some freedom to relax, to a conservative approach, to cutting down on experimentation and risk-taking. *If,* says Masood, *you have to deal with say ten donors at a time and be constantly on the watch for other opportunities you learn to be very quick on your feet, you learn to be highly adaptable, far less ponderous, you become outwardly looking.*

Is that all good?

Masood shrugs, says *well, you also have to put up with things you really don't want to put up with.*

An example?

With Masood you tend to talk like this, clipped, to the point, wasting no energy, no time. And yes, he is a romantic as is Shoaib, but reads serious texts, not Shelley, not the English romantics. Shoaib says of Masood, *he is very serious yes, but one of the very best.* Then he pauses, smiles, asks, *what would we do without him?*

Masood thinks, says, *well, like the provincial government decreeing in 2001 that all social mobilisation activities in any contracts given to us will be carried out by government functionaries, of having to continue with such projects or be sidelined, but having to watch government officers make a mess of social mobilisation. Let governments govern* smiles Masood, *while rural support organisations work with the people.*

Interestingly, Masood believes he manages to do as much now in Chitral with four staff as the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme does with a much bigger establishment. Being lean keeps you on your toes, he says, there can be no complacency, no resting on laurels. Being lean also means you can only offer salaries that look miserly compared to the salaries Shoaib used to pay. So how does Masood retain good staff? Masood thinks offering add-ons such as staff training is one way, says *yes, my board does not push staff training, I do.*

Does he see eye-to-eye with Shoaib on this aspect. No, he doesn't, says he doesn't have the luxury of being able to pay staff well over the odds. Shoaib has mellowed on this aspect, but still, when pressed will say, staff who work in organisations for the poor should come fully equipped with whatever it takes to do the job. Masood agrees this would be the ideal but he has to work in a less than ideal world, believes in his shoes Shoaib would act as he does. Keep the home fires burning; give a little at the edges while maintaining your core.

Masood also has an interesting take on the emerging village super-organisations Shoaib wants to see take hold in Pakistan, the local support organisations. Says fine, but already some run the risk of becoming mirror images of the organisation for the poor; the organisation which brought them to life. Masood smiles, life can be an amusement, he has seen a lot of it already, knows all about the trials of leadership. He has an ingrained responsibility towards his people. Says the first thing the super-community organisations want is a computer and then training in how to do log frames so they can start to deal with donors directly. And then off they go, off on the rocky road where they find themselves being more involved in upward accountability, justifying themselves to donors, rather than in downward accountability, answering first and foremost to their members, doing what the people want. Masood says his own life is a

constant balancing act, uses the term often, a balancing act between satisfying donor requirements and doing what the people want.

Thinks for a while.

Says the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme really had no need for downward accountability, it had a board and donors, all that really had to be done was to keep them happy. It was Shoaib who insisted on the primacy of downward accountability, of doors always open to village people, of placing villagers first. It was a conscious act. Perhaps people knew this, perhaps it was one of the reasons Shoaib was so loved, so revered. And unlike many of the later support organisations, senior staff in Shoaib's Aga Khan Rural Support Programme could speak to donors on an equal footing, could muster and deploy resources, could be an advocate for communities. Says Masood seriously, that kind of advocacy is important in our kind of society where there are a lot of hierarchies, invisible walls.

Discounting difficulties of travel and isolation, Masood asks how in many of the supra-village organisations, Garam Chashma for example, could the president Mohammad Wali, or any of his committee members pick up a telephone and arrange a meeting with an embassy, a senior government officer, the head of a donor agency, whenever they wanted to? Would they even know how to do this? An embassy, a big donor agency might be delighted to occasionally receive a village delegation, see it as a curiosity, but would they treat the villagers as anything other than a curiosity, an amusing interlude; would they take villagers seriously? And even more, would a village delegation even get past the security screen these days? Masood doesn't think so.

Shoaib would, of course. He is welcome everywhere, high or low, embassy or aid agency, government offices, banks and businesses, all doors are open, most immediately. Masood also has access to some extent, but not as freely, not as easily as Shoaib; Mohammad Wali, climbing off the Chitral bus, just might tickle some ambassador's fancy, answer some aid agency official's need to make contact with a real local. When I say this Masood smiles, the idea amuses him, he likes the idea of a Chitrali villager, smelling of wood smoke and mulberries, marching into an ambassadorial office, pakhol perched upon his head, taking tea. He smiles because he knows a Chitrali villager might just do this.

A thinker, if he survives Peshawar, survives the dark days that are undoubtedly ahead for Pakistan, Masood, a quietly impressive man, could quietly step into Shoaib's Pakistani shoes, join Raju, join Roohi in taking social mobilisation forward when Shoaib no longer can.

Funding for the Sindh Rural Support Programme came like a bolt from the blue, says Shoaib. The Sindh provincial government produced a half billion

rupees out of the hat, and then not to be one-upped by the Punjab, added another half billion. Sindh's rural support organisation became the only one to have an endowment of a billion rupees. However, leadership, or rather the lack of it, lawlessness, feudalism, have all played their part in the organisation running headlong into dead-ends. It is an example that resources alone are not enough; that it is better to have first rate leadership as in Peshawar—Sindh's main claim to fame is that it does so little with so much.

This may change. In June of 2008, Dr Sono Khangharani, the man who has succeeded so well in Thardeep, in the far western desert of Sindh, was persuaded to take on the leadership role. Dr Suleman Shaikh, chairman of the board, will be a relieved man. So will Shoaib. As for Sono, I hope he knows what he is doing. Gentle Thardeep, no matter how poor and isolated, is a far cry from the brooding feudalism of upper Sindh, the banditry and the tensions that exist between the many ethnic groups, the Sindhi, Baloch, Pashtun, and the refugees of Partition all those years ago. Is he still there, has he been able to work, a Hindu Dalit in the heartlands of intolerance, banditry, where killing a man is commonplace, kidnapping part of daily life, where poor people do not lift their heads because they might lose them?

December 2007 was not a time to go wandering around the middle of Sindh; banditry was rife and who knew what else. Instead, we met Suleman Shaikh, a gentle anaesthetist, a man weighed down by the fear that now permeates Karachi. There are worry lines, the air of a man deeply disappointed with his country, how his life has panned out. *Yes*, he says, *there is deep intellectual depression in Karachi, an underlying fear*, cites an article in which psychologists at the Aga Khan University hospital report huge increases in stress levels. Suleman says yes, he is stressed as well, not so much for himself but for his family, how what is happening destroys any confidence in the future.

He is right. Karachi is a city of fear.

Every hotel has it draw-bridges, its bomb barriers, guards with mirrors; and when you drive the streets you watch with suspicion any motorcycle rider, any pillion passenger, wonder if they have explosives strapped to the fuel tank, stubby automatic weapons stashed under their tunics; wonder if their faces are hidden for other reasons than the dust, the fumes.

The Dani's raise their heads again. Suleman says he first met Shoaib through Anis Dani. Recently retired from government service, he and Shoaib compared notes, discussed how the National Rural Support Programme might be taken to Sindh. Suleman then joined a Canadian funded small project but continued meeting and talking with Shoaib, laughs, says unlike himself, Shoaib is a very focused, highly organised person, asks about Andhra Pradesh, is due to

travel there soon, how he asks, is it that government is so much behind the programme but does not meddle, does not politicise it all?

In 2003, Suleman found himself sitting in the chief executive's chair at the newly founded Sindh Rural Support Organisation. It was not an easy job. He says governments just do not think rural people have the wit, the intelligence, the get up and go to manage their own affairs, thinks those who give should manage and control all projects. Suleman believes villagers do have the wit, calls it folk wisdom. Is he being patronising? No, he isn't, says folk wisdom is very strong even in the illiterate, and that it is a huge mistake to think that illiterate people do not have a better grasp of the problems of their communities than educated outsiders, are less insightful. They may not know the solutions but they know the problems and sometimes the solutions also. They just lack the means.

Suleman is now a board member, Nazar Memon, the chief executive, works full time in the five most troubled districts, hip replacement and all, another of Shoaib's golden oldies. Where, I wonder, are the young? Nazar Memon leant heavily on a stick as he made his way up the short drive of Falaknaz House, smiled cheerfully, said he expected it to get better, said his responsibilities included Larkana too, the Bhutto's home territory, all extremely challenging districts.

Extremely is the word, poverty, high crime rate, banditry, honour killings, tenant farmers who fear to raise their heads; how can poverty be eradicated when there are so many darkly entrenched problems, how can people escape the poverty trap? He shakes his head, has no answer, every day looks defeat in the face, will not be defeated, sometimes comes close despite his cheerful optimism, stays on only because of Shoaib, is tired, really tired and disappointed, so much has changed in his lifetime, so many broken dreams, his own included.

Memon built a career in one of the many United Nations organisations focusing on children, was a visitor to Gilgit several times. Infected by the social mobilisation bug, by Shoaib's enthusiasm, he forgot about retirement—who wants to retire when there is so much waiting to be done? Slowly, slowly, he was brought into the fold, first as a member of the national support organisation's board. And then, when the government of Sindh, not to be outdone by the Punjabis, handed over its own one billion rupee endowment, Memon was persuaded by Shoaib to take up the cause in his home province. 'Nazar', Shoaib said, 'now that you are free Sindh needs you to build this institution, get a team and together we can make it work'. *How could I say no* says Memon, *how? I had seen what Shoaib had accomplished in the Northern Areas, seen people change from scrabbling for a few spilt chick peas to exporters of apricots and cherries, sending cases of fruit by air, saw people now independent and doing things for themselves, saw children in school uniforms where once they had scrabbled with their parents in the dust for those chick peas. I thought why not, maybe, just maybe something like this can happen in Sindh.*

It was a huge task.

Andhra Pradesh was equally an eye-opener. Memon says he could hardly believe his eyes. It wasn't so much the programme, he had already seen the amazing changes wrought in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. No, it was not the programme so much as the way Indian government officials, top political figures, thousands of women, treated Shoaib as one of their own, as a guru.

Memon is a very likeable man. He brushes hardship aside. He is as open and curious as a child. Says he was excited when Shandana asked him to meet us and told him why, how he would talk to anyone, any time about the effect Shoaib has had on the lives of so many people. *He is a life-changer*, says Nazar Memon, *he changes people's lives; it is a rare gift.* What can he do to help Sindh given all that he has said? It is simple, Memon says, *in every village you come to there will be two or three truly destitute households. If all that you achieve is to transform these two or three households, lift them out of destitution to being just poor but at least eating enough, then you are on the way.*

He stops talking for a moment, thinks and then says Shoaib said something Memon always keeps in the forefront of his mind. It is this: every stone, every rough dirt-coated pebble might be a diamond, bend down and pick it up. You might be very surprised at what you find. *This is the message I tell everyone*, he says, *bend down and pick up the rough stones, encourage the villagers, you will find some are diamonds.* This message and the idea that people should do something to help themselves is new to Sindh, says Memon, *people are used to putting their hands out, government is used to giving handouts, or not, landlords are used to making sure most of the handouts stay in their hands. What we are saying, what we are trying to do is very new.* Also very hard.

Shoaib has many wonderful attributes Memon says, many. *He can inspire people at all levels, poor villagers, young people fresh out of university, older people, those who have reached the end of their service years, or thought they had, like me*, he smiles, *like Akhter Hameed Khan, Shoaib is a peacemaker.* He tells a story.

A vaccination programme is on-going in Karachi, but there are problems, and immunisation rates are low, too low. At the time Memon represents his United Nations organisation; he is eager to help, so there is a meeting. Akhter Hameed Khan is there, and so is the famous Abdul Sattar Edhi: the man who lives with the poor, is known as a saint, runs a free ambulance service, is trusted by the poor, very touchy. Memon sits forward, blurts out that he will reimburse any expenses, any. Edhi stands, says that's it, our friendship is over, we have not come here to get money from anyone, we have come here to help children, not the United Nations. Akhter Hameed Khan smiles, he is completely unruffled,

waves a hand, sit, sit he says to Edhi, the young man means well and he will learn, don't worry. *That was Shoaib's mentor* says Memon, *and if a man like that believes in Shoaib everyone can.*

The difference between Shoaib and his mentor?

Ah yes says Memon, *Shoaib is very comfortable with bureaucrats, he knows how to speak their language, find a way through bureaucratic labyrinths.* Akhter Hameed Khan was not like that, he was a savage critic, dismissed the governments of Pakistan as corrupt do-nothings. Smiles, agrees, says *but both men showed that there was no age limit to learning new things, no age limit to starting a new life*, grins, *a new working life.* It is quite something to take on upper Sindh at any age. When Memon left his United Nations organisation he says people gave him a farewell party, said 'enjoy your retirement'. He laughs, *I am enjoying my retirement.*

Shoaib, yes Shoaib, because he heads all the rural support organisations, is the father figure, the acknowledged man at the top, a legend, his role as a unifier, holding all the diverse organisations together, this role is unique, irreplaceable. Smiles, brightens, remembers that in November 2007, only a month ago, the federal government publicly accepted social mobilisation as a legitimate development concept, to be applied in all ninety districts in the country, all due to Shoaib's patience and persuasion.

Back in Karachi, sitting in the grand lobby of our hotel, Suleman sips at his tea, nervously glances over his shoulder. Is he looking for a lonely suitcase, a man fingering a bulging vest? We chat, his attention snaps back, he smiles, just a little shamefaced, Karachi he says, look what it is doing to us, but Shoaib, he relaxes, smiles, Shoaib is the finest person he has ever known in all forty years of working in Pakistan.

Then a surprise.

This melancholy man who glances over his shoulder as if assassins might be creeping up on us right now, closing in on us across the hotel's sumptuous lobby, this man is also chairman of the Thardeep Programme. Suddenly, he is animated, brighter, a success story, almost moved to tears, says Save the Children handed Thardeep over in trust to him, says it is his much loved child, the most beautiful in the world, all those desert dwellers, as poor as you can imagine, coming out of poverty through their own ideas, their own efforts, says this is one of Shoaib's greatest gifts.

Why is Thardeep so successful, when the Sindh organisation is not?

Suleman thinks, not for long, he knows, wonders whether to say it, says it. *It is so hard* he says, *so very hard to take social mobilisation to people who have*

been so long oppressed, so downtrodden, where they have never seen even the slightest glimmer of hope, of being anything but exploited by landlords, harried by bandits, by government officials, police, by everyone. In Thardeep, he says, there is almost no crime at all, people feel safe, it is a place of religious tolerance where Hindu temples and Muslim mosques are honoured.

Not so in upper Sindh.

The Baloch and the Sindhis are at each other's throats at the drop of a hat, ruthless bandit gangs abound and honour killings are common. Not at all a Sindhi tradition, says Suleman, the concept of honour killing has been borrowed from the Baloch, taken root everywhere, met with shrugs, not taken seriously by most law enforcement agencies, dominated as they are by men, many of whom believe in honour killing themselves. *So bad is the situation* says Suleman, *male staff will not travel in the same vehicle as female staff because they could become a target of an honour killing*. This is the bitter truth, he says, terrible things are happening all the time and simply go unreported, staff are constantly under threat, it is a battle to keep going.

Memon agrees, says *we go on trying and every now and then we succeed but it is very, very difficult, very, it is so feudal, more so than anywhere else in the country*. Says in each district there are only three or four big feudal landowners; we met one in Mahmood's house in Karachi, one of the more liberal, hooded eyes, hangman's gaze, immense power, men like this hold most of the land, their word is law. There are huge disparities in wealth, in freedom, nobody moves, nothing happens unless a feudal lord inclines his head, nods, moves an eyelid. Land redistribution is an impossible dream unless global warming impoverishes everyone. Yes, says Memon, *Zulfikar Bhutto may have abolished the entitlements of princes, of nobles, but he did nothing about their landholdings*, nothing about the many feudal lords large and small, his own family included, one of the main reasons, he believes, why India has advanced, and Pakistan has not.

Memon says he has one advantage. His previous work means he is known to all the Nazims, sighs, says *it helps but only a little*. Most, he says, are feudal: rulers and ruled, except for a very small number of people who have moved up from the coastal areas of Balochistan. An innovation most likely to succeed, Memon thinks, is microcredit. Everyone borrows from the mainly Hindu moneylenders, everyone, even the feudals, he says, *often illiterate, they do not even know what they owe*. Their tenants, the '*haris*' pay the usurious interest rates, pay off the loans their lords take out, repay some of their own debts.

Microcredit at rates we think of as astronomical, twenty per cent, seem like a gift to these people.

Without Shoaib, Suleman wonders if they will all keep going, all the old men with their old ideas of service. He himself is getting older, they all are, and where are the young to pick up the baton, he asks, where are they? Gone to America if they can, to Norway, England even, anywhere if they have any sense; if they want a life.

Another Sindhi, a small man, glanced nervously at our tape recorder, a mouse twitching his whiskers wondering if the cats will pounce. I tell him this and he laughs, a little nervously but he laughs. And then what do you know. This meek seeming little man, this nervous former bureaucrat had once been a student radical, been beaten by police, wanted to be a firebrand politician. You just never know. Fazlullah is his name; his father had been a leading politician. He is proud of his family heritage, proud that he was jailed on numerous occasions, baton charged by police in Sukkur bazaar in 1954, all of it still clear in his memory, great days, his eyes gleam with excitement, where has the mouse gone?

His lament is this.

These days, he says, *you might see lawyers, farmers, grown men, but you do not see students on the streets. Why* he asks, and then answers his own question? *They are all overseas, safe, making a career for themselves in another country*. Fazlullah's three children are no exception. They are scattered, in London, Canada. He did not want to leave Pakistan, Fazlullah wanted to follow in his father's footsteps.

Another regret, this one deeply felt, his father said forget it, and sent him to Lahore to train as a bureaucrat. That is what he became, a good bureaucrat. *Yes*, he says quietly, *if you want to be a good bureaucrat, if you want to keep your job, be promoted, you have to stick to the rules*, and sometimes you have to do things you do not want to do, listen to whatever political party is in power. Says *you may not like it but you have to do it*. Shoaib didn't and look what happened to him. A director of the National Rural Support Programme when Benazir wanted the endowment back, and at the same time a federal secretary, Fazlullah says he was under intense pressure.

Was he one of those who wavered?

Fazlullah avoids the question, says *we kept our resignations* ready. A follower, he waited to see who was the stronger, who would blink first, and was relieved when it was not Shoaib. Says that on Shoaib's strength we got strength and so the organisation was saved, but it was hard, very hard. He protested all the time that his hands were clean, says he told those from Benazir's party, who just happened to drop around to his office for a friendly chat, that all he and his colleagues were doing was working for the betterment of the people. Says he understands that the work of rural support organisations can be slow to yield

results while government always wants quick results, something they can boast about at the next election. And he still has reservations, still disagrees sometimes, has never again seen anything as good as Shoaib's first rural support organisation in the Northern Areas. Says, look, the National Rural Support Programme has been working in Sindh for twelve years but he cannot see any change, and the good thing about Shoaib is that he does not mind, he seems to have infinite patience. Says Shoaib tells him about Andhra Pradesh, that it is just as good as the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme ever was, better perhaps, but not Sindh, he says, maybe it is the culture.

I would like to know why Sindh is so hopeless he says, slipping back into his shell, his air of quiet despair.

Back to Fazlullah's student days. The director of the academy happened to be Tariq Siddiqi and so off to Gilgit went Fazlullah with others of his year. Shoaib was right. Those orientation courses were seed-planters. The would-be radical lurking underneath this small, apparently mild mannered man noted and remembered, never quite forgot although at the time his new bureaucratic exterior said fine, but not for me.

Fazlullah saw the north again in 1996, an investment in the future, Shoaib made sure he did. *The difference was incredible*, he says, *a different place, children in school uniforms, the whole area humming with new purpose, cherries in the bustling bazaar, incredible*, says Fazlullah, *just incredible*.

Will it be the same in Sindh?

Fazlullah slowly shakes his head, says no. Sindh is a social wasteland, tribal societies wasting their time fighting each other, spending lavishly on entertaining guests, and when not doing that, languishing in jail for a beating or a killing, or off on the trail of some poor unfortunate who is about to lose his or her life in another honour killing.

What honour he asks; *whose*?

The long-ago boy-radical peeping through the mask of an aging former bureaucrat who has fitted in, done what he was told, obeyed, not rocked the boat is a little ashamed. Says the feudal land owners of Sindh, the Amirs, do not want their people to advance, they want to keep them in their place, heads down, working. These feudal lords do not want their people educated, they do not want them to think they are equal in any way, they discourage small independent farmers, send their bullies around to make sure people know their place. Fazlullah shakes his head in despair, his province is now so divided, the Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhis, and in the huge seething melting pot of Karachi also throw in the Mohajirs, he says, those who fled India at Partition. He shakes his head again, asks 'what can you do with Sindh, different ethnic groups at each other's throats, the worst sort of poverty, feudalism, banditry, you name it, Sindh has it, what can you do?' Not impossible, he says, just improbable. Who in their right mind would want to go there?

Shoaib does, but Shoaib can go anywhere, *and that* says Fazlullah *is what makes him so unique, so rare in our country. Shoaib is accepted anywhere by everybody*. Says he is admired, respected, whenever the conversation moves to poverty his name is on everyone's lips. For anyone else it is different. Says *if you are accepted in Sindh, the people in the North West Frontier will not want anything to do with you and vice versa. Same for Punjab or Balochistan. But not Shoaib Sultan Khan, he can go anywhere, people will listen with respect.*

So is Shoaib a Frontier man, a Sindhi, a Balochi, a Punjabi, a Pakistani?

Fazlullah laughs at the idea because the simple answer is—all of them and none. A child of a once undivided India, Shoaib is a man of the region, a man of South Asia.

Not all is gloom and doom in Sindh. A light shines far down in the desert borderlands.

Tucked away deep in the south- eastern deserts of Sindh, hard by the mysterious swamps, the hot hard sand flats of the Rann of Kutch, smuggler's country, where remnant herds of wild, straggle-maned donkeys lurk, not all that far from the border with India, something quite remarkable has been happening. No fanfare, no publicity, no streams of admiring visitors, but there it is, a Sindhi success story, a mini-version of Shoaib's Northern Areas marvel, Thardeep.

A minor mirror image of the Northern Areas, Thardeep had several unique advantages. People so poor they were willing to try anything, all at the same social level, and a society where women could play a relatively active and open role in social mobilisation. Add to that a ferociously dry and desolate landscape, extreme poverty, few job opportunities, a largely low caste Hindu people, a sensitive border, and the terrible tyranny of distance, and you have a situation where the ideas and singular advantages of social mobilisation were an almost natural fit; anything in fact that might improve the villagers miserable lot.

Originally a project of the British branch of the international non-governmental organisation, Save the Children, complete with an adviser who, unlike so many expatriates, actually lived on site, Thardeep gradually morphed into a rural support programme. Located in Sindh's Thar Desert, the district of Tharparkar is one of the few remaining Hindu pockets in Pakistan. Thardeep's chief executive, Dr. Sono Khangharani exudes energy, one of those people whose enthusiasm seems to bubble over, infects everyone, you find yourself

smiling, you cannot avoid it. 'I am a Dalit' he says smiling, a low caste Hindu, he says it with such pride he makes it sound like an accolade. In its early days, before Sono arrived, the project began by working with bonded labourers, and was funded solely by donors. Sono says he retains this policy, remains strongly opposed to accepting government funding, says there are too many strings attached. Shoaib, perhaps more quietly, did exactly the same in the north.

Sono is also acknowledged as a very good, very committed chief executive, and Thardeep as one of the most dynamic of all rural support programmes. Says Sono quoting a little known poet, 'fortunate are those who love what they do'. Shoaib should feel at home. Thardeep is said to have exactly the same atmosphere, the same feeling of something amazing afoot as did the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in its early days. The project actually has working second level groups, local support organisations you can visit any time. Tariq Husain should be told. He is, says *it's a hell of a long way to go, but good news if it is true*. It is. Sono beams, says yes, there are six, they are quite successful. Why are they successful, what is the secret? Sono laughs again, community activists of course, oh yes, and something to focus on, something everyone wants. Without hesitation he agrees, microfinance was a flop at first, shrugs off this set-back in an eerily familiar way. And then I realise I am thinking of a younger Shoaib, how he would shrug off as a lesson learned some of the dead-ends he ran into in the Northern Areas.

Water off a ducks back, Sono beams again, says planting trees, another failure; lesson learned. Environmental protection of common resources, a lot of other experiments really worked. So has microcredit next time around. Says thirty community organisations make up one local support organisation, says they are not yet driving Thardeep, laughs again, corrects himself, says one of the women's organisations is, they are starting to tell us what they want, they are starting to own us. *Eventually it will all be like that* he says cheerfully, *we will be owned by the organisations we serve*. Has he talked with Raju?

Yes, Sono says, *but we are slighly different to other rural support organisations; we have a Board with fifty members, twenty-two elected. This makes us a bit different*. And Shoaib was also not there at the outset, he had not been involved in Thardeep's inception or initial funding. Is this why he sometimes seems reluctant to echo Sono's enthusiasm, talk up Thardeep's achievements? Sono also takes risks, believes his villagers. So did Shoaib. An example.

A village close to the border. People had to walk 30 kilometres to a well, pack water back to the village in buckets and cans. Water diviners said dig; you will find water at 700 feet. With Thardeep's help they did hit brackish saline water. Would they have to build an expensive desalination plant? The technical advisers said yes, villagers said no, we have to dig deeper, we know sweet water can be found at 1400

feet. Engineers scratched their heads, asked how could the villagers be so sure? Climb the border fence they said, walk ten miles, people there have found good water at that depth. Remember the Soust canal, Hanuchal? That was also an engineering impossibility.

The engineers are unconvinced. They remain highly sceptical. Not Sono. He said fine, dig, went back to his team, said we have already spent two million rupees, how can we tell our donors it was all for nothing? Let us find the money to go on. They do.

Then the drilling rig needed water and there was no extra money to hire a truck. Village people said fine, carried in water on their backs, trudging thirty kilometres, day after day, happy to do so. The Northern Areas all over again; the same sense of humour. The headman laughed, said 'look, we haven't got water yet but there is a benefit already. No one has time for anything else but carrying water. We have got automatic family planning.'

Two weeks later the drillers hit sweet water. The people celebrated for three days, forty sheep were offered up and eaten. Goodbye family planning.

The drillers had hit a gusher, drilled into artesian strata, water boiled to the surface, formed a lake. Didn't anyone advise them they should cap the well, conserve the water? When he saw the lake Shoaib was delighted, did not think about the consequences, nor had Sono. Oh well, maybe someone will sometime.

Other initiatives?

Solar cookers; drip irrigation; clay-lined mini-dams to collect rain water and so on, even insurance arranged by Shoaib's cousin, the bustling money-maker, dedicated hunter, Mahmood, an enthusiastic supporter of Thardeep. Sono shrugs, says *insurance is good, I do not know if it has made any difference yet except that people feel more secure*. Sono says it also helps influence hospitals. They are happy to work with Thardeep because they know people will be able to pay.

We first met Sono one night in Karachi, an extraordinary night where we dined in Shoaib's cousin Mahmood's hunting lodge surrounded by dead animals, expertly stuffed, posed and preserved by a famous South African taxidermist, just as they might have looked before Mahmood's bullet found them. Incongruously, Mahmood's dinner guests that night include Sono, the son of a Dalit labourer, and a Sindhi feudal noble, a man who lets Mahmood shoot over his land, a man who holds the fate of hundreds of bonded labourers, tenants, serfs in his hand. Knows it; smiles a demi-god's secret smile. The fare was excellent and well spiced which tended to offset the faint lingering wafts of formaldehyde. We took our coffee sitting beneath a large elephant whose head - and shoulders thrust from the wall above.

Sono didn't seem to notice, Sindh is a place of extraordinary opposites, told his story.

A Dalit, we know, is a low caste Hindu, Sono would be enormously disadvantaged in some parts of India. Not in Tharparkar. A poor family; father a small farmer, mother an artisan, so what? Everyone else in Tharparkar is in a similar boat. Sono says his mother is a remarkable woman, a major figure in his life, says she was my chief motivator, is still active at 80, laughs, says his wife also pushes him, does not mind that he is away so often just so long as he is doing good for people. How did he end up in academia, how did he become a veterinarian? Another story.

Starting out in the National Rural Support Programme after a five year stint at university Sono met Shoaib during the orientation period, and fell under Shoaib's spell immediately. Says unlike other trainers, Shoaib did not project self-importance, he did not hand out cards with a string of letters after his name, spoke softly but truly, said things that struck an immediate chord with Sono. Next he met the old man, Shoaib's mentor. Akhter Hameed Khan must have seen something in Sono that others did not because there were other meetings. Perhaps it was Sono's origins, perhaps it was his enthusiasm, perhaps it was Sono wanting to know how a technical man, as he was by training, how a veterinarian could transform to a social mobiliser. Says the old man had told him Shoaib is very special, the right person to show you how this can be done, see for yourself; stay with us. But Sono also remembers him saying of Shoaib, he will want to take you to the whole of Pakistan but don't be tempted. Think instead about your community, think small, do not be seduced by size.

The only Sindhi at that time, Sono stayed nearly five years as a programme officer. Says he was given a lot of respect which was a surprise for a Dalit, helped convince him he could happily spend a lifetime within the rural support movement, and is surprisingly positive about Najma Siddiqi who then led the organisation. Perhaps we have dealt too harshly with her, but then again, maybe Sono is like Shoaib, sees good in everyone.

Sono sought permission to resign in 1996. Shoaib came to see him, asked why; Shoaib hates losing good people. When Sono said he wanted to go back to the Thar Desert and create the same model there Shoaib beamed, gave his blessing and said you are allowed to go, more than that, go and create a new rural support organisation. So Sono went down to Tharparkar where Thardeep waited. As we know, a project was already in place but the director, a young Englishman, was about to leave. Sindh is not an easy place to work, the isolated desert region of Tharparkar even more so, he had done the best he could, served his time, was drained. On his way out, he met Sono in Islamabad, wrote with

some relief an end of contract report recommending Sono as exactly the right person to carry on the project in the area.

Stars in his eyes, Sono says he set out to create a mini-AKRSP, this time in an isolated desert area instead of high in the mountains. The challenge of a baking, waterless heat rather than bitter, snow-filled winters. Sono started small, thirty-four staff members inherited from the previous project and an office in one of those torpid, one-street, dusty, desert towns you drive through in a minute. *And despite pressures from outside to do this or that* he says, *we never forgot social mobilisation, never deviated,* laughs, *today we have five hundred employees and have gone from seventy-one villages to more than five thousand.*

For social mobilisation to work there has to be an entry point, something that will galvanise communities, make them want to get together. In the Northern Areas it was all those amazing physical infrastructure projects, in Thardeep's area, most of the men were away somewhere else seeking work so Sono went with the obvious, something that was already partly in place, an aspect at the top of village women's wish list: drought relief. The World Food Programme provided food packages, and they had a programme aimed to help them recover from drought, deal with the next one. Sono bought into it, added smokeless stoves, water harvesting, lanterns to light the way to the toilet at night, snakes and scorpions a hazard, trying to find something other than the usual embroidery stuff, did that very well too. It was all good.

Shoaib was surprisingly offhand about Thardeep when first we spoke of the programme. Yes, he said, they are doing very well. But although success stories had been filtering out for several years, and Mahmood had said quite often that Shoaib should go and see for himself, Shoaib did not visit the programme until the middle months of 2006. It was the hottest time of the year, says Sono, but Shoaib was totally unfazed. Afshan travelled with him, and said it was like driving through a sauna. Shoaib, says Sono, was very excited, very impressed. This is a puzzle because when I later asked was he surprised, impressed by what he found, Shoaib says not. He said he knew Sono had been trying to mirror the example of the Northern Areas so why should he be surprised. *Yes,* Shoaib agrees, *Sono has succeeded remarkably* but adds *of course he had plenty of resources from other donors.*

Yes, the programme is small, yes, it is tucked away in the far desert reaches of Sindh, yes, there are some social advantages, fewer strictures on the involvement of women, but what else causes Shoaib to pull back from full-throated enthusiasm, from talking of Thardeep as a wonderful example is hard to say.

I am not sure of Sono's wisdom in taking on the Sindh Rural Support Organisation. Shoaib sees this programme as part of his network, desperately

does not want it to fail, to fade away. Has he sacrificed Thardeep, does he have a twinge of guilt at persuading Sono to jump in at the deep end? Perhaps instead Shoaib knows exactly what he is doing, that Sono can handle both programmes, hands tied behind his back. Let's hope he can.

Shoaib made sure to include Thardeep in a journey to Sindh in 2008. One reason—at the risk of being cynical—to plant the idea in Sono's mind that he might take on the entire Sindh support organisation because who else might save it? The other, simply to see for himself a rare Sindh success story. Perhaps Mahmood's influence helped, he is an enthusiast. And whether he expected to or not, Shoaib loved everything he saw; wrote about it in one of the Notes for the Record he still produces, old habits never die, wrote of a wonderful journey complete with peacocks congregating in the temple compound of Dando Kasbo, of meeting Captain Dr. Danish, the only Hindu in the Pakistan army, of a new house for Juggo, the old caretaker at the Mithi training farm, of his cousin Mahmood's insurance firm, Adamjee, handing over 25,000 rupees to a slightly stunned but grateful widow, of drip irrigation schemes funded by the Poverty Alleviation Fund, of livestock vaccination camps, and an exquisite Jain temple, Gaurika Mandir, all topped off by a happy hour with the women of a carpet weaving centre. Shoaib left Thardeep with a warm glow. Things were truly happening in the desert.

If only it were the same elsewhere in Sindh.

A mistake is made.

An attempt to change an ailing donor project in Balochistan into a rural support organisation ends up in grief. Entrenched ideas will not go away, the German donors bridle at the idea of owning an office. Once, in the early days of the recently established Rural Support Programmes Network, Shandana found she had fifty-five million rupees in the bank. Great, said Shoaib, buy a house. Shandana did. The rental income yielded two hundred thousand rupees a month in 2007, and the property had appreciated in value. Just as good as an endowment. But in Balochistan, the Germans would not have it. They were appalled. How would their head-office deal with owning a building in Balochistan? It was unheard of, against the rules. Ah yes, the rules.

The highly capable Azmat Isa, now at the World Bank, was at the helm in the early days, talks of everyone falling out with everyone else, of the rural support programme grinding slowly to a halt, of him baling out rather than going under with it.

Shoaib, however, would not let it go under. There are too many detractors waiting in the wings, waiting to say 'I told you so', that social mobilisation doesn't work.

And at least they had a building. That was something. The saving grace, Shoaib believes, for without the house, without owning its own office, the rural support organisation would have disappeared. Gone the way of so many donor funded projects, gone without a trace. Says without hesitation he could not let it fail, his reputation and his word was at stake. Shoaib had made a point of saying that rural support programmes could work anywhere, under any circumstances, yet here was one that looked like it might die. If it did, he would hand his detractors a wonderful spoon. They would happily stir the pot.

World Bank funds had started to flow to the Poverty Alleviation Fund. First call was Azmat Isa, formerly in charge in Balochistan. Shoaib laughed, *I took him aside*, said *shame on you for letting the programme languish no matter how hard it has been, it is time for a resuscitation effort, do so.* Chastened Azmat hopped to it, Kamal Hyat was very supportive but they needed a new direction. They had tried to bite off too big a mouthful, tried to work in seven districts straight away. The trick of it all, says Shoaib, is to be able to make an impact and in order to make an impact you have to reach at least 75 per cent of the people; small area big area it does not matter, 75 per cent is the magic number. Anything less and there will be insufficient impact to make a difference. A little bit here and a little bit there and nobody will notice, the impact will be minimal, and nobody will want to join in. Azmat did what he was told, cut back, started the ball rolling, but he was on his way out. He had simply had enough.

Shoaib needed to find a dynamic replacement, someone so different people would sit up and take notice, even conservative Baloch tribesmen. He found one, a woman. A woman leading a support organisation in the heartlands of conservatism? Good God, said most people. Not as extraordinary as it first may seem but nevertheless remarkable.

Shahida Jaffrey, improbable as it may sound this fortyish, flamboyant woman of the world did indeed ride to the rescue of the Balochistan Rural Support Programme. Shahida had stayed on in Gilgit after Shoaib's ouster but being a smart woman knew her days were numbered. *That didn't bother me* she laughed, but why stay when you are not wanted? Shahida went to see Shoaib, laughs again, says *because of my husband the next thing I know I am chief executive of a near dead rural support organisation in Balochistan, yes, almost totally dead. Hah, she says, no power, no water, a dozen or so dead vehicles, no telephone, no money for staff salaries, dead.* Laughs again, says, *so I said fine, I will ask Shoaib Sultan Khan, if he says 'yes', I will do it.*

It was 1999, laughs Shahida *so there I was, chief of nothing, head of a dead organisation, an organisation already in the coffin, already buried. But there was one thing.* She laughs again, *there was a valuable building.* Shahida did not rush; this inherently impatient woman was, for once, patient. Says, I sat there for

an entire year reading, being trained by Shoaib. How do you run a rural support organisation? I didn't know but I learned. I did exactly what Shoaib Sultan taught, and then in 2001 some funding came our way.

There is a smile of triumph at the memory, well deserved no matter how many people, men more often than not, may think this woman spends too much time blowing her own trumpet. She has a lot to blow about. *Can you imagine this* she laughs, *a woman heading an organisation in Balochistan, a woman as the boss of men in that province*? Shahida, however, had an ace up her sleeve, and played it whenever it was necessary; her husband was Sikandar Jamali, a Baloch notable, chief secretary. Nobody trifled with the Jamali family, the wife of the chief secretary.

Can you imagine this she laughs again, *a woman driving to Balochi villages, honk, honk, honk, the driver would sound the horn and out would come the men and out I would get wearing a big Balochi smock and a chadar, a couple of other women with me. The men would bow and avert their eyes, they knew who Jamali was, so they would politely say, 'over there is the women's quarter Madam Jamali, please speak with them'.* Shahida smiled again, a smile of triumph, the men were in for the surprise of their life, because this woman would say, *I am not going there; I want to talk with you.*

Imagine the thoughts racing through the minds of these men, Shahida laughs. Oh no, how were they going to get out of this? How were they going to avoid irritating this powerful woman, how were they going to look her in the eyes?

Nothing for it, off they would all shuffle to the room set aside for male visitors, in the best house, and sit there, eyes fixed on the floor, hoping she will just go away. Not Shahida, she would start to talk, say *hah, you know I am the Sardar's wife, Jamali's wife, does any Sardar's wife come into your quarters like this?* They would say nothing. Shahida says she then asked, why should they come, they have nothing to say, nothing to offer but I do, *I have something to offer you, I have come to help you. And remember, it has nothing to do with being the Sardar's wife, everything to do with you.* Silence, not one man will say anything, none of them move, but wait, do I see a glimmer of interest? Her eyes flash, says *then I would ask the next question. 'Who is your prime minister, a man or a woman?' At last they answer, talk to the floor, say, of course the prime minister is a woman. And then I say, yes, Benazir, and you Balochi men all voted for her, a woman.*

Yes, yes, they would mumble laughs Shahida, *and then we would get to work. Three years were like that, of course I was not paid, I did not need money, three years, but it was good. Now there is a new chief executive and it is all working but it was me who brought it back to life, and I only did what Shoaib Sultan Khan said, what he encouraged me to do. Just that, nothing more.*

Shahida has not finished. Says listen to the end of this story. It is a command. Of course I will listen. How could I not?

Imagine this, she commands, in a voice the cook could hear way off in the back kitchen, so I try. *I am in San Francisco taking a break from Balochistan, visiting my daughter.* The telephone rings, her daughter says, eyes as round as saucers, 'it is the governor's personal assistant calling from Quetta, will you speak to the governor.' *Me*? Shahida laughs, *a call from the governor, of course, I would talk.* 'Honeyed words followed, what a marvellous job I had done, how I was just the person he was looking for, honeyed words,' laughed Shahida loving it, and who wouldn't. The rub? Would she take on the position of vice-chancellor of the women's university in Quetta? Would she? *I was shocked* she says.

Her family were all for it, but Shahida says she was still head of a rural support organisation, first she had to ask her mentor, Shoaib Sultan Khan whether she should accept and then she had to check with her husband. The second was easier; Jamali was also visiting his own children in America. Shahida pretends to be annoyed, says *hah, unknown to me, both had already been consulted.* Shoaib thought the move a grand idea, wrote that the offer was an honour for all of us. 'He could have told me earlier', she said in mock annoyance. Shahida is still at the university, travels there each day, a working woman in the Talib heartland, *four years I have done it* she says in a voice that says to anyone who might, try and stop me, three hundred women with their masters degrees, she shakes her head, a long drawn out sigh, *aaah, you should come and see it.* Modesty is not Shahida's way and I admire her for it because why should she be modest in this world of men? I have done it, yes, she says, but it was all due to Shoaib Sultan. He took a crying, depressed woman, gave her a job to do in Gilgit and now look, there she is, vice-chancellor of a women's university in the heartland of religious extremism.

Hah yes, she says again, a favourite expression, *there is al Qaeda and the Taliban, and so am I, and it is all due to Shoaib.*

Asks 'Is that enough. Is that what you wanted to hear?' It is.

A network coordinating organisation, the Aga Khan has one, has as members every one of the various Aga Khan philanthropic or development organisations. Shoaib thinks he needs one too, says one of his main worries in joining the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme was how would he manage to continue to maintain contact with the various fledgling rural support organisations in Pakistan, including the one-off Ghazi Barotha, an organisation established at the behest of Shams ul Mulk, then chairman of the very powerful

Water and Power Development Authority; Ghazi Barotha, established to tackle the problem of farmers displaced by the construction of big dams, something that had never been done before, cited by the World Bank as a ground-breaker, the organisation had a roller-coaster ride. There were problems with finding a chief executive; problems with the power and water executive over how much should be paid as compensation because of course their ideas of fair compensation were a long way short of the amounts farmers thought they should be paid, and a plethora of other small problems with the displaced farmers.

But, as Shoaib says with a shrug, in the long run it was better than nothing.

To complicate matters, and as we already know, keeping the various rural support programmes alive and well was a constant battle. The Americans had left the Sarhad programme high and dry, funding was a perpetual problem, and the national support organisation still needed cosseting. Then another complication, the Chief Minister of Punjab adds his half billion on the understanding the amount will underpin a Punjab Rural Support Organisation. Not to be outdone, Sindh's government does the same, even ups the ante. All this just as Shoaib was about to start travelling, take on the region for the United Nations.

Shoaib's answer was to persuade the United Nations Development Programme in Pakistan to allocate funds to pay for a small group of professionals who would act in Shoaib's stead, resource people, Shoaib called them, who would travel and help with the start-up phase of any new organisation, plug the gaps when existing organisations ran into trouble, be his alter egos. Shoaib knew exactly who these resource people would be. Shandana Khan was one, so was the tried and true Hussain Wali, and an old Daudzai hand, Feroz Shah. Off they all went to Punjab while Shoaib orchestrated events at arm's length.

Well, it was a start, but Shoaib wanted to go one step further. Not only did he want a gypsy band of resource people, he wanted a permanent organisation. Maybe the British would find the funds. Steve Jones we have already met. An independent consultant, the British Department of International Development listens to his advice. Shoaib sought a meeting, saying he pestered Steve mercilessly. Both happened to be in Delhi at the time, and as Jones is one of those people who seems always to work to a hectic schedule, the only time slot he said he had was midnight at the Taj Mahal hotel. Shoaib was leaving for Andhra Pradesh by the first flight next morning so you can judge for yourself how much sleep he managed to get. Jones does not seem to ever sleep. Whatever was said, it worked and the British government came up with the funds. Shoaib got his network supporting organisation.

A question? How well do the various rural support organisations work together, is there more cooperation than competition?

Shandana now heads the network organisation, sits at the centre of the rural support web, acts as Shoaib's conscience. She is no male-eating spider, but she is very bright, sure of her own abilities, hears many different sides of the same story. *The network is exasperating* she says, *really, there is very little free flow of information between the ten member organisations, they are more competitive than cooperative, and some of them, such as the National Rural Support Programme's urban bank, tend to be secretive. The National Rural Support Programme's role is also a perennial issue. Boring, boring* says Shandana, all this fretting about territory. It is an issue Shoaib deliberately chooses to avoid. The rural support organisation's staff don't, they grumble, see the nationally named organisation as an anomaly, as having bitten off too big a mouthful, so big they sometimes choke on it, see the refusal to let the Institute of Rural Management become an independent organisation as grandstanding, ask can one rural support organisation claim to be truly national? If rural support organisations are supposed to be embedded in society, with villages, how can one rural support organisation do this when there is so much diversity in Pakistan?

In Peshawar, Masood largely ignores the training institute, so does Farooq Haroon in Punjab, and this makes the institute less than it could be. Punjab remains a wound. Shandana says Shoaib was totally shocked at the outcome of his intervention, hurt by the ensuing bitterness. But he saw his mistake, put it to rights, apologised. Few men of Shoaib's stature would do this, would even think of doing it, says Shandana. Shoaib also stumbled over the changeover of power in Balochistan, he is not perfect, does not claim to be. Some think he is, are surprised when he makes mistakes. He is only human after all, the best sort of human, one who can make mistakes, apologise, even when he doesn't have to.

Shandana believes Shoaib frets, worries that apparently quite capable rural support organisation boards mess things up when he is not there, make mistakes, are not as assertive as they should be, can be pushed around by politicians, influential people. He is probably right. Some of the Board members we have met are good men but timid, followers, conscious of the status quo, others of course not. Shandana thinks if Shoaib can only bring himself to increasingly step back, to take a break from direct involvement, some rural support organisations and their boards may strengthen, may become more confident if they know Shoaib will not be there watching, guiding. No one will argue with Shoaib, no one will disagree even if they think he is wrong, they will not say so to his face, you don't do this to a guru, to someone with Shoaib's stature, you just don't do it, says Shandana. She does, of course, but then Shandana was in Gilgit.

Perhaps some of them are even too nervous to make a decision in case Shoaib might say 'no, what I think is this', make them look foolish. Young seedlings struggle to grow in the deep shade of a giant old walnut tree says a smiling Izhar

Hunzai. Perhaps Izhar is right; perhaps he is also talking about himself in Gilgit. A young seedling still, Izhar finds Shoaib an almost impossible act to follow; finds it very hard to grow in his shadow.

Is there a stand-out rural support programme? *Well, of course* says Shandana. *In Peshawar Masood's is very well run, very, but it is so hard, so very hard to do anything in the Frontier,* she says, shaking her head. Once Shandana thought she could, failed, says it is just so hard, says Masood is really doing an excellent job and of course he is. Brightens, but Thardeep, Sono's organisation, there is one organisation that has some of the excitement, that could be a smaller, lesser version of the Northern Areas in the early years. There is the same isolation, a desert instead of mountains but a long way from anywhere; there is the same ethnic uniqueness, in the Northern Areas it was the Ismailis, in Thardeep, nearly half the population is Hindu. Neither are part of the mainstream, both were willing to cooperate, women in particular.

And there they are, a short walk away from Shoaib's own office perched above the modest back garden of Falaknaz House, a small gathering of Shoaib's bright young people, the inner circle, Gilgit trained, the outer circle the next generation, no less committed, all trying to create a sense of unity, a sense of being part of a marvellous whole, confronted by provincial rivalries, competitive ambition, occasionally divisive spats, different priorities. And really, is the network of rural support organisations Shoaib has contrived to create in the years since he came down from the mountains of the north, is it a wonderful success? It is good, no doubt about that, the major rural support organisations do a good job, stay as close as they can to Shoaib's guiding principles, seen as a combined whole, all ten reach out and touch the lives of about three million villagers, two hundred thousand community organisations. Impressive perhaps, but think of Shoaib's Northern Areas organisation in its heyday, one organisation, a quarter of a million active villagers on the rolls, think of Andhra Pradesh, a scarcely believable figure, ten million people, still growing. And yes, the combined savings of the community organisations of more than a billion rupees, the disbursement of over ten billion rupees as microcredit loans, the three and a half billion rupees spent on product physical infrastructural schemes, all identified by villagers themselves, the nearly half million village activists trained, all this is impressive, achievements that would be envied by most donor-driven projects. But when you think back to the early 1990s, to the bright promise of the future, to all the hopes and promises, it is as Sartaj Aziz says, both puzzling and disappointing, it is not enough.

Dogged in pursuit of his goal, an eternal optimist, Shoaib does not echo Sartaj's disappointment, looks on the bright side, says the achievements are wonderful considering the difficulties faced by the rural support organisations,

and the reluctance of government until very recently to come out in full support. This is what he says, this is the message he gives to anyone who asks, to the board members of every rural support organisation, to new recruits, to those who have served long and faithfully—you have done well, you have remained true to the ideas of social mobilisation, all we now need is a final push, a final effort and we will succeed, reach the magic number, 75 per cent of the rural population, 75 per cent of the rural poor.

This is Shoaib's public face, does it change in the privacy of his rooms at Falaknaz House; does he despair? Is that why some days he speaks of going back to Gilgit, to watch the sands of life slowly trickle away while he sits on the lawn outside his rooms at the Chinar Inn talking with a few old men, those who were once part of a glorious experiment, the wonder of the world? Perhaps it is.

An urban orphan in a houseful of fully parented rural support organisations, is the Urban Microcredit Fund secretive as Shandana suggests, does its foster parent, Rashid Bajwa's National Rural Support Programme, keep it under wraps, out of the limelight, hidden away in its slightly run-down offices, secondary to other concerns, does not want its trumpet blown when the rural side of things is such hard going. After all, the Fund is different, focusing on the urban poor when every other one of Shoaib's creations, the mandate of every other rural support organisation, are rural villagers, the people Shoaib first encountered sitting at his grandfather's side while the old man carefully dealt out justice to the villagers in his circuit, the rural poor of India.

How did the Urban Microcredit Fund start, why did Shoaib take on the far more difficult job of mobilising the urban poor, do as his mentor had done so well in Orangi in the slums of Karachi, create hope? Let us be honest here. The plight of the urban poor is not one of Shoaib's priorities. Perhaps he knew instinctively what Saunders, in his book *Arrival City* describes so well. How rural living is still the largest single killer of humans today, the greatest source of malnutrition, infant mortality and early death. Urban poverty, writes Saunders, may force a mother to send her child into the streets to sell goods; rural poverty will cause that child to die of starvation. People do not as a rule die of starvation in a city, incomes are higher; access to education, health, water and sanitation as well as communication and culture are always better in a city. People are not stupid, they vote with their feet—the teeming millions who live in Karachi, and the millions more in other cities.

Except for a few countries, India and particularly Pakistan, Saunders suggests the population of the world's countryside will stop growing around 2019, India's by 2025. But a billion rural poor in the Indian subcontinent as a whole is still a huge number of people. In any case, Shoaib is the first to admit that social mobilisation as it stands does not work in urban areas, that some

innovative thinking is required. However, if there is little sense of the existence of a cohesive community in the slums of Karachi, Lahore, or Rawalpindi, and only tenuous unity in a single street, a stronger connection exists between immediate neighbours, family, members of a specific religious sect. Small groups work, so does microcredit.

Back to 1994. After they had failed to get their hands on Nawaz Sharif's gift of five hundred million rupees the next niggle from Benazir's back-room power brokers was why didn't Shoaib replicate the activities of Bangladesh's increasingly famous Grameen Bank, do it in an urban context? Well, said Shoaib we knew it was no use arguing about the entirely different approaches, how in the Northern Areas we had taken an holistic approach whereas Grameen was sectoral and based only on providing credit, anyway, to stop the niggling we said fine, we will try a pilot.

Next step? Funding. No real problem there, the decision makers of Shoaib's United Nation's poverty programme said they would be happy to fund a pilot project. So the urban poverty alleviation fund was created, and a promising young man, Masood Gill, was appointed to head the organisation. To cut down on costs, and perhaps to add another arrow to the quiver of his brand new National Rural Support Programme, Shoaib decided the Fund would start life as another of its subsidiaries and would work in the surprisingly extensive slums of Islamabad, and the far older, well established slums of Rawalpindi.

What could Shoaib tell Masood Gill about working in the urban slums? Not as much as Akhter Hameed Khan; so Masood Gill was packed off to Karachi for a two year apprenticeship. Lucky fellow, Shoaib agrees, yes, lucky fellow indeed. Well, if you call wandering around the slums of Karachi lucky, walking the reeking streets of Orangi, because that is where the old man sent Gill. What Gill discovered was that he had to 'unlearn'; he had to begin again from scratch, discard the ideas he had gained about working with the rural poor, take a fresh look.

There were no villages in the slums, or none that Gill could find, he was lucky if he could find ten like-minded people in a neighbourhood, ten people who would meet and provide mutual support. More often than not the most he could find was three. There was also not a lot of social capital in the slums, very few potential activists, people were coming and going all the time, women and not men were the constant, and it was all intensely competitive.

Another issue to mull over. Working in the slums, working with very small groups was a staff-intensive business. How would he handle this? Gill decided on an organisation that dealt with social mobilisation on a very small scale, where there were no intermediaries, no activists, where a lot of field staff were

required, where meticulous bookkeeping and highly transparent accounting was an absolute, a non-negotiable must.

Was there a uniquely positive side to working in urban slums? There was. The Fund would aim to work with women because they were always there, something the other rural support organisations do not do. The Fund would also be targeting the fastest growing population in the region, the urban poor.

At the end of his two years, Masood Gill returned to Islamabad, made a presentation, announced he was advocating an organic, pragmatic, sociological approach. Shoaib chuckled, *no one was quite sure what he meant* except Gill who explained that he had learnt from the old man that nothing is permanent, everything is evolving, a pragmatic approach is not a bad thing and that making compromises means you are simply adapting to changes as they happen. Shoaib laughed, *that was the old man* he said, *that was Akhter Hameed Khan alright.* Gill was left to quietly get on with developing the Fund's activities, and as it turns out, quietly got on with things very well. *Another plus* says Gill in his earnest slightly worried way, *was that a lot of previously unemployed urban youth were taken on to run the programme which benefited the way the Fund was perceived.*

What next?

Well, says Gill in a matter of fact way, *as if this was not a considerable achievement, within three years and a subsidy of thirty million rupees, the fund was self-supporting, had established its own line of credit from banks and lending agencies, had offices in slum areas where a million people lived, seventy-five thousand active women borrowers, nearly seven hundred million rupees outstanding as loans, two hundred different businesses.*

By 2007, so successful was the Fund that the First Women Bank happily took on the task of overseeing all accounting matters, provided a two hundred million rupee line of credit, and allocated special windows in its banking hall for clients of the Fund. Other willing supporters include the United Nations, and unlikely as it may seem, Bangladesh's Grameen Bank via its American branch and their office in Lahore.

Does the National Rural Support Programme ever help out, I ask? Gill laughs, says *I only ask them as a last resort because they offer no discounts, demand premium market rates.*

The Fund's field staff encourage the formation of small loan groups, an urban echo of Andhra Pradesh's self-help groups, a minimum of three members who hold meetings in each other's houses and who are prepared to stand guarantor for each other. No collateral is required. Loan groups are supported by

an office staffed by three or four field workers, all within walking distance of the member groups. As ambitious as any other, Gill has more than doubled the number of the Fund's district offices because personal contact with loan groups is an essential. Still a subsidiary of the National Rural Support Programme, the Urban Fund remains operationally independent, sometimes competing with its principal for territory. Gill smiles, his brow wrinkles, would he like the Fund to go out on its own? Uncomfortable with the question he declines to answer. His quiet success speaks for itself. Let Shoaib decide.

Shoaib airily says that's all it takes, thirty million rupees and you can extend coverage to another million urban poor, a very small price to pay, thirty rupees for each person, he shakes his head, it is such a trifling amount. Gill's office is a model in understatement, far from plush, far more downmarket than any of the other rural support organisations, a little seedy even, a place where a slum dweller would not feel overawed. Very little money is wasted on unnecessary trappings.

Quietly positive about the Fund although urban slums are not quite where he wants to be, Shoaib is full of encouragement for Gill, says what impresses him most of all is the huge range of enterprises the women engage in, producing over two hundred different products, marketing them. All the women needed was a small amount of credit and out went the middlemen, people who had previously paid them a pittance. In Orangi, Shoaib says, there are a million people but you will not find one beggar, not one. Says he thinks we would find exactly the same situation in the slums where the Fund now does business. And a business it is, no hand-outs, the Fund helps women create money-making enterprises, lift themselves out of poverty.

Shoaib is enthusiastic, would like to find a way for Gill to be able to move into sanitation, health and education. Could he use the Orangi model, he asks, not expecting an answer? *All it takes*, he says with enthusiasm, *is a very small amount of money, that irrelevant thirty rupees a head to kick-start group formation. Most of the effort comes from the street communities.*

Masood Gill is in awe of Shoaib, says it was Shoaib who allowed them to take a very different approach, that you can argue with Shoaib without fear of retribution, says once so vehemently did he argue against making regular meetings mandatory for his loan groups that any other man in Shoaib's position might well have sacked him. Instead Shoaib had listened patiently, said alright; see if it works your way. He also gives Shoaib credit for putting the Fund on the financial map by bringing in a team of evaluators from an internationally recognised Indian microcredit rating organisation. It was a major coup, says Gill, very important, the Fund scored highly, made people all over the microfinance world sit up and take notice, all Shoaib's doing. The

congratulatory letter Shoaib subsequently sent meant a great deal to Gill, more perhaps than the four-star rating of the evaluators.

How important is Shoaib?

Think of this, says Masood Gill. In Bangladesh there are at least three famous towering figures who have worked against poverty, Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank, Fazle-Hasan of BRAC and Shafique-ul-Haq Chaudhry of ASA (Association of Social Advancement), the fastest growing organisation in the world. *India also has its greats, but in Pakistan there is just one, Shoaib Sultan Khan* says Masood Gill, *Shoaib Sultan Khan stands alone as far as development, as far as programmes for the poor are concerned, he and he alone is Pakistan's towering personality.*

Does Masood Gill see any problems looming on the horizon? He surprises me; says he does, says everyone, government, donors, development agencies, all of them constantly seek the one-off magic cure for all ills, something that will solve every problem in one fell swoop. Everyone wants to reach the poor overnight, he says, the poorest of the poor has become a mantra that will bedevil them all for years to come, and asks, isn't being poor enough, if the poor have nothing what do the poorest of the poor have, less than nothing? Says this is what I see, microfinance has become the magic bullet ever since Yunus and his Grameen Bank were awarded the Nobel Prize. Of course, says Gill gravely, microfinance alone isn't. Microfinance will help, a lot in fact, but it is not a magic bullet. Development has to happen as part of an entire approach, as part of social mobilisation.

This is where those such as the Grameen Bank fall down says Gill, *they have never included social mobilisation in the way they do business.*

Another poverty alleviation fund, a big one this time, complete with a multi-million dollar soft loan from the World Bank, nation-wide responsibilities. The story begins, as some do, with Benazir who seems to have stirred quite a few ants nests when her party won power in the 1990s. Questions were asked, how had Bangladesh got the jump on Pakistan, why is the Grameen Bank so famous; why is there nothing like it in Pakistan?

Time passed. In the political merry-go-round of politics in Pakistan Benazir was out, Nawaz back in again.

One of his first actions? To say yes to the establishment of a poverty alleviation fund. Then, in 1999 Nawaz is out again, but the new finance minister and former CitiBank vice-president Shaukat Aziz who has been given the task of revitalising the country's sagging economy is equally in favour of such a fund. Says get on with the job.

First question; easy answer. Would the Fund be an extension of government or an independent financial institution? Civil service mandarins, financial bureaucrats said government of course, isn't it a World Bank loan we are talking about? Doesn't government have to guarantee such loans? Sat back, thought surely their views would prevail? The World Bank and other people of influence such as Sartaj Aziz were enamoured of the way the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme had been structured, says Shoaib, and they had seen how the National Rural Support Programme was not able to be stripped of its funds and more or less dismantled at the whim of a political party. That was what they wanted for a poverty alleviation fund, independence and accountability.

Lobbying done, papers written, all is in readiness when in May 1998 Pakistan goes nuclear. World Bank backs off, in Washington the various divisional managers sit on their hands, the Americans are not pleased, the Indians extremely irritated, they do not find it at all amusing to be caught by surprise. Luckily, Shoaib's ardent supporter Meiko is still a power in Washington and Meiko very definitely wanted the Fund to go ahead. But not only had Pakistan misbehaved with its nuclear programme, blotted its international copy book, World Bank's sectoral managers did not think the country had the capacity to absorb the amounts that were being bandied about. John Wall happened to be one of those who had shaken their heads, said sorry, no; not at this point, think of something else.

So Meiko says to Shoaib, please get over here and work your magic. Shoaib hops on a plane, of course he loves hopping on planes, even if he thinks he is in for a frosty reception. Shoaib offers no comment about Pakistan's new nuclear capacities, it's not his job. He does not like the idea of nuclear weapons in any hand but this is not the time to make a stand. He will keep his views to himself. Poverty is a big enough problem without complicating matters with a nuclear conscience.

What a time to pick to arrive in Washington. Shoaib laughs heartily at the memory but it wasn't funny at the time. He must have wondered if for once synchronicity, the falling in place of events just when they are needed, had failed him. Was it hard going? *It was* laughs Shoaib, *but I had to do it. It was now or never. Windows of opportunity like that one do not stay open forever.*

An astonishing twist. Shoaib produces an extraordinary *rabbit out of my hat:* arranges for an Indian to ride to the rescue. And why not? The alleviation of rural poverty has no borders. In Washington, Shoaib began to talk, gave presentation after presentation and in a master stroke, used a film Raju had caused to be made showing the amazing successes of Andhra Pradesh. *It did the trick very nicely,* Shoaib laughs.

Still, Shoaib had to talk and argue until he was hoarse. Argue that it was South Asia at stake, not only Pakistan, and that if anything worked in one country it could be taken to the region. He also argued that gone were the days when World Bank projects in Pakistan were chronic under-spenders, not when you were talking about rural support organisations and social mobilisation. Look at how much money was disbursed in the Northern Areas, look at Andhra Pradesh. The problem will not be under-spending but whether the new funding agency could keep up with demand.

Back in Pakistan, Azmat Isa was the point man, and in Washington there was Meiko and a new convert, John Wall. But once again it was Shoaib who made the difference. The sectoral managers grudgingly gave the Fund the green light and World Bank's board approved it. Shoaib, with Raju's help, had unblocked the logjam. In Pakistan, a joint-stock company is established and luckily later on Sartaj Aziz is there to make sure the usual old hacks and government officials are not retained to serve on the new Fund's board of directors. Struck off the list is the deputy chairman of the planning commission, and all the federal secretaries; included are a hand-picked independent elite, chosen for their interest and experience in development, in civil society, picked for their business skills, their financial acumen, their honesty.

Next, a former banker with impeccable credentials, Kamal Hyat is persuaded to take on the job of chief executive. The Fund is ready for business. Shoaib for once is not a board member. Potential clients cannot be on the Fund's board, there can be no hint of impropriety, no hint of favouritism. This is fine by Shoaib but he keeps his finger in the pie. A member of the general body, he is also in constant contact with Kamal Hyat, they meet at Falaknaz House, take tea in the wide front living room, talk. Kamal is an interesting man. Quietly spoken, confident in his manner, a consummate banker, casually in command in the offices of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, at home a different man, an artist of considerable talent. I would happily hang one of his works on my wall. Kamal has his own network of contacts, most I imagine in the business world, but Shoaib is a founding father, a man of influence in many courts, he can access almost any office, public or private, a phone call is all it takes, appointment diaries are cleared, Shoaib is seen. Kamal likes that, uses Shoaib's good offices whenever it makes sense.

Kamal does not run a philanthropic organisation; he does not deal in hand-outs. The loans the Fund will make are meant to alleviate poverty but they also have to be paid back.

In the beginning there were hiccoughs as the Fund found its way, some of the loan recipients ran into trouble, others found it hard to meet the ground rules such as opening up new areas instead of just increasing coverage in areas where

a rural support organisation had already invested time and effort, had 'opened it up'. Kamal's years in banking have also made him cautious, prudent. He liked the idea of social mobilisation but he opted to wait and watch. Patience is a banker's forte. Waiting will cost Kamal nothing. Shoaib nodded, *yes, we have talked a lot but it is only in the last year, in 2006 that the Fund's people have got fully behind the ideas of social mobilisation.*

It doesn't matter to Shoaib. He would rather a financial institution exercise prudence than recklessness; rather a considered approach, a commitment for the long haul than an on-again off-again situation where you never quite knew where you stood. The main thing, says Shoaib, was that we ended up with a well funded institution approved by government but free of government control, inherently flexible, but immune from the worst excesses of political pressure. And unstated but always there, free of corruption. He might be cautious, his financial prudence might annoy some but as far as any hint of improper practices are concerned, Kamal Hyat's credentials are impeccable.

Kamal's story. Ah yes he says, speaks slowly in measured tones, covers a lot of ground with a few well chosen words. You warm to this man at the same time knowing he could be quite ruthless. Once a banker always a banker, is that right? Kamal smiles, leaves the answer to my imagination. Living comfortably in Lahore in the early 1990s, not retired, he says let us say I was living a restful life, a painter's life, Kamal was asked to lead a team whose task was to investigate if a bank could be built upon Shoaib's activities in the Northern Areas. You could not help hearing about the remarkable changes happening there smiles Kamal, all sorts of rumours, nothing definite, people talk you know he laughs, not everything you hear is true so I had some quick homework to do. Intrigued, Kamal found himself being picked up at Islamabad airport by Tariq Husain.

Shoaib was at home. Surprised by the modesty of Shoaib's small, cluttered office, a building tacked on to the back wall of Falaknaz House, without a hint of condescension in his voice but with a banker's eye for detail, Kamal describes *walking into a very nice little study.*

That was the first surprise. The second?

Well he says, *immediately there was a very nice, warm feeling. There was not an ounce of stiffness in Shoaib Sultan Khan, nothing at all bureaucratic. We talked as we are talking now, in a relaxed and friendly manner, so unlike most meetings with top officials. You knew straight away* Kamal says, *here was a person you could talk to, who would listen. And this is important. So many senior people in Pakistan have forgotten how to listen.*

So Kamal agreed to lead a team to the Northern Areas, Americans and Pakistanis, bankers and economists, saw Shoaib in a new light, a man totally at

home with the people, totally at ease just sitting and talking with the villagers. Impressed, as much as anything by the dignity of the village people, their confidence, their absence of servility and how they did not feel obliged to provide lavish amounts of food for visiting guests, says *for me the best thing was being offered just a cup of tea and an apple, this was a sign that a truly remarkable transformation was underway.* But as we know, nothing came of the mission; the findings were not what the board of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme wanted to hear.

Fast forward.

Years have passed but that brief interlude had awakened an idea in Kamal's mind, an idea, he says, he had not known was there, that life had been good to him, it was time to repay the debt, move out of his comfortable existence. No one could ever accuse Kamal of being rash, of making an unconsidered move.

It is one of his strengths, a banker's strength. So he waited, bided his time until asked to head the Poverty Alleviation Fund.

Yes Kamal says, a man from an era when a social conscience, helping the unfortunate was 'noblesse oblige', we owe a debt to the poor people of Pakistan, there is no doubt in my mind about that. I thought the poverty alleviation fund was one way I could do that. There was also irritation, anger even, although a banker should not be moved to anger. Makes him careless. This is why Kamal was irritated.

Kamal says he is not a party person by choice but when he went to Lahore it came with the territory. But not only did he have to endure the ordeal of social niceties, time and again he could do little but smile politely and move away when foreigners, and Pakistanis too, says Kamal, all those people clutching cocktails and canapés saying, 'oh yes, you know, Pakistan is such a corrupt country, they are so useless', on and in this vein. A real teeth-gritter, Kamal said it made him more determined than ever. One day he would put together a world class institution, one with impeccable credentials. He wanted to hear people say that a world class financial institution can be found in Pakistan, an institution where honesty is a byword; that was the only reward he sought.

I hope he has achieved it. It is well deserved.

I was quite ferocious about this he says, *it was either that or I would be gone. He laughs, there was trouble at all levels, even with the rural support organisations because we insisted on business plans.* Shock horror; the rural support programmes were aghast, said how can we ask the poor for a business plan, you do not know anything about poverty? *Maybe I didn't* smiles Kamal, *but I told them I do know about business, and a good business, no matter how small needs a business plan, nothing complicated, the simplest plan will do.*

What we had to do, and it was no easy task, was to convert Shoaib Sahib's dreams into something that would work.

Kamal shrugs, *how else will the proposer know if they have a viable business? How else can we assess them? If there is no collateral, good faith is all we have.* He laughs again, *so I said to the rural support organisations, some of the bigger non-governmental organisations, look, just for me, take off your saffron robes and talk about the real things in life, show the poor how to draw up a business plan, it will really interest them, reassure them they will be able to repay the loan. Then you can put your robes back on; continue with your good works.* Shoaib, he says, agreed without hesitation, and of course he would. Shoaib was equally a pragmatist. So, smiled Kamal, the saffron robes came off, the business plans came in.

One of his first acts was to talk to Shoaib; Kamal uses the term 'confer'. A banker's term, the word means more than just a talk, it also means to take counsel. It was what Kamal set out to do, take counsel, ask questions. Kamal's main question was this: what would be the best way to take the Fund forward. He did so with his eyes wide open, says yes, Shoaib is a great facilitator, he can make things happen in the most unlikely circumstances and he can be extremely dogged, pursuing an issue dear to his heart year after year until finally it will take root with a stubborn government, a reluctant aid agency. And then Kamal smiles, but you also have to understand Shoaib's biases, the way he puts his villagers first and foremost, talks about them with the same affection a father might about his children. Plus and minus says Kamal, plus, he loves them and so puts their interests above all else, minus, he does not want to hear any criticism of them.

Nods, smiles, says he calls this an understandable process, the only time you might meet a brick wall when talking with Shoaib is to criticise the villagers, the poor. *So I don't* he says, *not my place, and in any case it is poor business policy to act on hearsay.* Laughs again, says *Shoaib does become annoyed with me but only when I become too professional, says to me 'get off your high horse, the people you are dealing with are really struggling. Your job is to help them'.* Kamal laughs, *and he is right, so I do.*

A very likeable man.

Says one of Shoaib's greatest achievements is to attract talent, says they come to him like moths to a candle, talented civil servants, all sorts of people from all walks of life who might otherwise have been lost in the normal tangle of the bureaucracies, professional people who want more than just to make money, those who started out as interns in one of the support organisations, so many talented people all drawn to service, all drawn to organisations where they can use their talents to the full. It is a remarkable achievement, a wonderful legacy.

Says yes, the Fund had a very slow start and that annoyed everyone, government, the World Bank, the rural support organisations, and other potential clients. Kamal though, was determined to make as few mistakes as possible. He was also working in an entirely new milieu, one where if someone was judged 'good' they got money, and if not good they did not. There was no question of collateral, the way banking normally worked. Kamal had to adopt a new mindset, find ways for loans to be made and paid back. This was where the rural support organisations came into the equation. Social mobilisation in all its forms was the collateral Kamal sought. He laughs again, now government officials ask me why I am expanding so fast, how money seems to be vanishing out the Fund's doors in vast amounts, money some in the government would like to get their hands on.

Other government officials come to Kamal say look, you are running a parallel government, a parallel system. Kamal says he replies by asking 'parallel to what?' No funds are allocated, no loans given for a school or a health clinic if there already is an operating government clinic within twenty-five miles; so parallel to what, he asks again and then he smiles? He knows he has made his point. Made it well.

Shoaib's greatest contribution?

Kamal does not hesitate. Had there been no Dr Akhter Hameed Khan there would have been no philosophy; had there been no Shoaib Sultan Khan there would have been no action, no rural support organisations, no socially mobilised villagers, no poverty alleviation fund, none of us would have been inspired to do what we now do.

Says Kamal the artist, the banker, the provider of loans for the poor, *Shoaib Sahib is a very lovely person, a man who practices goodness, still believes in goodness.* In service in an increasingly cynical and self serving world, Kamal is a man who sees Shoaib Sultan Khan as someone he can look up to.

What about the Poverty Alleviation Fund? Kamal smiles, says *it is to all intents and purposes a hybrid of what the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme once was, philosophically similar, trying for an holistic approach.* Describes the Fund as 'a very interesting animal', entirely independent, an institution no governmental department can tinker with, no politician can command, a private sector company, but nevertheless sponsored by government who underwrite the loans provided by the World Bank.

And Shoaib? Well, smiles Kamal, he is our biggest fan.

Kamal talks more, says Shoaib quickly realised the Fund under Kamal's leadership had become a professional organisation. Nobody stood on their dignity, was easily slighted as can happen with government, and while financial probity was absolute, there was not the same rigidity, more personal

responsibility, decisions could be taken and enacted with alacrity. It was exactly what Shoaib had hoped would happen when he went off to argue with the bankers in Washington. Kamal also says he set about recruiting staff on the basis of skill not friendship. Says with some pride his staff are all Pakistanis, recruited from all over the world, adds quietly, there is no end to the talent available.

Shoaib's network of rural support programmes are Kamal's key clients. Are there any standouts? There are and it is a surprise. Kamal cites Thardeep, says those people are very good, it is an extremely difficult area and yet now they are covering almost the entire Tharparkar district.

Nobody is completely exempt from a little pride and Kamal is no exception. He of course has every right to be so. He leads the only social fund in Asia asked by World Bank's financiers if follow-up funding was wanted. Kamal the banker laughs, *it was a surprise, a strategic advantage because of course* he says, *we would have gone to them but they came to us first*, topped up the initial US$90 million with an additional US$238 million. Very useful, attracted others, says today there are five different donors including the corporate sector which came in after the earthquake of 2005 with a resource base of US$650 million.

There is one idea Kamal has yet to be convinced will work, providing finance directly to the supra-village organisations, those Shoaib calls 'local support organisations'. Yes, he says, they might certainly prove to be of great use for some purposes but how can my Fund afford to work with a thousand different community groups, how would I cope with the administrative costs, do they have the maturity, the know-how, to write loan applications, deal with all the minutiae?

So, Kamal says, let me lend to the bigger rural support programmes, Rashid Bajwa's National Rural Support Programme in Islamabad, Masood's Sarhad Rural Support Programme in Peshawar, any of the others, any organisation for the people. They can then lend to those next down the ladder, the organisations of the poor. That is the way Kamal sees the system working, believes unless the larger community organisations are grouped it will be very challenging for his Fund. He thinks Shoaib will be able to live with this. So will the rural support organisations. It will guarantee them a role into the future, place them in a complementary position with the next level of community organisation rather than a competitive one. It will no doubt please Masood who, like Kamal, has thought about the future role of larger community organisations, how they will retain their downward accountability.

Why does Kamal have this view?

A thinking man, he has an answer ready, says, if you look at Pakistan today, look at the source, the origin of protest and you will find an elitist organisation of some sort, educated people, those who see and understand the wider issues. It has always been like this. Rarely does genuine social protest originate with poor communities, unless there is a leader. Perhaps Kamal is right, perhaps the reason is that the poor of Pakistan know all too well that if they raise their heads someone greater than they are, someone far more powerful is likely to chop them off.

Do not get me wrong here Kamal adds, local support organisations are a great idea, but I have to find a way to work with the idea. He thinks, however, that many of the staff in the various rural support organisations in Pakistan at least, remain sceptical, but they are sceptical for the wrong reasons. Kamal says he once told Shoaib this, that he may not be believed by all rural support organisations, and Shoaib gave him a very old fashioned look, said, no, no, come on, that cannot be true. But, said Kamal, I said yes, it is true and you should not be surprised, it would be a miracle if everyone thought like you do, had the same dedication, the same purpose, everyone has their own ideas about how best to help the poor, you only have to look at Farooq Haroon in Punjab. His view of social mobilisation is very different to Sono's at Thardeep, or Bajwa's at the National Rural Support Programme. There are differences, quite big differences.

This, says Kamal, is Shoaib's last big challenge, smiles, *well maybe not his last, that is being a bit dramatic, but the challenge is this: How to bridge the believability gap*. Kamal says he suggested Shoaib become more interactive with his chief executives, spend less time in the corridors of power. Shoaib listened, said 'come on, there is only so much I can do' *and again he is right* says Kamal. *But the great thing about Shoaib is that he will think about this, he will continue to strive, continue to get upset when he finds someone who does not believe, will not believe, sit and shake his head, say 'my God, what is the matter with him, what can I do'. Yes, Shoaib is a passionate man, and social mobilisation is his obsession, his magnificent obsession. It can be wearing but it does not diminish his accomplishments.*

A red rag to some in government, the inability to manipulate Kamal Hyat's poverty alleviation fund, to be able to dictate what the institution should do with its funds, not to be able to use them to some political advantage annoyed some in government, some of them quite a lot.

Shoaib laughs, says *remember what I said about governments and their programmes, they change the names, do similar things and commit the same mistakes, all governments*. Says think about Mr Junejo's five-point programme, Benazir called it the people's works programme, Nawaz Sharif renamed it yet again, and when General Musharraf became chief executive it was reborn again. Then they looked at the poverty alleviation fund and said, alright, why not have a fund that we control? Good idea, was the general response, and let's call it the Kushal Pakistan Fund.

Then there was a fellow, a Dr Shah, adviser to the ministry of finance at the time. He had a brainwave laughed Shoaib, he said *'why not ask World Bank to finance our new Khushhal Fund instead of Kamal Hyat's Fund. Kamal's Fund has already been given more than enough, and after all, it is the government who is borrowing the money so we should be able to say where it will go.' Yes, it was a brainwave alright* said Shoaib still laughing, but it ended up as a bad headache. When push came to shove what some in government wanted was a fund that could be used to support political careers.

The World Bank, however, stone-walled, they are good at that sort of thing said Shoaib with a shrug, and so John Wall, by now a convert to social mobilisation, did not refuse government's request outright, he just suggested the loan approval process would be lengthy and rigorous, asked whether the government was really ready, had they thought through all the implications? As for additional funding for Kamal Hyat's Poverty Alleviation Fund, well, said Wall, that institution had a very successful track record, had already worked with World Bank for five years so additional funding would present little or no problem to the Bank.

Grumbling, Shah and his supporters backed off. Turned their attention to the funds allocated to a government programme called Sectoral Development. The idea of this programme was to hand over a large lump sum grant to the Nazim of each of the country's five thousand Union Councils. The bureaucrats hated the idea almost as much as they disliked their powerlessness when it came to the money managed by the Poverty Alleviation Fund. So they lifted ten billion rupees from the sectoral programme and opened an account for the Khushal Pakistan Fund. Satisfied with themselves Shah and his colleagues sat back *Now* said Shoaib, *perhaps you might go and see Yaqub.*

The Kushal Pakistan Fund has its office in one of the ostentatious concrete mansions drug barons and their ilk now build in Islamabad. Sparsely furnished as if staff had only moved in yesterday and might move out again tomorrow, we are greeted by an impossibly well groomed, impossibly beautiful secretary. Yaqub, she informs us in a seductively melodic voice, will be right with us.

We sit opposite the polished expanse of his executive desk, papers well ordered. Yaqub Arif is an impressive, well-spoken, obviously smart young man, everything about him says he is one of the elite, birth and education, both count, a bright young man, one of those who have come home. Fulsome in his praise of Shoaib, Yaqub says first he was sceptical but now, having seen the effects of his loans on individual lives, he is a believer.

Shoaib says his first impressions of Yaqub were good (they met walking on Margalla track number 3 the exercise circuit for Islamabad's elite), and always on

the lookout for talent, suggested Shandana interview Yaqub. Nothing came of it and then one day Yaqub just bobbed up as head of the Kushal Pakistan Fund.

Perhaps I push the point a little harder than is polite because Yaqub is very definitely uneasy when I ask about political pressures, about the preferential direction of loans.

How free is he, I ask? He almost protests too much that his Fund is squeaky-clean. He seems compelled to say more, says after all politicians in every country try and use funds like his for their own benefit, in America they call it pork-barrelling, they try and direct money into regions to serve their own political interests, and if that sometimes happens with his Fund so what is new?

Yaqub is now very definitely not at ease. We both know that in the long run the government of the day is his paymaster. If they wish they can call the tune at any time. He either has to dance or leave the floor. So far he has chosen to dance.

Shoaib declines to say anything either way when we talk later. Instead he says *well, let me tell you another story.*

Always on the lookout for new funding sources, over in Peshawar, Masood ul Mulk heard that loan funds might be available. So he met with Arif Yaqub and the various ministers Arif answered to and an agreement was reached. The Kushal Fund would sign a loan agreement with Sarhad (SRSP). Masood went back to Peshawar, climbed into a vehicle and did the rounds of sub-districts and villages, involved various Nazims and communities, prepared a portfolio of projects, submitted it. And then the trouble began.

The first Shoaib heard about it all was a phone call from Munawar, Shandana's mother, the very capable chairperson of Sarhad's board. The Khushal Fund, she said, would not approve the project list, particularly those for the non-Pushtun districts of Haripur. Instead, they had offered another list, their list. Invited to attend a meeting at the Peshawar headquarters of one of the leading political parties, Masood declined, politely of course. Fine, said the politician in question, I will come to your office.

He did. Without much beating around the bush the politician said, 'look, after all we are giving the money, all we ask is to have some say in where it is spent. We will give you a contact person regarding the areas where you are to work, but that is all. You can decide on the projects, how the communities are organised; there will be no interference.' Interestingly, Khushal's chairman was not at all pleased with the proposed changes. The original list had involved a four-month survey and had then been approved, how then could the board go back on its word? Easily, said the provincial politicians, going back on your word is called political expediency.

Masood was asked, well ordered actually, to go ahead, detail and cost the new list, the politician's list, and to do so in very short order.

Masood said little, he rarely does until he is sure of what he wants to say, went out and identified a list of projects in the new areas, had them costed, completed the entire job in a week. Submitted it; sat back to watch the fireworks.

In Islamabad there was a call for Shoaib. It was Aftab Sherpao, the younger brother of Shoaib's long ago assassinated friend and supporter, asking just what is going on, had Shoaib's rural support organisations changed their methodology, the way they worked? Please tell me more asked a very surprised Shoaib. I will said Aftab, I have an office full of angry Nazims from Nowshera, Hangu, and God knows where, all shouting that Sarhad has become totally politicised, that they are only doing projects in areas approved by the other political party, and said Aftab, and here he could not help laughing, one of the excluded districts is mine, so the opposition are using you to cause trouble for me.

Shoaib of course buys time, counsels patience, says of course he will look into it and of course Sarhad is apolitical, totally, he can guarantee it. Aftab says all right, I will leave it to you to sort out. Shoaib immediately puts in a call to Masood, suggests he should go straight away and see Aftab, tell him what has happened because despite their chairman's reservations, Khushal's board have met again, thrown out the first list and approved the new one. Masood shrugs, takes himself off to Aftab, tells him what has happened. Shoaib follows this with an urgent call, asks Aftab to please refrain from going public just yet, not to lend his name to any newspaper articles, the last thing Shoaib wants is adverse publicity, knows any number of journalists would gleefully seize upon the situation. Aftab agrees for old time's sake but says he can only wait so long. Masood then asks Munawar to call an emergency meeting of his own board. They stand firm. A memorandum of understanding had been signed with Khushal, they will work only with the original list. Khushal can loan the money or not. Their call.

A stick in an ants nest. Arif called Shoaib, said his chairman would like a meeting. Shoaib knew games were about to be played, mustered reinforcements, asked Masood to bring along each of his regional managers. They all drove across from Peshawar, trooped down to the ministry of finance. This was not what was wanted. Would Shoaib see the chairman for a brief private meeting? All right, he would, but only a brief meeting. The chairman happened to be on the telephone but present also was the secretary of economic affairs who surprised Shoaib by asking smoothly why Sarhad just didn't get on and do all the projects, both lists. After all there was enough money. There was in fact but Shoaib answered, *wait a minute, we have been told that only the new list has been approved. Not at all*, said the secretary, but then to complicate an already

complicated situation was immediately overridden by a more senior official who said *no, we can't do those projects, only those on the second revised list.*

Why, asked Shoaib, *why limit our work to only fifteen Union Councils when there is money enough for all forty-four?* Shoaib wasn't given a direct answer so he shrugged and said, *fine, but Sarhad's board is unlikely to agree.*

Then ensued a fair bit of irritated muttering, hurried consultations between this official and that laughs Shoaib. It wasn't supposed to go like this, it was not in the script, why didn't the irritating fellows from Sarhad just agree, roll over, take the path of least resistance. After all, one lot of poor villagers is more or less the same as the other, isn't it? Talk, and more talk. Eventually Shoaib believes there is agreement to revert to the original position but as people were still talking, still arguing he is not entirely sure.

Best get it all down in writing, Shoaib thinks. He knows he will not be around during the next few weeks to rally the troops. This was done, the Sarhad Board met and approved the new arrangement, and that says Shoaib is the end of the story.

Shoaib laughs, *there are still mutterings at Khushal but our Sarhad staff learned never to listen to anyone except their chief executive, Masood, and that their jobs would never be at stake if that is what they did. Politics should stay out of development. Yes*, he smiles again, *poor old Sarhad was our guinea pig and we learned a thing or two. And yes* said Shoaib just a little reluctantly, *government can never quite be trusted, has to be watched closely but should not be excluded. Governments are just too powerful*, he brightens, adds, *but there are always windows of opportunity, just be careful you don't jam your fingers when they close* and laughs heartily at his joke. But it really isn't a joke. Shoaib has every reason to distrust bureaucrats. They hung him out to dry.

Masood wrote later to me to say he did not think the whole episode was that big a deal, that he has far bigger issues on his plate from time to time. He does and it wasn't but as a story it is an example. Shoaib thinks so too.

As for the projects Sarhad finally implemented, Shoaib beams, says *of course they were very good.*

But he would expect nothing less of Masood.

A diamond in the slipper

Imperial India, the princely state of Hyderbad, circa 1930

His Exalted Highness, the idiosyncratic Mir Osman Ali Khan, the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, the only princely ruler to be granted a 21-gun salute by the

Raj Sarkar, the richest man in the world, stubs his toe when trying on a pair of his father's slippers. Up-ended, out of the slipper rolls a diamond the size of a duck's egg. Twice the size of the famed Koh-i-noor, the Nizam gazes at his find in surprise. Known later as the priceless Jacob diamond the Nizam puts it to use as a paper weight.

Already wealthy beyond belief, the *bidi*-smoking Nizam may have shrugged off his find as just one more addition to the astounding collection of jewellery and precious gems accumulated by his forebears, rooms bursting with super-valuable baubles, one the size of a modern day Olympic swimming pool overflowing with pearls.

Not so wearily casual were those who inherited the new state of Andhra Pradesh. They did not shrug off their find. The slipper they stubbed their toes on and then up-ended was threadbare and worn, the slipper of poverty. The diamond that rolled out was an idea, and it had been placed there by a man, Shoaib Sultan Khan.

18th December 2007, Orvakal Mandal Samakya, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh.

Dear Shoaib I wrote, *yesterday you saved a life. The ideas, the seeds you planted ten years ago are now trees that provide shelter to many people, the poorest of the poor. These ideas reached out and saved the life of a beautiful young girl....* It had been one of the most quietly inspiring and moving days I can ever remember.

The story is an all too common one in India and usually ends in shoulder-shrugging tragedy, just one of those unfortunate things. A desperately thin, frighteningly fragile widow, a girl no more than eighteen, living on the arid scrubby fringes of the tribal areas, with two young children, eking out a wretchedly poor existence. Her husband had just died in a haze of alcohol and fever, and the young girl, depressed, with little hope, sought to kill herself. But the girl's mother, a new and hesitant member of a self-help group, brought her here hoping for a miracle. The girl sat on a carpet on the cool tiles in one of the tranquil rooms of Orvakal Mandal Samakya's headquarters, two small ragged children on her lap, engulfed within a ring of strongly serene, clearly courageous, self-assured older women, engulfed within a circle of love and support.

Felicity already sat within the circle, she had been taken there, tugged by a smiling child, *come please*, she had chirped, shaking her head when Felicity spoke, 'come please' the only words of English she had learned so far.

When my turn came I shook my head. This was not men's business. I smiled and backed away. Vijaya stopped me with her voice, saying come, this is not just a women's group, this is a Shoaib group. I let another child lead me to a spot on the

floor, folded my legs awkwardly as we Westerners sometimes do, and sat watching while the Shoaib group worked its miracle. By day's end the girl's blank hopeless gaze had changed, the despairing bleakness was gone, and the faintest of hesitant smiles lit up her beautiful face as she sat there clutching a cheque for five thousand rupees, an unimaginable amount. The women had decided she needed this, had it issued immediately, no strings attached, just like that, magic.

But there was more, far more. There was the sure unfailing strength of support, the immense power of love that poured from each of the women sitting with the girl, the way they smiled and said *we will not let her leave until we are sure she will be all right, until we are sure she wants to live. Then we will help her to set up a business so she can go on, look after herself and her children,* and then they laughed with the joy of it all. *And then,* they said, *we will go to the government and make sure she is given her rights, her pensions, she has no idea she has rights but she is one of us now, she is part of a Shoaib group.*

And they would do this; they knew they could do anything.

Surely this was the dream come true, the quiet strength, the power of social unity, a unity that can bring new hope to rural families, of communities themselves reaching out to the poorest of the poor in a way no donor, no outside organisation could. My one regret was that those who doubted such a thing could ever happen, that once organised and strong, communities would reach out to their own people, the poorest of the poor, their cousins, their sons, in this case their daughters, my regret that day was that those who doubted, those who had quenched the fire in Gilgit, those people were not sitting there with me to see what might have been, to see that the idea of community organisations, village organisations is not over, is not time-limited or socially exclusive, but is one that has the potential to grow into an extraordinary structure, a social network capable of changing and altering the lives of the rural poor, an idea that might actually eliminate poverty, words spoken in the past only by the brave or foolish.

And you know Shoaib, I wrote again, *that was only one part of a totally amazing day.* We saw women building a school with their own hands; visited thriving shops and dairies, small businesses; stood by as women discussed matters with various government officials who have their offices in the community-owned building; watched as loans were quickly processed and given by the women's organisation; paused briefly with another group of women sipping tea in yet another room as they talked through the repayment problems of one of their village members.

They smiled as they sipped their tea, the defaulting member sipping her tea with them, and said in answer to my question, 'oh yes, in time we will solve this'. And somehow you knew they would.

I could not help thinking—'what if this had been a men's group'—because while all these matters were being dealt with, there was no drama, no raised voices, no threats, no pushing, no stones thrown, chairs overturned, no ego plays, no stalking off in a temper, no affronted dignity just an amazingly serene, quietly busy atmosphere, a feeling that all would be well. And somehow you just knew that no matter how difficult the problem a solution would be found.

As the day ended, after we had eaten a simple but superbly spiced vegetarian lunch, dipping our clumsy fingers into bowls of delicious *pachchadi*, after we had happily agreed that the cuisine of Andhra Pradesh is the spiciest of all Indian cuisine, after we had cooled off with four small cups of whipped coffee taken on the flower edged lawn, Vijaya drew us in again to meet a group of young women. They were all laughing prettily.

Their story though was not pretty at all.

Rescued as children from the bondage of indentured field labourers, the girls had just graduated as nurses. Great, I thought. Not so great, said Vijaya, some clerk, some minor pen-pusher had taken a bribe, removed the names of these girls from the list of those to be employed in government hospitals and inserted other names, girls whose families could pay. Despite the fact that every one of Vijaya's girls had finished in the topmost group, the petty bureaucrats had just smirked and shrugged, 'but madam, the names are not on our list'.

They were in for a surprise. These were not girls who would shrink into the background, who knew their place in life, a place that was supposed to be at the bottom. This was war. *Hah*, smiled Vijaya confidently, *we will go to the Collector, all of us, the officials will not be able to resist all of us, five thousand will go if necessary*. I doubt it will be necessary. As we left, the girls, the newly qualified nurses, young women liberated from a life of labour and poverty in the fields began to sing the anthem Martin Luther King made famous in America. It did not seem out of place at all. The words, 'we shall overcome' followed us out into the fast closing evening.

There was more. I had a list of village women to meet, those who had been there from the beginning but they were not to be found. Where were they? What had become of them? The answer was yet another head-shaker, a hard-to-believe situation: most were away in Uttar Pradesh, in Bihar, taking the message of social mobilisation to far distant places, to new women's groups, away on journeys that would have been unthinkable a decade before, skilled activists out earning money as paid trainers, sending the funds back home, some of course straight back to the new school fund.

And that, I wrote, concluding the email, *was how this day ended, thinking of*

were once isolated and desperately poor, illiterates with no education, women who could do nothing, who knew nothing, who had nothing, women who could hardly dream of even travelling to the district's main town Kurnool, women whose husbands would have put their foot down, refused permission and then sauntered off to the country liquor store leaving them desperately and hungrily alone with the children.

Women who could now do anything.

Surely this is what scaling up really means.

It is not necessarily increasing the size and reach of some high-achieving support organisation. It is, as Vijay Kumar laughs, the man who has followed in the legendary K. Raju's footsteps, the clever jovial man who now leads the ultra-successful Society for the Elimination of Poverty in Andhra Pradesh, Vijay Kumar roars with laughter and says, understand this, this organisation, my organisation, like all organisations for the poor does not matter so much. Yes, we can help start things up, provide support along the way, but it is organisations of the poor that matter, who can really convince others that being poor is not a hopeless no-escape situation, whose activists can travel to other districts, other states, women who are unimaginably skilled compared with their previous conditions, women whose new status is unimaginable to those they are now talking to. He goes on, do not forget the most important point—none of us sitting here in our offices, with our education and privileges, can take the credit. Whatever has been achieved in Andhra Pradesh is because the power of the poor has been unlocked. He laughs, our only achievement is that we have not been an obstacle. And think of this, the process, the whole business of social mobilisation has not only changed the lives of the poor, it has changed our lives too.

He laughs again, shakes his head as if it has all been one huge joke, and says it is difficult to explain this, that really you have to experience it to understand what he is about to say, how in unlocking the power of the people we have also unlocked our own power. Nods to himself, he has found the right words but there is one more thing to say, looks directly at me, says it. *At the same time I feel guilty that it has taken us sixty years, all that time since independence to achieve what now seems so simple, so obvious. We have wasted so much time.*

And so it came about that they met, with all the glittering pomp and diplomatic effusiveness that such events demand, two presidents, four prime ministers, and the king of the tiny mountain state of Bhutan, all with their comet-tails of bustling attentive staff and very important people, met in 1991 on a cool December week in Sri Lanka's gracious capital Colombo for this the sixth summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. I can see Shoaib smiling, saying you

know, things happen when they are meant to happen because things were indeed about to happen. Again by one of those strange hand-of-God coincidences Shoaib believes in so firmly, of the big two, one of those who took his seat, India's Prime Minister Shri Narasimha Rao, called Andhra Pradesh home, while Pakistan was represented by Mian Nawaz Sharif, the brash no-nonsense Punjabi businessman turned politician, an unabashed supporter of Shoaib. Why was the presence of these two so significant?

Wait.

More than twenty topics were on the table from the banal to the sensitive. Regional cooperation; international, political, and economic issues; trade agreements; the environment; shelter; children; terrorism; visas, drug trafficking; science and technology and more. A wearying list and so of course the various leaders did not attend every session; there were teams of diplomats, businessmen and academics for that purpose. There was one session however where every prime minister, every president, the King of Bhutan, the only royal present, took his or her seat. So did the representatives of the world's major aid agencies and financial institutions. The issue on the table was this. If the last forty years had been a roller-coaster ride for many countries, in 1991 optimism was in the air all across the region, even in trouble spots such as Afghanistan, things seemed to be looking up. There was however one major exception that just would not go away: wars came and went but the weeping sore of abysmal and persistent poverty just seemed to get worse, could no longer be swept underneath the carpet, conveniently ignored. Throughout the region countless millions continued to live in a state of appalling poverty and instead of declining, the squalid urban shanty towns, the hovel villages of wretched rural poor were growing faster than gross national product, faster than anyone had ever thought possible. Not only was this a looming social catastrophe of vast dimensions, the millions of poor across the region represented a fertile breeding ground for radical dissident movements.

Something had to be done and done quickly.

To their credit, and despite any other differences they may have had, it was an issue the leaders met head on, for once united. Poverty must go they agreed, poverty alleviation programmes will be accorded the highest possible priority. And then they sat back. They were leaders. They could make decisions, they would act, but they needed something on which to act. So they did what politicians and leaders do when they reach an impasse, they passed the buck to the hired help and then got on with what was left on the discussion agenda. Some forty-eight resolutions were included in the final official declaration, many fairly banal or of a very general nature. One resolution, however, was very specific. For Shoaib and although they did not yet realise it, for the State of

Andhra Pradesh in India, resolution nineteen was to mark the start of life-changing events. The idea of the late Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa, an independent South Asia Commission on Poverty Alleviation was to be established immediately with eminent persons representing each of the seven member states. Its task would be to table a report to the seventh summit on how each member state should best go about alleviating poverty.

In Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif already had someone in mind to represent the country, an ideal candidate, someone who knew all about alleviating poverty. His mind made up, as was his way, Nawaz acted.

Shoaib says *out of the blue, just like that, one Gilgit night I received a call from Geneva* as it so happened, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sheheryar Khan was on the line. A foregone conclusion, Shoaib became a member of the Commission and during the following year travelled with his fellow eminent members throughout South Asia.

If the Commission had been Premadasa's bright idea it was India's Narasimha Rao who set the boundaries, demanded an action plan not a treatise. He told Commission members, some of whom were academically inclined, he knew what poverty was, had grown up with poverty in Andhra Pradesh, so he didn't need to be told, what he wanted to know was how poverty could be reduced. So would the Commission please stop wasting time on definitions and get on with providing simple, practical solutions. Something that would work; said so in no uncertain terms. Some feathers were ruffled. Not Shoaib's. He was delighted. Practical answers were his business, the way he worked.

Now whether the other members of the Commission were bereft of specific ideas and practical experience or whether Shoaib used his formidably persuasive capacities to full measure to bring them into line, the final report left no one in doubt as to what should be done to alleviate poverty and where the ideas had come from. Shoaib had laughed when I suggested he might have had to work hard to get his message across to the others, *not at all* he said, *they were a very good team and produced a very good report.*

The Commission's report was tabled at the next summit meeting in Dhaka in Bangladesh in April 1993. It had Shoaib's thumbprints all over it.

The declaration, the record that shows the world that those at the summit have indeed been working hard in the interests of the region and of their own member state, had grown this time to sixty-three resolutions including a few new topics such as women in development. Poverty alleviation had not been forgotten, had in fact moved up a few notches. Not only that, somehow the term 'poverty eradication' was now being bandied about, a phrase far stronger, a situation far harder to achieve than alleviation.

Could poverty really be eradicated? Well, the phrase was a fine one and would go down well with the electorate back home but perhaps the wording could be a little less ambitious, a little more cautious. So the member states applauded the report and accorded high priority to the alleviation rather than the eradication of poverty. An agenda of action through to 2002 was quickly agreed. Strategy? Social mobilisation. Tactics? Building organisations of the poor and empowering them through support agencies underwritten by government.

It was pure Shoaib and shone through all the subsequent non-specific waffle tacked on to the poverty alleviation declaration, hobby horse issues such as decentralising agricultural and industrial development, lifting poor women out of the awful hole they were in and providing some of the basic infrastructure and laws to nurture and protect the poor and the very vulnerable, protect children.

Shoaib had thrown up his hands, disappointment still evident, still real. It was as if the summit had happened yesterday and not fifteen years ago. Why had he been so disappointed? Hadn't he got what he wanted?

Well, you know he said shaking his head, *the report was endorsed without anybody really trying to understand the proposals or making any concrete suggestions about what they were going to do about it.* Could I imagine that, he asked? I could. For many of those at the summit, the report itself was outcome enough. They sat back satisfied. Job done, and done well, hand the report over to the bureaucrats to be filed 'action pending!'

Shoaib shrugs again, smiles because he knows that didn't happen, says, *you know it could all have ended right there, right then, a year wasted.* It was not just the year wasted that bothered Shoaib, a window of opportunity was open, but already it was beginning to close. If nothing was done millions of people would have no chance of ever getting out of poverty. However, all was not lost. Perhaps the politicians were smarter than Shoaib thought. Tacked onto the resolution was an appeal to the donors, a paragraph urging 'all actors in the world economic scene', particularly those in the West, particularly the big financial development institutions, even the big international private organisations, for all of them to create 'an enabling international atmosphere'. In other words allocate experts and money to get the leaders of the region off a very uncomfortable hook.

Permission granted. World Bank's summit observers picked up the document, added their imprimatur and sent it to all United Nations agencies. Phone calls were made, notes sent saying, said Shoaib with a grin, *look, here is a document endorsed at the highest political level by every one of South Asia's leaders, let's do something about it.* The 'something' was a workshop to be held

in Washington, at Annapolis to be accurate, where the commissioners would again present their report, this time to an all-star cast of donors and financiers.

Enter Henning Karcher.

Henning was one of those whose ideas and outlook were formed in the heady days of John F. Kennedy when anything was possible, when young men and women believed they could make the world a better place. He had been an assistant resident representative in the Islamabad office of the United Nations Development Programme when Shoaib had been in full cry in Daudzai. Shoaib laughs, *look* he said, *now do you see why I believe in synchronicity*? Henning had climbed a rung or two, was now the Chief of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.

Sent up to Annapolis as an observer, Henning sought Shoaib out after the presentation and said with a grin that the spark he had seen in Daudzai had now become a bonfire. Shoaib thought nothing more of the brief encounter, his attention diverted by the contents of a letter written to the government of Pakistan by John Wood, then a vice-president at World Bank. Wood had read the Commission's report and wanted to allocate twenty million dollars towards setting up independent rural support organisations in Pakistan.

Nice thought but Shoaib knew it wasn't going to work. Not yet anyway. Benazir's government was bent on retrieving the five hundred million rupees Nawaz Sharif had handed over to kick-start the National Rural Support Programme. Thwarted because the money had been cleverly locked away in an untouchable endowment account, Wood's suggestions received a somewhat frosty reception in Islamabad from some of those in Benazir's inner political circle.

Fifteen years later and it would be a very different story but for now, Shoaib knew he would have to look further afield to find a welcoming home for social mobilisation.

The United Nations does not work like Nawaz Sharif. Nobody snaps their fingers to summon a secretary; nobody immediately dictates a letter to the finance minister asking him to send half a billion rupees to support an idea, no, the process is far more sedate, far more predictable. Back in New York, Henning sits in his office. Let's assume he is an immediate and enthusiastic convert, what would be his next move? Well, in order to sell the idea to a largish and often opinionated congregation, each with their own pet cause to promote, he has to plan his campaign carefully; he has to move with caution. However, it just so happens he is in exactly the right position to do this. It also just so happens a cluster meeting of South Asia's Resident Representatives is scheduled for Kathmandu in three months time.

Henning reaches for his telephone. Would Shoaib come to Kathmandu and make his social mobilisation presentation? He would? Henning is delighted. Step one accomplished. Step two depends on Elena Martinez, an exuberant Cuban who happens to be the regional bureau's acting director. An exception to the United Nations norm, Martinez not only becomes an instant convert, she is also known for making instant decisions. Henning later told Shoaib so great was Martinez's enthusiasm that she just said to her functionaries, 'get this man at whatever cost, just get him'. As soon as he returned to New York, Henning telephoned Shoaib again with another proposal, the next step in the process Henning knew he had to follow.

Shoaib laughing, said *suddenly it was all happening, you know I picked up the telephone and he asked me if I would undertake a mission to each of the six member countries who had participated in the commission.* Shoaib's task was this—to obtain the go ahead and promise of support from each of the countries to establish practical social mobilisation programmes. Henning also needed a Terms of Reference for the mission, a polite cough, would Shoaib write one. 'Sell this to each country' said Henning 'and I can then table the entire package as something right up the United Nations Development Programme's alley'.

Shoaib is very good at keeping his emotions to himself if he wants to, to most outsiders he is his normal cheerful, optimistic self, but secretly he is a very worried man. Although he has been retained as a Director, no longer is he on the high-flying payroll of the Aga Khan Foundation. His work with the National Rural Support Programme was also entirely voluntary. *I simply was not going to ask them or any rural support organisation for money* he said emphatically, *this was my labour of love.* In any case, a local salary would be a financial flea bite. *You know Noel, all this was happening at a time when I did not know what I would do* said Shoaib smiling a shy, slightly embarrassed smile, *there was my United Nations pension so I was not going to starve but we would all have to tighten our belts.* And although Shoaib's daughters said they were more than willing to economise, Shoaib was not. He thought his wife and family had already sacrificed enough. There was also a long list of other dependents. How would they manage? What was he going to do? Can you imagine how Shoaib felt when he sent the terms of reference to Henning Karcher in New York? On that document rested the future of social mobilisation in South Asia. Perhaps his own family's future as well.

Henning did not disappoint. Back came the reply, a green light for Shoaib and the mission and permission to take an assistant with him.

At this point I sit back and shake my head in wonder. The person Shoaib chose to take with him was, of all people, Anis Dani. *Yes*, said Shoaib smiling his 'why-not smile' I had come to know so well, *I took Anis Dani with me.* But

then again, Shoaib had already flabbergasted the board of the National Rural Support Programme by not only declining the position of chief executive as an interim measure which was more than sensible, but by also putting all his weight and influence behind the appointment of Najma Siddiqi to that position. A footnote to the larger happenings, Anis's participation in the mission went no further. He did not feature in further developments. Najma, too, chose to move on. On edge a little, Shoaib relaxed visibly when we moved on.

Shoaib was also in his element. Gleefully so. It was a marvellous mission. Doors to the offices of the elite, those at the very top were opened, carpets rolled out. 'I had my contacts' Shoaib said with unusual emphasis, contacts in high places. And if the Aga Khan Foundation had struck gold when Shoaib took on Gilgit, the United Nations Development Programme tipped a diamond out of the slipper when they recruited him to lead the first phase of the region's war on poverty.

An inveterate traveller as we know, perhaps even a compulsive one, for four months, Shoaib traversed the region, exhausting Anis in the process. Not Shoaib, he was invigorated. It was Gilgit all over again but this time the canvas was enormous, this time it was hasty sandwiches in airport lounges instead of biscuits and salt tea at some cold and dusty *chaikhana*. Virtually unstoppable, Shoaib flew from country to country. Anyway, he laughed, *everywhere I went they quickly said yes, of course they will do it.*

In Bangladesh there was Eimi Watanabe who harked back to Mahaweli Ganga days, now the UNDP Resident Representative and a no-holds-barred supporter who forged a hard-to-beat alliance with the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary; in Nepal there was polite enthusiasm from the planning commission plus strong commitment from the UNDP's Carol Long. This was important as such support was not entirely a given. India also came up trumps with Shoaib's co-commission member Venugopal obtaining prime ministerial approval from his boss for Shoaib to work as an Adviser to an Indian project. This was no mean feat. But once committed, the Indians jumped in wholeheartedly. Shoaib's face twitched with the beginnings of a laugh, *then they said take ten million people and if you succeed with that small number we will do it on a much larger scale*, and then he roared with laughter, *ten million, is that all*? Shoaib suggested a more conservative start, a few hundred thousand people, a handful of districts would do nicely to kick the project off. No surprise at all. Three districts in Andhra Pradesh were chosen. Shoaib moved on.

The Maldives were typically laid-back. A minister had been on the Commission with Shoaib, said all right; we have two hundred islands and twenty-eight atolls, each with a population of fifteen thousand or so. Take one and if it works we will do it on every atoll. In Pakistan, the Resident Representative, the ebullient Hans von Sponeck, was already an enthusiast.

Promised forty per cent of Shoaib's time to work with rural support programmes he threw eight and a half million dollars worth of technical assistance into the kitty. For a start, there were no initiatives in Pakistan specific to the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme although later, when the programme was in full swing elsewhere, a demonstration programme was initiated in the Lachi area of Kohat, not the best programme in Shoaib's portfolio, but not the worst either.

It was in fact in Sri Lanka where Shoaib first drew a low card. Did resentment still simmer in some offices? They had their own programme already up and running they said, and doubted if Shoaib's ideas would add any value. But they would give it a try.

One more thing said Shoaib, *people, my friends thought I was mad taking on this huge challenge at my age*, where would he find the energy? But Shoaib knew he wasn't mad, well, maybe a little mad, knew that the key to it all was finding one person in each country, one unique and talented person who understood what he was trying to achieve, a bright star who would make the running, select a team, make the programme work. Shoaib gave as much importance to finding such people during his four month odyssey through the region as he did to sweet talking the doubtful and very practical men at the top. How on earth they asked, was this man going to pull off something that no one else had managed to do in the last forty years, how was he going to persuade the poor to pull themselves out of poverty by their own sandal-straps, that is, if they even owned a pair of sandals? A leap of faith was required, not only by the poor but also by those whom Shoaib had persuaded to go with him.

The leap was made. Not only did Shoaib find most of the people who would carry the programme insisting—being granted, such was his status—the rarely given right of an outsider to exercise his personal judgement, he also saw to it that these would-be National Programme Coordinators began recruiting their own teams at once. By the time he submitted his report the poverty alleviation programme was virtually unstoppable. Henning Karcher beamed. This was exactly what he had hoped would happen.

There was one slight change.

A wonderfully erudite person to person man, Shoaib's official reporting style is exact but excruciatingly dull. His civil service training just will not go away. Would your fingers itch to pick up and read a report entitled 'Institutional Development at Grassroots for Poverty Reduction'? The spin doctors in New York thought not. They reached for the white-out, typed in a far catchier title, the 'South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme', sat back, job done.

Enter SAPAP, a new addition to the international lexicon of acronyms, the language of development. Shoaib didn't mind what the programme was called;

all he cared about was getting on with the job, showing that poverty could be banished, that the poor had the power to banish poverty themselves. With a little help, of course. Happy to discard his own suggestion, Shoaib thought the new title seemed to be just right.

What next? A regional poverty alleviation programme without Shoaib at the helm would be as pointless as setting sail on a trans-ocean voyage without a map or an experienced navigator. Landfall would be unlikely. Henning's next carefully planned step was to recruit Shoaib as the programme's senior advisor. That done, he would finagle a field posting for himself to Nepal as Resident Representative. New York was a big pond and a world away from the region. Henning wanted to be on the spot. A big fish in a far smaller pond, he had everything to gain and nothing to lose. So did Shoaib.

Henning's posting to Nepal was the icing on the cake.

United Nations country office staff usually groan and roll their eyes when a regional programme is announced. More often than not they see such programmes as impositions from New York, the hobby horses of various regional head office chiefs, hobby horses that soak up time and money and have little to do with what their country really wants or needs. Staff drag their feet, do as little as they can hoping that eventually either the big boss's enthusiasm will wane or even better, that he, or she is transferred so that the programme will quietly fizzle out. Henning Karcher knew this very well.

His last act as regional chief had been to bring all seven of South Asia's Resident Representatives together; sell the programme to them; make it theirs. He was very clever, says Shoaib, SAPAP ceased to be thought of as a regional programme. Each United Nations Development Programme office assumed ownership. SAPAP became a series of country programmes. Staff would give it their all. As usual, the Development Programme handed on the task of paymaster to the United Nations Office of Programme Support in New York. Their first job was to process Shoaib's recruitment. A routine task? They might have thought so but they were in for a rude shock.

Shoaib remembers being in London on his usual summer vacation when a call came in from a desk officer asking for details. In Islamabad, Hans von Sponeck had already won agreement for forty per cent of Shoaib's time. He was happy to pay for this from his own budget. An honourable man who could not abide bureaucratic games or duplicity, later the United Nations most senior diplomat in Iraq, he was to resign in disgust over the awful humanitarian consequences of the United Nations sanctioned embargo. Shock waves rippled through New York. Nobody ever resigned from the United Nations. But that is another story. What mattered to the desk officers at Programme Support back in

1994, was the arrival of an official letter in their in-trays. The letter originated from Han's office in Islamabad and instructed that Shoaib be offered the same terms and conditions he had enjoyed with the Aga Khan Foundation.

Fine, they thought. Saves a bit of beating around the bush, the normal too and fro of negotiation. But when they saw the amounts involved, the package paid by the Aga Khan Foundation, the desk officers assigned to process Shoaib's appointment were stunned. Not even the Secretary General earned that much. They threw up their hands, said it simply couldn't be done.

But of course it could be done. There is always a way in every bureaucracy. It is a game. All you need is an expert player. Henning knew this, said find one and Programme Support did. Shoaib laughed his schoolboy laugh again, what a prank it all was, said he told them he knew nothing about the Secretary General's salary but the amount in question was barely enough for him, barely enough to support his family in London, to maintain Falaknaz House, to provide for all those who depended on him, grinned, said they were very imaginative. Right, said the case officer heaving a sigh, your base will be Nepal, but as the bigwigs have already agreed you have to spend forty per cent of your time in Pakistan you can be paid an extra daily field allowance for that period. Sat back. That did it.

There was one more matter to settle.

His Highness the Aga Khan had been more than a supporter. There was a bond, a debt if you like. Shoaib felt he could not just walk out, start a new life without the prince's approval. How easy is it to arrange a meeting with His Highness? A measure of their relationship, there was a quick response to Shoaib's request. The prince intended to be in Paris shortly. Perhaps Shoaib might meet him there.

In Paris, Shoaib climbed into Shelley's car (Tim was based there at the time), and headed for the rue de Lille in the exclusive 7th Arrondissement. It was unfamiliar territory for the young and impressionable Shelley. Lost in the maze of small quiet streets of Saint Louis Island, Shelley hopped out and asked directions of the nearest gendarme. Who could resist a pretty dark eyed girl? Mademoiselle, he gallantly replied, it is that way, but you cannot make a mistake; it is the only house on the street. Flanked by the d'Orsay Museum, as Shoaib wryly noted, His Highness had a large establishment.

As at home on the dirt floor of a village hut as in the elegant salon of a prince's Parisian apartment, Shoaib chatted with the man he held in high esteem. They spoke of the past, of the achievement of great dreams, his own and Shoaib's, of the high points and the lows, tragedies and triumphs. Ever the statesman, ever aware of the biases, the schemes, the ambitions of his own constituents, as privy to Shoaib's strengths and weaknesses perhaps as any man, what else would the prince do but

graciously agree. But Shoaib was an asset. A man as astute as the prince does not discard an asset. In November of 1997, Shoaib's work in the Northern Areas was still paying off. An article in the prestigious London Economist was worth pasting in the Aiglemont scrap book. Captioned 'The Aga Khan: Supranational Imam', the article wrote of the prince's concerns for the development of poor mountain tribesmen whether they were Ismaili or not, and of the amazing changes the Aga Khan's rural development campaign had brought about. Of course Shoaib's name was right in there too, 'Shoaib was the prince's answer to poverty' wrote the clearly smitten journalist.

What a wonderful thing it was, the Aga Khan said, that something that had its humble beginnings in a shopfront in a dusty mountain town would now benefit all of South Asia. Shoaib should not see his move back to the United Nations as an end but as a beginning. He should not think he was leaving the prince's own rural support organisation; 'I do not know where it will go without you' Shoaib recalls the prince saying, 'keep a watch, keep it on the right path, do this for me'. Shoaib would try but unhappily he would not succeed, that we know. What the prince felt as he watched the slow decline we do not know.

So the prince is happy to loan his star to the United Nations, genuinely delighted that Shoaib was taking the ideas tested and proven in the Northern Areas out into the region. Shoaib's moving on to a prestigious United Nations job would also reduce the likelihood of the prince having to take sides in the boardroom of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme. No doubt the Aga Khan was also genuinely delighted. Shoaib deserved the job. So, like some knight of old seeking approval for a great adventure, Shoaib received the prince's blessing.

Accustomed to flying to Geneva whenever major decisions had been afoot, Shoaib says he was quite surprised, a little disappointed even that he was not required to fly to New York to sign his new contract. Such was the importance of the programme, Shoaib believed, perhaps a little more fanfare was warranted. Assured it was the way things were done in the United Nations and did not relate at all to the status given to the poverty alleviation programme, Shoaib shrugged, signed the fax and sent it back. After all that had happened, it seemed somewhat of a let down.

Despite the blessings of the prince, Shaw and others at the Aga Khan Foundation in Geneva and Karachi are mightily miffed. Earlier, Shaw had written to Shoaib saying they, *whoever 'they' were* shrugged Shoaib, *they were not very clear about what I was doing and what my functions were.* Shoaib laughed, said he knew he had been stirring the pot, was an irritant at Board meetings, says with a puckish smile, *I thought my main task now was in developing replicable models.*

Obviously not. The Aga Khan Foundation had already withdrawn initial support, perhaps sensibly had curbed the initial enthusiasm of direct participation in the start-up of other rural support programmes and had instead re-focused on the north. Shoaib took a deep breath, *well* he said, *although I had come to Islamabad with the brief to take a wider view of rural support programmes it seems I was more of a nuisance than a help*. He shook his head and said he knew the Foundation's Karachi office people were less than interested in his involvement with the new National Rural Support Programme; he had been told, he said, by those who knew of the feeling in the Geneva office that he was just an unnecessary burden.

A burden! Remember the heights? Rock bottom now; from bright star to burden. That must have hurt. It did. Still, it was Bob Shaw who had gone post haste to Hans von Sponeck ostensibly to make certain some of the time Shoaib was to allocate to Pakistan would be given to the Foundation's programme in the Northern Areas. Surprised, Hans said of course it was a given. It was not Hans who determined Shoaib's work and travel schedule. Shaw, however, had stopped talking with Shoaib and the question was indeed a blind. As we know, not once was a minute of Shoaib's time requested.

As for the fax from the United Nations, *well, I had already signed it and His Highness knew, but I have to say, it seemed to catch all the Aga Khan Foundation people by surprise* Shoaib says, raising his eyebrows. He could tell a dissembler from an honest man any day. He had sat in judgement in too many village disputes in his civil service days, had heard too many wonderful liars to be so easily taken in. He smiles again, was there a hint of satisfaction? *Oh, you have gone just like that* he mimics, *we couldn't even say goodbye. Hah*, he barks, *that is the best way to part company; go just like that.*

And it was. To be able to leave in style. Take on the entire region; eight gloriously busy years. Now that was something. They could put that in their pipes and smoke it because he could have taken them all with him, as he says, 'lock stock and barrel'. Would have. Now they would be left behind to wither on the vine. Shoaib shakes his head. What a waste. Brightens. Here come the SAPAP years, the next great adventure, eight years as a regional vagabond, constantly on the move, couldn't be better, the making of a legend, a status unsought; the guru.

Guru to the region's poor Shoaib may become but there were some practical matters to settle first. Top of the list? An office.

When Shoaib retreated to Islamabad in 1992, Musarrat apparently laid down the law, or at least Afshan says she did. If Shoaib was going to work at home, use her house like a district commissioner of old as was his intention, she

was not going to have all and sundry traipsing through her living room, muddy boots or highly polished brogues. She let it be known, *in no uncertain terms* Shoaib laughs, an office would have to be built. The Aga Khan Foundation's administrators hastened to pay ten thousand rupees rent per month. Musarrat was known for her fiery temper, was quite capable of marching into the Foundation's office and creating a minor uproar. An office was a small price to pay for peace! One is quickly built

A second floor annex tacked on to Falaknaz House in Aga Khan Road, access is via a steep, narrow, spiral steel staircase, a fire escape look-alike fabricated by a back-street welder with a sense of humour. A dignified entry is out of the question. You bump your shoulders, duck your head and stagger out onto a thankfully large second floor veranda to be soberly saluted by Ishaq, the keeper of the keys. Shoaib's retreat is far from large and overflows with books and papers. But he is at home. He does not need a desk as big as a dining table, an enormous room and a panoramic view. His office fits around him like a loved and well worn jacket, suits him very well. Next door the faithful Rauf presides over a computer and a neat array of files and boxes. Shoaib thinks, writes, taps out the odd email on his laptop, Rauf organises, deciphers Shoaib's hand-written notes, types up reports, the longer emails, takes the calls, tells Shoaib when he should leave for some Board meeting, a chat with a President or Prime Minister, a diplomatic reception, all the chaff that comes with being what he now is. The guru.

Shoaib is happy. He can take his tea and toast in the quiet of his bedroom, watch the early morning television news, have a bath and then stroll quietly through the house nodding his good mornings and climb the winding staircase to his office. More often than not Rauf is already there, hands Shoaib a sheaf of emails, correspondence, a list of meetings to attend, phone calls to make, visitors on the way. The stairs are a trial for some of his visitors, so he may opt to meet them in the living room downstairs now that Musarrat in her frailty is unable to leave London, unable to flash her eyes, toss her head in disapproval. Shoaib laughs and says when he can no longer climb the stairs that will be the time to think about retiring. I somehow doubt this. I imagine he will work on out of his bedroom, out of any place that suits. He wants to die working, or in Gilgit, sitting in the sun outside the legendary rooms at the Chinar Inn, or so he says.

In 1994 retirement is far from Shoaib's thoughts. His nominal base is Kathmandu. Alright, he says, I will work out of my hotel room. Not good enough, says Henning; you need a place that everyone can see is clearly your headquarters. Space will be made in the United Nations offices. In Islamabad, von Sponeck protests, wants Shoaib based there instead. Shoaib smiled, *I had no intention of being stuck in either office, Islamabad or Kathmandu* (unsaid, at the beck and call of everyone). *I had an office right here at home*. And that is what

he did. In any case, Shoaib's need for an office was minimal. He was off and away, travelling, constantly on the move, his favourite occupation. He just needed a post box. That was Rauf.

Shoaib's first and most vital concern was to make sure the programme's team leader in each country was exactly the man for the job. No women had been nominated. Once satisfied with the team leader, in UN-speak called the National Programme Coordinator, the next step was the recruitment of a very special team. The final move, the initial finishing touch was to bring each team to Gilgit, to see social mobilisation in action, to see the amazing results because the Northern Areas were still in full flight, had not yet faded. There was an immediate problem.

Gaining security clearance for teams from Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, even from Bangladesh, was no problem. The Indians were another story. Their own government refused approval, politely refused to countenance allowing a team to travel up into territory they regarded as disputed. Across the border, the heads of Pakistan's security agencies pursed their lips and also shook their heads. A visit was a problem they didn't want to deal with; thankful the official Indian view took the heat off a tricky situation. Add to this Shoaib's having to cancel his first vital mission to India because of a smallpox scare. Visas were suspended so he was unable to participate in a process that was on the top of his list—selection of the in-country team. Shoaib knew how important it was to hand-pick his team leader, to say yes, or no. This he could not do in India.

It was an inauspicious start.

Beginnings are not everything. Bangladesh looked good to start with, willing but cautious, asking why they needed another anti-poverty programme. It was a reasonable question. They already had Brac and the increasingly high-profile Grameen Bank.

Established in 1972 to help war refugees, by 2010, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is said to be the world's largest non-governmental organisation. Starting out focusing on health and education, Brac branched into rural development in 1986, and in 1996 launched a social development programme aimed at empowering women. Shoaib must look at Brac with longing. He had similar dreams in Gilgit. There is a university and a bank and universal recognition that the organisation is a world leader in challenging poverty reduction, everything the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme might have been. Brac's founding father, Fazle Hasan Abed, is the recipient of many awards including, like Shoaib, the Ramon Magsaysay Award for community leadership. He also has a knighthood, conferred by Queen

Elizabeth in 2010. Shoaib's daughters would have loved to have a knight as a father. Any daughter might.

The Grameen Bank derived its name from the Bangla word *gram* meaning rural or village. From humble beginnings in 1976 as a research project to design credit delivery and banking services targeting the poor, Grameen is now a hugely successful bank for the poor, a world leader in microfinance. Its founder, Muhammad Yunus, and Grameen as an organisation, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

With these two soon-to-be giants already up and running hard, what need was there for another programme for the poor, politely asked the Bangladeshis?

Good question. Shoaib agrees. Brac and the Grameen Bank were true pioneers, they were doing a splendid job, but despite having a presence in almost every district in Bangladesh, Shoaib believed many of the poorest of the poor were still missing out. The two were also organisations for the poor, not of the poor, a very important but poorly understood distinction. Shoaib's argument was that there was a gap. Social mobilisation, he said, will fill this gap, will enable the rural poor, the millions who were still missing out, to reach out with confidence, to connect with Brac, take full advantage of Grameen's marvellous no-collateral loan system, do it themselves.

Those at the top in Bangladesh, shrugged, said why not? What have we to lose? So Shoaib got his 'Thana', forty-eight thousand households ready and waiting. Back in his old hunting ground he set to work, deployed his team. *As we went from village to village* he says, *we counted twenty-two small non-government organisations, none of them connected, all working away at this and that.* Data collected from these organisations and from village meetings suggested Grameen's loans had been taken up by fewer than fifteen hundred households, while Brac's various programmes had reached out to about six thousand. *No doubt this was a great achievement,* Shoaib agreed, *but our aim was not just some, but for every household, every village to be a participant in the social mobilisation process.* Within three years, Shoaib's teams had reached out to thirty-four thousand households.

In top gear, the programme was humming.

There was a downside. *Obviously* said Shoaib a little regretfully, *if you reach as many households as that in so short a time, even if you are doing only very little things,* because there were none of those super-visible infrastructure projects that so startled and impressed the early visitors to Gilgit, *even if you are just giving people the confidence to connect with other programmes, with government agencies, if it involves more than seventy per cent of all villagers in the Thana then a lot of people will start talking about your programme.*

They did

The World Bank began it all. They commissioned a study and the results were astonishing. Poverty reduction in the programme's thana was running at an average 3 per cent compared with a country average of 0.03 per cent. *The United Nations people were very happy*, said Shoaib with a shrug, *but these figures are just an indication*. What really mattered, he believed, were the number of poor people getting involved in micro-investment activities, *poultry, vegetables, nurseries, and so on*, Shoaib said with a wave of his hand. He did not mind what they did, did not know much about the technical side of things anyway. All he cared was that poor people were suddenly making money. Same for the credit programme. *We did not have bank officers*, Shoaib said, with Grameen's methods in mind, *the village organisations were disbursing and collecting money, we did not employ an army of staff to do this; we simply maintained a very strict book-keeping and auditing system.*

Enter the Prime Minister. Enter national politics.

Invited by the women and children's programme to see for herself the giant strides they had taken, the prime minister became an instant enthusiast, commanding 'let's do this all over the country'. It was the one thing Shoaib dreaded—politicians getting in on the act too soon, before the support organisation was ready, before everything was in place. Offered the post as Secretary to the Ministry of Local and Rural Development, Shoaib's hand-picked programme leader was unable to resist. The lure of high places was just too much. *Against my advice he accepted and that was that* said Shoaib. The rest of the programme's staff took umbrage. 'They had missed out on their fair share of the praise, missed out on the prize of promotion', they grumbled. Government officers on deputation, they withdrew to a man, to a woman, virtually overnight. The programme's support organisation crumbled. With support gone, the network of brand new village organisation's faded away. Organisations of the poor, fledglings, they were not yet ready to fly alone.

Was the programme missed? Shoaib believes a great opportunity was lost. But Brac and Grameen were there to fill the gap so the poor had someone to turn too. Everyone shrugged. They had tried, said government officials; it hadn't worked. And if the government was happy to drop it all then so was the United Nations. That was the way things worked. End of story. Goodbye Bangladesh.

Shoaib had high hopes for Nepal. So unfortunately did the Maoist revolutionaries.

Shoaib said he thought Nepal was very ripe and ready for social mobilisation in 1994; the Maoists that the country was equally ripe and ready for social revolution. From Shoaib's viewpoint, government had done things he would have dearly loved

to see happen in his own country. Decentralisation was well under way and considerable powers had been handed over to local government bodies. Responsibilities for law and order had been completely divorced from development and nearly four thousand special Village Development Committees had been created whose members were elected by the community. Shoaib smiled, he was to be proven right again, contrary to the apprehensions of all and sundry, village organisations and village development committees worked in complete harmony. The two organisations worked hand in hand.

Then the Maoist troubles began, said Shoaib, *and there was nothing I could do about that.*

Except to keep hoping for the best, something Shoaib is very good at. It may all be working out again he says. The revolution seems to have fizzled out for the moment, the trained activists are all still there and there is a new and enthusiastic chief executive at the helm of the once faltering poverty alleviation fund. Shoaib smiles, brimming with new enthusiasm and says all they need is money. It could all be worse although the man Shoaib picked out for his special qualities, the man Shoaib trained to lead the programme has left the country. Ah well, Shoaib shrugs, he is in the Ukraine or someplace like that heading up an international programme and the others we trained are all over the place too, snapped up by the international market he laughs in rueful delight, they were that good.

Sri Lanka, ah yes Sri Lanka, a hard nut to crack says Shoaib, just a little uncomfortably. It was home territory. Shoaib knew all about how prickly they could be, how proud they were of their own home-grown accomplishments. Yes, Shoaib's work at Mahaweli Ganga had been quite exceptional but he had dinted a few egos, unwittingly stepped on a few toes. Sri Lankans have long memories. A hard nut yes, but Shoaib thought he might be able to crack it. The people in the rural areas, people he knew made a try worthwhile.

But the Sri Lankans' enthusiasm had been muted, lukewarm at best, and they did not think they needed outside help. One other problem. Government had already put in place a highly subsidised programme. Shoaib chuckled, *political games were played, all the time, although the subsidy programme changed names with changes of government one grandiose title to another, nothing really changed. It was still just a handout.*

The subsidy programme was not a serious competitor, but pride was. Eventually Shoaib was given an area in which to play his games. After all, it was a United Nations programme and cost the government nothing. Shoaib did not mind at all. He had been through it all before. He also knew the area had one huge advantage. Well settled, literacy was high, *it was not difficult to find*

activists, I was able to achieve in six months a task that had taken more than two years in the Northern Areas.

Shoaib's team wasted no time. Soon village organisations were meeting, additional skills training was underway, and ideas of savings and credit quickly took hold. *Make no mistake* Shoaib said, in defence of the coming debacle, *the response was very positive, very. The villagers were very happy with the programme.* Government wasn't happy though; was not at all supportive. There was little political mileage to be gained from the programme. Shoaib's approach to politics has always been the same. In order to survive political changes, in order to stay clear of the whims of leaders, he has insisted his programmes maintain strict political neutrality. Shoaib uses the term 'scrupulous' to describe his attitude. *Rural support organisations,* he insists *must be totally non-partisan, must be seen to be absolutely and visibly neutral. Their sole focus must be development, nothing else.*

The Sri Lankan government of the time thought otherwise. They wanted a politicised programme and set about employing a small army of thirty-five thousand young people, a politically dedicated army that would take development to the villagers. It didn't work. The young people, fresh from schools and colleges ran head-on into village activists. Trained and with years of practical experience, the activists contemptuously dismissed the earnest young officials as puppies still wet behind the ears. 'What did they know about village life', they demanded scornfully, 'what did they know about development or the rural poor; what could they contribute?'

Shoaib ran out of words. Sri Lanka had been a failure. What else could he say? Well, he called for soup and biscuits, and we all took a break. Then there was no avoiding the matter anymore. Yes, he admitted, Sri Lanka had been a write-off. He thinks, however, that the village organisations are all still there, latent, waiting to be brought to life, but only in the three divisions where the programme operated. Shoaib admits the Sri Lankans probably thought the idea of social mobilisation superfluous. With literacy far higher than any other country, with their own thinkers and development theorists in plentiful supply, they thought they were just fine.

The last thing they needed, they believed, was an outsider showing them what to think, what to do. Sri Lankans were not as poor as people elsewhere in the region. In any case they had a problem far greater on their minds. Serious trouble was brewing in the Tamil north.

So, Sri Lanka was out, Bangladesh had folded, Nepal was enmeshed in a very nasty insurrection, therefore, apart from India and Pakistan, that left the sunny atolls of the Maldives, over one thousand coral islands, two hundred and twenty of them

populated by cheerful fisherfolk of mainly Sinhalese origin although there is a sprinkling of Malay, Arab, South Indian and African genes. A double chain of twenty-six atolls sprawled across ninety thousand square kilometres, an airborne hour or so south-west of Sri Lanka, on average, most islands are a bare one and a half metres above sea level, the highest point less than two and a half meters, the lowest high point of any country on the planet. There are a lot of coconuts, some fruit, a little millet and heaps of fish, sand and sea, and for most of the leaders, considerable worry. Their future is far from bright. This island nation may well vanish underwater if global warming has its way.

Shoaib's welcome there was as sunny as the weather. A government minister had travelled with Shoaib on the Commission. They were friends, Shoaib was an honoured guest. 'Welcome to our island nation', Minister Sobir had smiled, adding that Shoaib should just think about enjoying himself because there wasn't much else he would be able to do. 'The people', said the minister, 'our happy islanders, want just one thing. For us, the central government, to sail to their specific atoll, their group of islands and deliver whatever it is they want'. That's the situation. Enjoy.

But Shoaib was very definitely there to work. If he wanted to enjoy himself, if he wanted to relax he went to London, or to Monaco to visit Shelley. Tropical island holidays were not on his personal radar. In London there is a daily morning stroll; in Islamabad Shoaib has an invariable vigorous afternoon routine, track number three in the Margalla Hills, joining retired army generals, civil servants, Islamabad's upper classes, police discreetly posted at intervals to see off riff-raff interlopers; and in the Northern Areas, Shoaib had revelled in out-walking his staff, keeping up with the hardy mountain men. Let's go for a walk he will say at the drop of a hat. Shoaib laughs in agreement but Male, the capital of the Maldives was something else—there was simply no place to really stretch out and walk. Shoaib described Male as a crowded low-rise mini-Manhattan, over one hundred thousand people packed onto the former island of the kings, nearly one third of the entire nation's population, not a centimetre unused, every government office a short walk from Shoaib's hotel, the quaint presidential residence the only place with any space, a driveway, small beautifully attended gardens, a few low trees. It was delightful, says Shoaib, like a page from Gulliver's Travels, everything to a small scale, in forty-five minutes he could circumnavigate the entire capital, walking for much of the way along the sea walls. Male, he says, reminded him of a miniature Kabul without the trees, without the hills, full of life. But if you don't swim, and we know Shoaib cannot, and if you don't much like boats, then the only option is to work. This suited Shoaib. He was there to work. Relax on an atoll beach under waving coconut palms? Forget it. As soon as he could, Shoaib went determinedly to work.

Shoaib's friend thought he would get nowhere, but he was more than happy to let this warm and friendly madman give it the best try possible. Shoaib could have

an atoll or two, each one a jewelled cluster of fourteen or so tiny islands, all up twelve to fifteen thousand people, pick one. The minister recommended Noonu atoll. Shoaib of course accepted. How would he know one atoll from another? Which one would make an ideal start? Noonu atoll would be just fine; fourteen islands, twelve thousand people. Shoaib was ready to roll but queasy as he often was on boats, I doubt if he looked forward to the trip with eager anticipation.

Each island was tiny, on average about half a square kilometre, twenty-five hectares in size. People could hardly run away laughed Shoaib, all I had to do was organise an announcement on the mosque's loudspeaker and everyone who was not out fishing would assemble. He was impressed and surprised by what he found. I must say government had done a lot, he says, there was a well made road, a new school for boys and girls, a mosque and a community hall, and a state of the art telephone system. He could pick up the receiver, talk to people in the New York office as if they were just on the next island. But it was not only the infrastructure that impressed. There was a strong sense of community. Every Friday everybody, every man, woman, and child, would be out cleaning the village, repairing the only road, sweeping out the mosque, doing anything that needed doing. They were already a village organisation waiting to be shown they were.

Shoaib's main problem? What could he promise, what would stimulate islanders to organise? The people quickly identified two things that would greatly improve the quality of their lives. Both were infrastructure projects. Shoaib took notes, he knew all about infrastructure projects, Gilgit again, an ocean version. Anything brought in by sea, said the villagers, had to be transhipped into small craft and then manhandled through the surf. A jetty was the answer, except that a jetty of the length and strength required was way over the budget, would have made Shoaib's desk officer in New York blanch. All right, said those at the meeting, if we can't have a jetty what about electricity.

Now they were talking.

On some islands government had already provided generators but these operated only intermittently because of fuel shortages and because no one had taken responsibility for them. However, the islanders had a long tradition of chipping in for community works well before there was any central government. In the old days it used to be a day's catch of fish. So yes, they would happily enter a partnership agreement. Shoaib's own abysmal ignorance of all things technical let him down at this point. A composite solar, wind, and diesel system would have been ideal. All he knew was diesel so that was what the villagers got. It was better than nothing and the villagers were happy. They hadn't heard about solar panels or wind generators either.

A footnote. On one island a generator had been installed and the entire system was working very well. Everyone was happily paying up for their electricity and an operations manager had been selected. Shoaib popped into the shed to meet this person. 'He turned out to be the local magistrate' which Shoaib thought a huge joke. But he was the man the people had decided was best qualified to run the generator. It was also a smart move. Who would argue about paying up or not when the local magistrate sent out the bills?

It all seemed to go like clockwork. By the time of Shoaib's last visit just before the United Nations let the programme go, the programme's team had taken social mobilisation to five other atolls and had plans to move on to all twenty-six atolls, twenty-one administrative divisions. It was in fact better than good, it was brilliant. The 2004 tsunami, of course set everything back immensely, so great was the devastation. Population growth is also alarmingly high, one of the highest in the world, and there have been some violent politically motivated ructions, but Shoaib is confident that so well and willingly was social mobilisation taken up by communities that it will be one of the positives in speeding the repairs, healing wounds.

So if the programme had been such a success, why doesn't Shoaib speak of it more often, why doesn't he talk of the Maldives as he does the Northern Areas, as he does Andhra Pradesh? It is hard to say. Yes, the numbers were small, one third those of the Northern Areas, and any success stories were not entirely due to Shoaib's social innovations. Maldivian communities were already well organised, already working together; the cheek-by-jowl nature of atoll living, the fragility of it demands close cooperation. So perhaps it was the location.

Shoaib is a man of the immense northern mountains, of the great plains of India. Exotic tropical islands, people who may be poor but rarely hungry, islands that are holiday destinations for the West, these are something else.

The Maldives are fine, but really it is a pinprick. A success in the island state is hardly headline news, hardly balances the drop-out rate among the majors. There were reasons for the drop-outs of course, good reasons, valid excuses.

Excuses, excuses, the simple fact to those who wished to see it this way seemed to be that the poverty alleviation programme was getting nowhere fast. High hopes were fading. Blame over-enthusiastic prime ministers, Maoist rebels, national pride, except in one backwater island nation, the programme seems to be stalling. Yes, rural support programmes in Pakistan are chugging along with varying success but that was happening anyway. Some of those who sit in New York must have begun to wonder if Henning Karcher had backed the wrong man, the wrong idea.

Then, seemingly from nowhere, there was India.

India did not start well. The Indian government did not want to send a team into what they held was disputed territory—Gilgit—to see the amazing things poor mountain villagers could achieve if only they were organised. Pakistan's security agencies did not want them either. But what else, Shoaib wondered, could he do to instil confidence, surety, show new and hesitant team members that it was all possible.

Shoaib couldn't think of anything that would even come close. Most of those who made the journey to Gilgit described the visit as a turning point, almost an epiphany. Really, there was no alternative. Shoaib decides he will not give up. There will be a way, he is sure, there is always a way. He will find one.

But first Shoaib had another problem to deal with. The most difficult of problems; a matter of personality. Shoaib sighs, shrugs, *a square peg in a round hole. The man selected to lead the programme in India had grandiose ideas* said Shoaib with a sigh of resignation, *he was a very good chap but he wanted to make a big splash, straight away.* He also dismissed the achievements of the Northern Area villagers and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme as a minor matter, said 'what is all the fuss about? We in India have already taken bigger steps, gone further, faster'. Was this true? Various state governments had certainly tried, most recently in Andhra Pradesh, just before Shoaib arrived, promoting the formation of women's self-help groups specifically aimed at empowering poor women. The idea was for groups of up to fifteen women to get together, save one rupee per day for six months after which they would be entitled to a grant of twenty-five thousand. The programme's main assumption, its main justification was that rural women could be quickly taught to manage money, and then be ready to link with commercial banks and the various other specialised agencies set up by government to provide credit to the poor.

Certainly, thousands of self-help groups were quickly established but there the matter mainly rested. Departmental numbers men put out publications trumpeting the thousands of groups formed and the millions of rupees saved, *but really* said Shoaib heaving a sigh, because it would have been great had it all worked, *only a few hundred self help groups were able to link up with banks.* The rest happily accepted the twenty-five thousand rupees, distributed it to their members and went into hibernation. *What else was there for them to do,* Shoaib asked?

It was a very good question, sat there waiting for an answer. Although he had not set out with the idea of specifically empowering women, the existence of hundreds of self-help groups seemed too good an opportunity to miss. But Shoaib wanted to start cautiously. In any case, the budget provided by the United Nations would not allow anything else.

His national programme director had big ideas. A cautious start was not on his radar.

Shoaib thought perhaps he might be able to *take some of the steam out of the fellow's sails* by letting him give a presentation. The United Nations Development Programme's India office obliged, inviting Shoaib's programme manager to make a splashy presentation that showcased India's achievements in alleviating rural poverty through the empowerment of women.

The strategy didn't work. Determined to make an immediate major impact, Shoaib says with a sigh, *the fellow gave his presentation and then came straight back and went into campaign mode.* He summoned a bunch of small non-governmental organisations, many of whom had been lobbying for money, a place in the sun, decided allocating fifty rupees per self-help-group member for training would do the job, handed the money over to the non-governmental organisations and said get on and train the women. Sat back said 'job done'.

For a year Shoaib let the programme run.

All the fellow really accomplished was to spend twenty million Rupees. Shoaib says he had tried to explain that funds were being spread too thinly, fifty rupees per person resulted in only very rudimentary training, little impact, and that anyway, the most important period comes after training. Follow-up really matters, *auditing and bookkeeping and all that* said Shoaib waving his hand impatiently, *that is what really matters.* End of tether reached, Shoaib called on his friend at the prime minister's secretariat.

He was apologetic, said he didn't like saying this, but the programme was not going to work under the current director. The whole thing was about to sink. Now Andhra Pradesh happened to be the prime minister's home state, home also to his secretary, Shoaib's friend. Failure would not look good at all. *Don't worry* his friend had assured Shoaib, *the problem will be solved; I will give you one of the best people I know.*

He was as good as his word and drafted a letter to be sent to the Collector in Kurnool, a man called K. Raju.

Raju was remarkable says Shoaib, *he grasped everything, just like that. The other chap went back to government, rose through the ranks, commissioner for rural development, secretary for this and that, important posts. And no, he was not a bad chap, he just got carried away, wanted to start on a big scale, and he did not really understand social mobilisation.* Raju did.

A small, quiet and unassuming man, make no mistake K. Raju is a seriously bright, totally capable administrator, a standout in an elite corps of administrators. Is he charismatic, can he influence a group with the force of his

character? Possibly not but he does attract the admiration of his peers, the respect of those around him, the wish to please. A quiet word of praise, of encouragement is highly valued. And yes, he has to be ambitious in a quiet no-nonsense sort of way, but above all he is a believer, one who is not ashamed to say so. Raju may well be the professional son Shoaib has searched so long to find, the flag bearer for social mobilisation; there seems to be no one else more capable, better suited to assume this role.

Two negatives.

Raju is deeply embedded within government so he cannot freelance like Shoaib; he cannot maintain a totally independent stance, but then again, neither really can Shoaib. Everyone has boundaries. Raju is also a quietly reserved man; he does not project the instant warmth that villagers love so much in Shoaib, the uninhibited hug; nevertheless you like him straight away. He has no pretensions but he very definitely has a presence. Without trying, he commands respect. K. Raju, this small quietly spoken man became the poverty alleviation programme's secret weapon, the reason why Shoaib would one day write the words, 'Andhra shining'.

Kurnool is a middling sized, middling clean, bustling Indian town whose main claim to fame was that it had been the capital of the state of Andhra from 1953 to 1956, until the Telugu speaking areas of the old state of Hyderabad were merged with the Telugu speaking areas of Madras state to form the new State of Andhra Pradesh. In 1995, Raju was stationed in Kurnool as the district Collector, watching events unfold from the sidelines. Shoaib hurried down to meet him.

Twelve years have passed. We are ushered into a wide sunny office in Hyderabad, seated in some comfortable armchairs; tea is called for. A personal assistant hovers, whispers, other important visitors are waiting and Raju also has to prepare for tomorrow's visit to Delhi. Raju smiles, rattles off a sentence or two, the assistant hurries out. Raju apologises, begins to speak of Shoaib with quiet assurance, without hesitation; says the connection was almost immediate. Straight away they went out to talk with villagers. This was where Shoaib could see the quality of those who were to work with him, where they could see his. Raju uses the word *clarity* a lot, says he was touched by the clarity of Shoaib's approach to poor people, how effortlessly Shoaib seemed to be able to make contact with people, communicate with them and yet not really understand their language; how he would look directly into their eyes; that they seemed to understand him. This was contact at a level Raju had not seen before.

Later, at the rest house, the two talked into the night, something the reticent Raju had rarely done before. Raju was an avid listener and Shoaib realised the meeting was important. For Raju it was a turning point, one of those moments where

your life is changed forever. Raju says he was stunned, says somehow those thoughts, those ideas, social mobilisation, the need to mobilise the poor, to unleash their latent power, to put the control of their lives into their own hands, all those ideas burned into his mind. He couldn't stop thinking about it all and began to question the whole approach to poverty reduction which he and his colleagues had been following for so long; says 'we saw the poor as a community waiting for our support, our ideas. We thought we knew more, had all the solutions in our grasp, that they were incapable of designing improvement programmes; that this was clearly our job because we were superior, smarter, that they would be grateful recipients of our generous largesse'.

It is almost dusk in Hyderabad and we have to rush off in a hurry to catch Dr. Krishnaya, one of the state's very busy, very senior civil servants; he was due to leave for America next day and had a hundred and one things to do. Go, go laughed Vijay Kumar whom you will later meet, I will be here tomorrow, that chap will be sitting in an aeroplane.

Reading the 'thought for the day' in the lift going up to his office on the top floor of the now empty government building; had those who jammed into this lift by day been inspired? The lift lurched to a halt, we emerged smiling. The thought for the day had worked.

Krishnaya's desk was piled with papers burying the in-tray and all the while a personal assistant kept rushing in and out with more paper. While we talked, Krishnaya's mobile phone kept going off like a berserk alarm clock. Phone tucked under his chin, he fended off the calls. *My wife* he says with a grin. She was flying with him, wanted him home to pack before midnight, wanted him home right now, 'coming, coming' he said lying through his teeth, signing papers the assistant slid before him, glancing quickly through others, answering our questions. He would be lucky to get home before dawn. It says a lot about Shoaib, how well he is regarded by very senior, very busy, Indian civil servants such as Krishnaya that they will see us, somehow squeeze us in when all others are turned away.

Krishnaya says he thought Shoaib was a professor, a simple man, an academic when they first met, the easy way he mixed with people, that he held no airs, conducted himself with simplicity, seemed to be very wise. Later, Krishnaya says, he was quite surprised to find out Shoaib had himself been a very senior civil servant, which means a lot in India, and had set up a super-successful non-governmental organisation. *I realised*, said Krishnaya with a laugh, *that he was not so simple after all*. Then followed the usual revelations, the eye-opening field visits, how easily Shoaib mingled with the poor, that Shoaib is an amazing people-person, *not an iota of inhibition or ego, sitting down with people, being accepted, talking as easily with village women as if*

they were all part of his own family. They were; of course they were. *The man I saw was not a simple person* says Krishnaya, *but a man with great people skills, a man who loved people, village people.*

Sits back, stretches, knocks some papers on the floor. The assistant scurries to retrieve them, rolls his eyes, shrugs, mimes 'what can I do with a boss like this'? Krishnaya relaxes, mind moves blissfully back in time, says until Shoaib came and opened their eyes, in Andhra Pradesh they had the same old problem. Starts, *we used to sit in Hyderabad,* stops, distracted again by the phone, *yes, yes* he says, *I am leaving right now, in five minutes anyway,* grins, says, *my wife again, she is getting anxious.* Mutes the ring tone. Five minutes later we are still talking, the personal assistant has slid in and out several more times as personal assistants do, the growing pile of folders on his desk teeters alarmingly, threatens to again topple over, spill papers all over the floor. *Where was I,* one of India's intellectual elite he knows exactly where he was, buys time, *ah yes, we had the wrong end of the stick, the wrong end entirely, we used to see a problem then try and think of a solution, think of one and say to ourselves, 'that should do the job', but it didn't.* He shook his head and laughed, saying he and his colleagues just could not understand why problem after problem seemed to arise during implementation, how benefits were simply not getting through to the people. *It was a puzzle, a truly exasperating puzzle.* Next day, Raju supplies an answer.

Shoaib turned our ideas completely on their head, Raju says, *we had completely discounted the tremendous potential within the poor to help themselves, did not really understand that more often than not it stays hidden because individually they are weak. They have to organise. Then and only then can they hope to harvest their potential, unleash their power.* Raju smiles, echoes Shoaib, says poverty reduction requires two conditions to be effective in any village. A willingness to get together, to meet, to help themselves, and the presence of committed activists, bright stars, people with dynamism, ready to serve, selfless, to think of their community, ready to lead their fellow villagers out of poverty.

It was Shoaib who opened my eyes to this says Raju quietly in a matter-of-fact voice, *I had an intense feeling from him; he released something in me.* Smiles, says *I must have repeated this statement a million times by now, unleashing the power of the poor, each time I see the poor managing their own development agenda my conviction and belief becomes stronger and stronger and I repeat the same statement again with ever increasing conviction.* Raju frowns, says yes, he had been perhaps primed by earlier experiences, saw glimpses of the power of people during the literacy campaigns of the late 1980s, wondered why the faint glimmer of power flared briefly and then, inexplicably vanished.

That was Raju, right now we are still in Krishnaya's office where he continues to brush aside paper, ignore his mobile phone. *In 1989 government*

had started a series of special programmes focusing on women and children says Krishnaya, talking of the politics of it all, that there were numerous incarnations, and although the idea of self-help was firmly there, almost every project anyone tried seemed to lack direction and focus. All sorts of ideas were tried during Indira Gandhi's time, but Krishnaya believes although well meaning, the approach was piecemeal until Shoaib and the poverty alleviation programme arrived on the scene. A dependency syndrome had been created and here Krishnaya chuckles, *we thought good ideas would naturally trickle down,* laughs again, *they didn't even seep.*

One of the starting points, one of the motivations behind the entire women's programme was a ground swell of opposition by women against the brewing and sale of *araki* or country liquor. Dividing families, crippling the home economy, by the 1980s male drunkenness and violence had become a social epidemic. Cheap, dirt cheap, raw, throat-burning country liquor had become a scourge. Maybe some men saw no way out of their poverty, saw no way forward and so drowned their despair, drank with desperation, blind drunk, dead drunk, sometimes literally. Malnutrition, hungry children, homelessness, domestic violence, women were tired of it all, tired of living in rags, tired of being beaten, of living without a roof over their heads, of seeing their children starve.

So the anti-*araki* campaign began. Says Krishnaya, *the men of a village were always drunk and all the money was being spent on alcohol.* The anti-*araki* programme with its simple single target signalled the beginning of the power of women. Increasingly powerful, increasingly vociferous women's groups descended on the reeking shacks, stood outside government offices chanting, demanded to see high officials, would not go away.

Cashing in on the movement, Krishnaya described one of the Collectors starting a thrift movement, urging the women's groups to save a rupee a member a day. Savings grew but nobody knew what to do next. Government tried to be innovatively helpful and so threw in an adult literacy programme. *One result—school enrolment* says Krishnaya, *is now close to 100 per cent.* His smile is genuine. He cares. The civil service ethic still runs deep and strong in Andhra Pradesh. A wonderful outcome no doubt, but the savings still sat there unused.

Shoaib has his own story. Agrees without hesitation, *oh yes, I inherited the women's organisations.* There was a decided plus to Shoaib's inheritance—the women of Andhra, he says, even those from Muslim families, had fewer inhibitions, were not so restricted. *They carefully borrowed money, handed out sums to their husbands if it was worthwhile, and were much more honest than men. They were the ones who laid down the rules about many things; they really got going over country liquor.*

And on this subject Shoaib has a story. He smiles broadly, *this is the story.* The husband of one of the women agitators happened to own a liquor shack, cooked up a fierce brew of *araki.* It did not let him off the hook, the opposite in fact; led by his wife, his shack was targeted by the women, and out of business he went. *Now,* Shoaib said happily, he was enjoying the story, *of course the man did not have a licence, he was operating an illegal distillery so obviously palms were being greased, bribes paid.* When the policeman, the bribe-taker arrived to collect his monthly payment the brewer had shrugged, said his shack had been closed down by the women, he could not pay the usual bribe. Oh ho, the policeman had said, not about to lose his beer and cigarette money, he didn't care whether the man was in business or not, in fact didn't really believe the brewer, a bribe was due and a bribe had to be paid. Or else.

Or else it was. Into the cell the man was thrown. He could stay there until he paid up.

Shoaib laughed, says the women were not going to take this lying down. A large group assembled, jumped into a truck, went straight to the district superintendent of police, demanded action. They got it. What else could a man do when confronted by an office full of angry women? With the superintendent in tow they trooped off to the local police station. Shoaib happened to meet them en route, singing loudly, cheering, in the back of a dusty pick-up, bouncing along a rocky road. Says he was vastly amused, impressed. *At the station* says Shoaib, *the offending policeman was found sitting outside at a table drinking beer. I have no idea what happened to the fellow* Shoaib chuckles, *but I do know that the husband was immediately released and the liquor store remained closed which just shows the power these women had begun to wield.*

Back to that first long night, a night where Raju listened while Shoaib talked, said all you have to do is to enable the poor to start organising, to find bright stars amongst them, activists who will absorb ideas like a sponge, selfless dedicated people, leaders, then empower these people sit back and get ready to embark on a wild and exhilarating ride at a pace you could never imagine. How your job was to facilitate, to stand ready to help, to guide, provide whatever it was the poor needed to go forward. And most importantly, you had to fit into their plans, not the other way around. *My eyes were opened* says Raju, *these simple thoughts kept repeating themselves in my mind, I questioned all I had done in the past, all the ideas that had been entrenched in my mind about my duty to help the poor, to tell them what to do. That first meeting made a profound change in my thought process,* a shy smile *you could say it changed my life.*

But then again, Raju, like the poor, was perhaps only waiting to have his latent power, his latent ideas released. And luckily for him he had met the very

man who could do this, a man who is a past master at releasing the power that lies within people. Raju had become a believer. He had begun to unlearn.

Unlearn? What kind of a word is this?

Life is a joke to Jaganatha Rao, now a senior manager in the Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty, a great joke, a happy joke. Beneath the humour, the image he projects that life is a joke, there is a serious thinker. It was Jaganatha who first talked about the importance of the 'unlearning process', how those who have been in the development game for any time at all need to 'unlearn' everything they have ever learnt, everything they have ever done before. Only then can they fully take on social mobilisation, that there are people who say they are 'believers' but who deep down are not fully involved, not fully committed because they have not been through the 'unlearning process', have not thrown out all their past beliefs, ideas accumulated for years, thrown them out the window and begun again.

Jaganatha describes Shoaib making 'a stream of visits' from 1996 to 2003, how each visit was a learning process, how he absorbed the vital lesson, the belief in the innate capacity of the poor to help themselves, of not just delivering things to the poor whether they want them or not. Jaganatha echoes this in his own words, how working directly with people you see naked poverty, you see how after forty years of piecemeal projects there is still tremendous poverty, tremendous suffering. *We had to change the mindset of the officials,* he says yet again, *nothing is more important than changing the mindset of the officials, in the Indian government, in the World Bank.* Stops; laughs in the manner of a father to his wayward sons. The World Bank? *Most of those rascals still don't get it. Their mindsets have not changed; they still think they know best.*

Back we go again, this time to the 'unlearning process'. Jaganatha will not let it go, how once government officers, anyone, 'unlearns' then everything becomes easy, that a poverty alleviation programme, correction, a poverty elimination programme will then go like wildfire. But, he says laughing as might a tolerant school master over the peccadillo's of a wayward student, they have to unlearn. If this is true, and it certainly makes sense, elsewhere in the region, those who staff the rural support programmes, those who work in government, have they 'unlearned' yet? We will come to that. Jaganatha says it was not easy, that it took him a year to clear out all his prejudices, all the old stuff, to accept that people have the capacity to manage their own development with a little help, that they can organise, can deliver goods and services, that government's role, a support organisation's role should just be a facilitator, a trainer, an encourager. *Once the people became organised we all became learners.*

And there he goes again, that throaty chuckle, from somewhere deep within, laughing at himself, how foolish he had been for so long thinking he knew best, could sit in an office and decide, how as Krishnaya had said, thinking it would all seep down, all trickle down. *Trickle nowhere*, Jaganatha spluttered, and laughed again.

Today, he says chuckling still and you just have to laugh with this jolly man, *we are implementing a huge poverty elimination project backed by the World Bank and it is easy because we are using tried and tested methods. But we are still learning, still experimenting, still listening. The whole thing is a miracle*, he says, *and it keeps on happening. We keep on learning and listening, supporting the people in whatever it is they want to do, a two-way traffic of ideas, not a one-way street at all*, and he bursts into laughter again, says *not a one-way street with us going the wrong way up it.*

Yes, after the 'unlearning' comes the 're-learning' but you have to have enthusiasm to learn, you have to realise your job is not to dream up a plethora of schemes and projects but to establish a strong organisation ready to react, ready to help the poor realise their dreams, their ideas, their projects. *That's it* he says, claps his hands and laughs again, an infectious chuckle that keeps us smiling, makes us want to laugh with him, *that individually the poor are weak but collectively they are strong, really strong*, so that if you help build the capacity of their organisations they soon start taking decisions, all the decisions, *and just like that, out they come*, and there is that laugh again, *out they come from poverty. And you know*, says Jaganatha *the last lesson, is to continue to be a learner, to realise that organisations of the poor can be built, can become strong but that they need a partner, an organisation for the poor, that this may change, will change but the two go together, hand in hand, one directive, the other responsive, yes, that is the word, responsive, that's us, the villagers give the directives.*

Laughs, shakes his head, *oh yes, if I had just stayed in my office, inside my own four walls thinking up new schemes I would never have unlearned. I would have got nowhere, it would have all been impossible.* Says again, *you have to go to people, talk to them as equals, understand the full extent of their problems, see their houses, or no houses*, laughs, *give them respect, honour, power, listen, then the unlearning process will start, my golly yes*, says that was what Shoaib taught, *you have to go to the people.*

Shoaib's status helped.

Says Raju, echoing Krishnaya, *we found he had been one of us, one of the subcontinent's elite, a member of the civil service.* This counted. Shoaib understood. Although Raju admits he was still far from clear, not totally

convinced after that first meeting, Shoaib's status, Shoaib's position meant that Raju would not be wasting his time. This was a man he could listen to, respect. Shoaib had reached the lofty heights, he had been a commissioner. He was also speaking from experience not from theory, not quoting from some textbook, Shoaib had been out in the villages, had done exactly what he said Raju could do, unleash the power of the poor. Shoaib was speaking from his heart.

This matters on the subcontinent, speaking from the heart.

Raju talks of the past, talks of how following the literacy programme, groups of poor women began the anti-*araki* movement, did something they had never done before, stood up against government policies permitting the brewing of country liquor. They were wildly successful; anti-country liquor laws are now a part of the manifesto of every political party. The women felt so empowered they began to talk about how to build on this resounding success. Men liked their liquor no doubt about it, liked their liquor very much but had been defeated. If they could do this, women began to wonder, to say 'what else can we do'? Raju says women were ready for more. Says all right, we thought we might bring them together in small groups and introduce ideas of thrift and credit. Says it worked in a desultory sort of way but there was no clarity, no framework, no idea how to go forward. Shoaib added all this, provided an ideological framework to the languishing self help group movement, gave it a way to grow, become immensely powerful.

So yes, says Raju, when Shoaib arrived he found self help groups all right, a ground movement ready and waiting, but at a standstill. They had won out on the *araki* issue but they did not know what else to do with their new found power. Then the whole thing suddenly snowballed. Shoaib's arrival was totally opportune. Village women were hungry for liberation, a groundswell of power waiting for direction. And by chance, luck again, Shoaib's luck, Raju says government was also ready and waiting. *Shoaib simply added the framework, the ideas, the simple clarity of it all* says Raju again, *we were ready for it, we were able to make the best possible use of Shoaib's thinking, we had been ready to go for some time but we had no direction, no framework, no clarity of vision.*

Raju was convinced, almost. He wanted to see more, see Shoaib's ideas at work.

Can he fly to Pakistan? He can. Can he travel to the Northern Areas? A problem. His own government has already said no, and over the border the security services do not want him wandering around the north either. Shoaib has a solution. *Come what may* he tells Raju, *say nothing to the government, take leave, come as my personal guest.* Raju does and if the Indian government knew

and surely they did, they chose to look the other way. Raju was not on an official visit.

In Pakistan *there was a great to-do* says Shoaib. Everybody opposed my taking Raju to the Northern Areas, saying he had to be a spy or why else had his own government allowed him to come, *and all that nonsense*, says Shoaib, amused but exasperated. Was Shoaib about to meet a brick wall? Not at all. He had a secret weapon. The serving Interior Secretary Jiwan Khan had been one of his probationers. The old boy network again, and of course the secretary would smooth the way for one of his most respected elders. He does so, says to the security agencies, if you think Shoaib's guest is a spy, send your own spies with him as assistants. Grudgingly, they agree.

Shoaib still finds the whole episode very funny. Says we were quite a cavalcade but off we all went to Gilgit, and as it turned out everyone became the best of friends. As the visit drew to a close, the Pakistani security men kept dashing off to scour the markets to make sure Raju got the best bargains to take back with him to India. Raju was a guest; only the best was good enough for a guest.

Raju says visiting Shoaib's famous organisation, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, helped immensely, put the final seal on his confidence, says although the programme in Andhra Pradesh has now gone well beyond Gilgit, far beyond, the visit was a turning point. Raju says he had already begun to see the power and wisdom of the people but the visit to Gilgit brought clarity, reassurance. Here was living proof. Says I was convinced, and came back to Andhra Pradesh to work with renewed vigour and energy. I had seen the future he smiles.

Raju takes over. It is 1996; he has four years, three districts, twenty Mandals, seven hundred and fifty villages, a small slice of the entire Andhra Pradesh pie of twenty-two rural districts, nearly eighty million people. Accustomed to dealing with mind-boggling numbers, Raju, a man with twenty years of field experience, prepares to focus down. Shoaib says, pick your own team. He does, selects the best, the cream, men and women he had known. Jaganatha Rao was one of these, given a district, or part of one, six Mandal Samakyas, subdivisions, previously known as *talukas*, called *tehsils* in other parts of India and in Pakistan.

A former Special Commissioner for the City of Hyderabad, another with twenty years experience in rural development under his belt, Jaganatha took a deep breath, he had been given command of just six Mandals out of the eleven hundred in Andhra Pradesh, reassured his wife and other colleagues that no, he had not gone mad, no, it was not a demotion, he, Raju and the others were going to try and chart new territory. Then he began to unlearn.

Raju stops talking, thinks, because that is what he is, a thinking man. He says Shoaib was a teacher, he would take whatever time it took to explain, and he would do so until you got it, until he had explained what you wanted to know. Burnt into his memory, Raju says he can still remember everything Shoaib said, everything they talked about, everything, as if it were just yesterday, every visit a learning experience.

Of the project area, Raju says it was a living laboratory. The aim of the project, he says, was to develop and refine the framework, come to grips with the concepts of social mobilisation—he prefers the term ideology rather than concepts—make it work in Andhra Pradesh, decide how to best undertake skill development, empower activists, determine, build and then link the various levels, self-help groups, village organisations, Mandal Samakyas, and at the district level, Zilla Samakyas, work out the role of each, the way his team would interact with them, test ideas until the whole thing works like clockwork, is ready to go, anywhere, anytime. Says we were all part of the experiment, all workers in the laboratory, the women, the activists, all of us. Shoaib added visitors from all over South Asia. They came to see what was happening to contribute ideas, to learn, to unlearn.

Fired by his visit to the Northern Areas, following in Shoaib's footsteps, Raju gave his officers a huge dose of motivation and freedom, the confidence to work directly with the rural poor. Jaganatha laughs, says, *yes, work directly*, says sitting in a government office, sitting at a big desk in a big office is very different from getting down to the grassroots level, getting down and dirty, facing up to the realities of poverty, the sometimes ugly truths, the good humour in adversity. *No barriers, no protection, there it is right in front of you*, he says, *all around you, no escape. But* says Jaganatha, *we were determined. If a man of Shoaib's calibre could do this, could seem joyful while sitting down with the poor then so could we. This is what we did, we became joyful too.*

Krishnaya says they picked the eyes out of all the previous programmes, the best features, added the magic ingredient, social mobilisation. Shoaib and Raju would also happily send anyone anywhere at the drop of a hat if there was a chance they would pick up new ideas, have their minds opened. Krishnaya went off to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, others elsewhere. It all started to come together.

Shoaib's contribution? Krishnaya answers without thinking, *the development of a practical model which led to the formation of an entire hierarchy of village organisations. Shoaib turned development on its head.*

Raju says the same thing, so do all the others, time and again. There may still be a trickle down of ideas, but there is also a huge upward flow of demands. The people now lead development and not the other way around. From a small and humble

beginning, just a few Mandal Samakyas, a few self-help groups there are now more than six hundred thousand women's groups in Andhra Pradesh, says Krishnaya. The impact has been incredible. Raju agrees without hesitation.

There were others, people at all levels who came under Shoaib's spell.

Ravi Kumar was one. Head of one of the small not-for-profit groups who worked with the programme in the field, Ravi had heard about a 'great man', someone who would come one day. Then a field visit was announced. *There was huge excitement* says Ravi, *what would this great man from Pakistan tell us?* The day arrived, Shoaib spoke, everyone listened, stunned; a dropped pin could be heard. *Then something utterly astonishing, and do you know what*, Ravi asked smiling? *No*, I said, *I didn't*. Ravi smiled again, *at the end of the talk he walked over and hugged me, just like that, said I was doing very good work here*. Nothing like this had ever happened to Ravi before. He says again shaking his head, *it was a truly amazing thing, a man in his position coming up and hugging a lowly person like myself, I could hardly believe it* smiles, says again, *it was just amazing*.

The warmth of a traditional Pashtun bear-hug. It changed Ravi's life.

Ravi and his team began to put Shoaib's ideas into practice. They were astounded by the results. In a matter of months, proposals were pouring out of the villages, from the communities. Programme funds began to flow, we could not believe what was happening, how quickly village people, women, began preparing plans, applying to join in. It went like wildfire. Ravi says he had never seen anything like it before. Raju and his team were important but at the beginning Shoaib was the inspiration. Says Ravi whenever we heard Shoaib was coming our spirits lifted, that was the effect he had, smiles, he made you want to go straight back to work and get it right, every visit helped, high officials just don't hug you but he did, and he would always answer your questions, telephone after he had left, a small man like me, we always felt we could reach him. This was unique.

It was not only Shoaib. The very best people were allocated to the project, Ravi believes, and there was great political will. Shoaib himself cannot speak too highly of the enthusiastic support given by the chief minister of the time, Chandrababu Naidu. The minister was totally behind the programme, was a major reason why it was so successful. Other politicians had to be reassured, included, helped to see that the growing power of the women's organisations was not a threat to their positions. However, said a young staff member, the people, the women, really have learned they are in control; now they know they do not have to follow the politicians' bidding. Their votes are also hard to buy. They require social action not just free *bidis*, a few rounds of drinks at the local *araki* shack. Raju also instinctively knows what needs to be done. Politicians are

continually briefed, taken on field visits, asked to hand out cheques, given a presence. They find themselves caught up in a tide of change they cannot evade. They smile, wide political smiles, good teeth are important, they wave, they graciously acquiesce. The votes of women could be crucial, might be the difference between victory and defeat.

Raju, too, was a source of inspiration says Ravi, deceptively quiet but a man who quickly grasped problems, mobilised resources, solved problems. Another oddball, Ravi smiles, says of Raju, unlike so many high officials he would not hesitate to come straight away, treating a small local organisation like Ravi's as if it was of great importance. *Every one of them, the entire team* says Ravi, *were totally committed, so were we*, gazes into the distance, says with just a trace of regret, *oh yes, those years were very sweet, we were part of an amazing team, we were breaking new ground, it was very sweet. Déjà vu*, it could be Tariq Husain talking of Gilgit's early years. Ravi shakes his head says again, almost to himself, *I will not see such sweet years again*.

Another quiet young man began to speak; another story, the programme saved my life. At first, he says, he did not believe anything that was said. He thought Shoaib was just another of those outsiders with big words and no action. But Shoaib had sat down on the floor, gathered the people around him, it was as if, said the young man, he understood the heartbeat of the poor. He remembers watching the way Shoaib sat and talked so happily, thought of his own behaviour with poor villagers, his own people, and was ashamed. His home village is way out on the arid fringes of the Deccan plateau, a place of dust and poverty, a place he says where extremism has taken hold. The revolutionaries, Maoist, the young man calls them, take young boys into the forest, hand out cash to the boys' parents. He was tempted, we were all angry, the money would help my family he says, but somehow I didn't go, then the programme came, saved my life, I saw that I could fight from within society, be involved in a quiet revolution.

Women! Everyone agreed without hesitation, the small group who had gathered to talk, no doubt at all, the brilliant success of the programme was because it was based on women's groups. At first men were a bit grouchy, gave grudging support to their womenfolk otherwise it would have been very difficult, but when women started to bring money home, the men suddenly sat up and took notice. Drinking money? No way, said their wives, but if you want some fertiliser, seeds, anything like that, yes, the money is yours. This was the way it had been, the way it still was; women were focused, hard working, and they were honest. They did not make a bee-line for the *araki* shack at the drop of a hat, the roll of rupees did not burn a hole in their pockets, *in any case they had no pockets*, they laughed, and they were not interested in endless talk of politics. They had been underdogs for centuries. The tables had suddenly been turned,

they saw a way out; grabbed it with both hands. No one was going to turn the tables back again. No one, that is what they all said, laughed saying it, 'no one'. *Shoaib listened to us*, said one woman, and every other woman nodded, *he would walk from house to house, he created a dream that we could get out of poverty, he created the dream, we made it work.*

Poverty is such a strong enemy said Vijaya Bharti as we dipped fingers into bowls of deliciously spicy vegetables and rice, there are those who want it to continue, there have been threats upon my life, her food once poisoned by landlords angry at losing their bonded women labourers, seeing their workers become self assured, independent, buying land—someone had to pay. Vijaya had, spent weeks in hospital. Came out fighting, this quietly self-assured woman, a powerhouse of social action says our circle is small but very strong and the world around is very corrupt but God blesses us. A woman's story, time there was one.

We sit in comfortable cane chairs in this haven for women, in this tall wonderfully cool, clean building, the Mandal Samakya of Orvakal. Outside there is a small garden fragrant with herbs and flowers, a few bright rectangles of startlingly green lawn, like kohl around a beautiful woman's eyes, a school humming with small voices and beyond, the rough rock and dry scrub of the Deccan plateau. Vijaya says she was a country girl and she may have been but she was already a university lecturer when deputed to the poverty alleviation programme in 1995.

A little afraid when meeting Shoaib for the first time, she found him to be *such a dignified man, so calm*, she felt instantly at ease. Vijaya says the first thing Shoaib did was to concentrate the programme on a few Mandals, twenty in fact, with the aim of using these as a demonstration of what can be achieved. Orvakal was one and became Vijaya's own. Now this is a surprise; this is a new Shoaib. No longer a man in a hurry? Villagers in the Northern Areas would find that hard to believe. Vijaya says she decided to focus down even more, on one Mandal, resisting pressure to expand her interest. She was one of the three project directors. Should she have taken on more, taken on the other selected Mandals in Kurnool district? Vijaya answers her own question, says no, she would have spread herself too thinly, says *I was stubborn, I wanted to succeed in a small place, I believed Shoaib Sahib when he said that the creation of one success story, one successful model will be the most powerful outcome of all.*

Raju supported her, so did Shoaib, gave her freedom to do what she knew would be best. Vijaya calls it the Gilgit model, one person concentrating for years on one place, *I did it here* she says, *I always dreamed of going to Gilgit and seeing where it all began.* Her one Mandal Samakya, just under five hundred self-help groups, twenty-seven village organisations, nearly five thousand six hundred women, an amazing place where women rule, not men.

The old man, Akhter Hameed Khan would have approved. Orvakal was indeed a demonstration. It says 'come and get it' and many have. Vijaya says she absorbed all Shoaib had to say, all his teachings, absorbed them like a sponge and then wrote a ten page training manual, ten principles of social mobilisation which she now uses wherever she goes; and she travels widely in the region. Smiles, says *Shoaib Sahib gave me a degree, a degree far more valuable than anything a university could give.* Vijaya too became a believer.

Of Shoaib, Vijaya is an unabashed admirer, says he has two angles, laughs gently, he is a professional but he is also a human being. Such concentration she says, he will forget everything when talking with the people, become totally immersed, he believes in the poor, he believes and he listens and listens, asks about their health, their welfare, he took them all shopping and bought bangles, laughs shyly, in India fathers' buy bangles, he treated us as if we were his daughters.

Another side? Shoaib is strict. Says he demands quality not quantity; says targets are useless unless they include quality; says he counselled that 'it is not our job to expand, we have to go vertically not horizontally'. This is a very different picture from the Gilgit man. That man went just as fast as he could go. Quality yes, but quantity also; in spades.

Second to Shoaib is Raju. Vijaya speaks highly of this small, soft spoken man, says he is the best administrative officer in Andhra Pradesh, She says we, the women of Orvakal, are very proud of him, very. Now that is something. *Raju*, she says *brought in so many things, literacy, the anti-*araki *campaign, savings, so many movements*, says whatever Shoaib Sahib said. Raju implemented, said it was Raju who convinced government, brought government totally on side, says his high standing in the Indian Civil Service helped, that every one of the programme's pilots became a training centre that others come to see, training centres whose women go out to other states, other countries, something Gilgit might have been. Isn't.

The amazing Orvakal building was a place of rocks and snakes ten years ago, 'chosen', smiles Vijaya, 'because no one would object'. Who would want such a place? There was a tiny former jail. Laughs, *yes we lived in that, we cleaned it out and whitewashed it; it was the beginning. And then we built the two storied Orvakal building block by block. It took twelve years.* Vijaya says the women of Andhra Pradesh demonstrate Newton's third law, that when something is suppressed for a very long time, when released it will rebound with double the effect, and keep on bouncing, increasing in effect, unstoppable.

She says in South Asia women are doubly burdened, with poverty and with discrimination. In Andhra Pradesh the status of women in rural areas was as bad as it gets; negligible literacy; child marriage; domestic and other violence; dowry;

suicide; the list goes on and on. Grimaces, says the suppression was horrible, that the Raj did not interfere. When the self-help movement first started, she says, it was like putting a plate of food in front of a starving prisoner, there is a hunger in women that the poverty alleviation programme answers, helps them escape the prison of their lives; offers liberation. Such a simple reason, sighs, smiles. We dip our fingers into the food bowls; eat; talk; it is all good.

Women she says *have an inbuilt motherly instinct. They take this with them to the village, to the Mandal, onwards to the nation.* Add all these up. Freedom from suppression; taking responsibilities seriously because of an inbuilt mothering reflex; women are the family and that is it, women invariably take loans to benefit the family; men may take loans for their own benefit. If women are the entry point the entire family benefits, even the men, the husband. Smiles, says, I am involved in a quiet movement, a silent, unspoken women's liberation movement; we do not parade and scream, we just quietly assume our rights.

On Shoaib, she shrugs, *what can I say? I simply followed him. I believed. I was attracted by his compassion, I saw him as the father of social mobilisation. I have taken his ideas all over South Asia; added some of mine.* Smiles, a sweetly powerful smile says, *his ideas have changed thousands of lives.* She moves her hand, a dancer's gesture, shakes her head says, *at the beginning we had to tread carefully. Some women kept their membership a secret from their husbands for a start, but once the support network grew they also opened their houses for meetings, were proud to do so, to have ten other women meeting in their huts.* Almost a carbon-copy of Vijay Kumar, Jaganatha Rao, all the others, Vijaya says when husbands found that their wives could borrow from the group there was a sudden turn-around. Husbands became friends, supporters. (A cynical thought, husbands as 'fair-weather friends').

Right now she says, *we have one hundred of our women away in Uttar Pradesh. Almost all of them illiterate, everything is in their heads, their success is the best advertisement possible; they are marvellous community trainers. Some husbands go along too. They have a second honeymoon,* Vijaya giggles, says *everyone is happy.* Sobers, says poverty becomes so ingrained, the poverty of generations, people get used to it, have to if there is no escape, have to accept hunger, dirt, injustice, they have to if they cannot see a way out. Either that or give up as some do. But once they start to believe, once they believe they themselves can be the agents of change, something wonderful begins to happen; says *I will tell you about just two women.*

Vijaya found the first cleaning toilets, a drunk for a husband, three children to support, a squalid hut, leaking roof, dirt floor, foodless days, bleak outlook for the children, husband muttering sullenly about bonded labour, that is when he wasn't drunk, couldn't talk, think. Fast forward a year or so, says look, 'can you

believe the Cinderella transformation?' Was Vijaya the fairy godmother who waved a wand because today, this woman owns her own small house, her son is enrolled in a degree course, she has a small business, a cell phone, a landline, another son in work, a daughter at school. Vijaya shakes her head, smiles, just think how her life has changed. What about the husband? *Oh him, he has sobered up. He had to or else* shrugs prettily, laughs.

The second was a widow, five of her six children lost, begged when she had to, worked when she could for a rupee a day, a pittance, poorest of the poor. Took loans from her group, learned how to manage money, used the loans wisely, now she has just purchased the mango garden where she once begged for work, seven acres, has adopted three orphaned children, is flourishing.

These are Shoaib's women says Vijaya, they owe their lives to Shoaib, show it every time he comes, eyes shining with adoration. There are thousands of women like this, thousands; they all love Shoaib. So strong we are now, so strong, she smiles, pride in her eyes, defiance, we will all go if necessary, all of us, any time, all five thousand, we will fight for justice for just one of us, all five thousand, no matter the cost, justice is more important than money. And so they will.

But just when it was really humming, momentum growing, just when it was ready to burst out of the three districts, out of the twenty Mandal Samakyas, in New York, those at the top said that was it, job done, mission accomplished, Shoaib and his teams had done what they set out to do, they had shown the way. That was what the United Nations was for. Showing the way. Shoaib could hardly believe it, sputtered, shook his head, a deep breath, replied immediately, said can't you see it, can't you see what is within our grasp, your grasp, think about it, look at the opportunity you are throwing away. Too bad, said the wise men in New York, we do not do big projects, we only do demonstrations. Shoaib still finds the decision incomprehensible, says the United Nations Development Programme's people have the strangest attitude. They will support a pilot project to take-off point and even if it looks as if it will be highly successful, the best ever, they will walk away. If someone else picks it up so much the better; if not they will still walk away. Yes, says Shoaib in exasperation, just walk away, they will not even stay on providing technical support as the World Bank people suggested— playing second fiddle is not their forte.

No wonder they have very little to trumpet about, Shoaib shakes his head, *no wonder their funding is being steadily reduced, they just pull out too soon, never have much to show for what they have spent. Look* he says, *they spent eleven million dollars in the region on the poverty alleviation programme, a lot of money for them, but think, just think we were dealing with six countries, some of the most populous in the world, think of the huge sums our work has now attracted, the tens of millions, hundreds of millions of poor people who have benefited, but no, they just turned away, said 'well done', and looked for something else to do, something new.*

Shoaib would not give up. If the UN was not going to take things forward, Shoaib would find someone who would. The other countries in the programme were another story but he was not about to let Andhra Pradesh come to a full stop. So he turned to Meiko, World Bank's Vice President for South Asia, brought her to Andhra Pradesh, took her on tour for five days. In village after village Meiko heard the same story, different versions but essentially the same story—somehow a miracle had happened, previously impoverished women were, seemingly of their own volition, climbing out of poverty. For Meiko, it was a revelation. Says Raju, *the Japanese lady from World Bank saw the transformation of poor women, saw for the first time social mobilisation in action, saw what the power of the people can achieve, saw the immense potential of the network of people's organisations, she saw it all* says Raju. Says Vijay Kumar who followed in Raju's footsteps, *she got it.*

Not only did she get it, Meiko acted. She immediately penned a directive, commanded as many World Bank staff as possible be sent out to the villages of Andhra Pradesh to see what she had seen, live there, immerse themselves in village life, see first-hand the power of social mobilisation. Immersion courses.

Jaganatha Rao laughs uproariously, says *some of them came back a bit the worse for wear but they nevertheless became enthusiasts, won over to the idea; that is if they survived.* Laughs again, says *we do the same ourselves, when top officials are deputed to the Society, we pack them straight out to one of the original Mandals, they have to unlearn and then begin to learn, they have to learn from the women, become a commoner, understand poverty, start to listen, really listen to the poor.* He laughs again, always he laughs, life is a joke, a good joke, says *the women in the Mandals are getting used to it, most of them, they have immense patience*, says *but yes, sometimes it is true, they get fed up. Pity the poor officer when they do.* Says similar projects are starting in Orissa, in Bihar and project officers from those states, more World Bank staff, all of them are thrown off the deep end, sent out for two weeks to the villages. Says, voice bubbling with laughter, it is really only a start but better than nothing. What is even better, he says, is that women from the Mandals are heading over to Bihar, working with groups there, shakes his head, smiles his wonderfully infectious smile, *our own once poor women, off they go, amazing.*

A puzzle; an enigma says Jaganatha, World Bank staff do not seem to talk to each other; ideas do not seem to move from one department to another, from one project approval team to the next. In Rajasthan the World Bank is trying to do rural development, has been trying for the last five years, top down stuff, ignored what we were doing in Andhra Pradesh, did not bother to learn, says Jaganatha again, his tone that of a headmaster discussing some wayward students, *those rascals never learned from our project, they just didn't get it. We told them when they asked, look, you have killed the Rajasthan project all by yourselves, it was not the Rajasthanis. You would think they would learn from their other projects but they don't, they don't seem to even look.*

Meiko however was one of those who looked, who got it, could hardly wait to bring the World Bank into the act. She wanted to expand the hugely successful experiment across the entire state. 'And do not bother asking any other funding agency, this one is mine, World Bank's'. In Washington they had been flirting with a programme for India called 'district poverty initiatives'. The proposal—good on generalities, short of detail—had drifted from one desk to another. Money was not the problem, not one to skimp, half a billion American dollars had been allocated, but they were short on ideas. A dead end loomed.

Meiko returned to Washington, said call the programme anything you like just so long as it mirrors what I have seen, threatened to take the entire matter to the Bank's Board if the desk officers kept on prevaricating, *kept on 'humming and hawing'* laughs Shoaib. It was not a hollow threat *Meiko does not make hollow threats.* It worked. The half-billion dollars was re-directed.

Next step? *A brainstorming session* says Raju.

The outcome? A decision to scale up. And for starters, to also expand the experiment to include the six most backward districts in the state. One thing more—create a new support organisation, the Society for the Elimination of Poverty. Raju smiles his shy smile, says quietly, *we had the right model, we had trained activists, we had a support organisation ready to go, we had the interest, conviction and support of State Government, we had World Bank funds. We were ready to run, ready to start.* Shoaib says the Society was set up because government was smart, realising that only an autonomous semi-independent organisation would have the flexibility, be able to recruit and deploy the skilled people just right for the job. It was not a task for rule-bound tediously slow government departments for whom tea breaks were sacred.

Of course they just took the entire poverty alleviation programme's staff, lock, stock and barrel Shoaib says, shaking his head, pleased that they did but still mightily vexed with the United Nations, *Meiko was very clear on this, she wanted everyone. The best luck they had* he says, without doubt the best luck was that Chief Minister Naidu approved Raju's continued deputation; he was able to stay on. Otherwise, Shoaib believes, the results would have been far less consequential. Raju set the right course.

Fast forward to 2003. A worry.

Shoaib's supporter, Chief Minister Chandhrababu Naidu, under pressure from politicians in view of the forthcoming elections, transfers Raju, who becomes irrigation secretary. His deputy, Vijay Kumar, moves up a rung, trained by Raju,

says Shoaib, not the same but still very, very good. Continuity guaranteed. Shoaib can stop worrying.

Eventually, Raju is moved again when the Congress Party assumes power in 2003 and Y.S. Rajeskhar Reddy becomes chief minister, this time to head the entire state's rural development effort. One of Raju's main tasks? Oversight of the Poverty Elimination Programme. Raju is back where he wants to be, where he can continue the work of overseeing the largest anti-poverty programme in the state.

Vijay Kumar leans back in his chair, smiles, everyone smiles, it is a happy project, talks of earlier postings in the tribal areas, of time spent with dirt poor people, those at the bottom of the social ladder, the lowest castes, bottom of the pecking order, but even with this exposure, or perhaps because of it, Vijay says he just did not get it, did not realise there was so much potential power just waiting to be unleashed. Of course he knew there was something there; that even the poor tribals were capable of some things, but he just never imagined there was so much power just waiting for the word, waiting to get going. He says, oh yes, make no mistake, we may be well meaning but we civil servants carry with us a lot of intellectual arrogance; we are quite sure we know better than the people. After all, we are educated so it is a given. We learnt from Shoaib how foolish it was to think this way.

He laughs, says it is *a virtuous circle*, laughs again at his clever word-play, says the more you believe the more you act on it the more it is reinforced by results, the better it is, belief increases, you act on it; see, he says, *a virtuous circle*. Says the best thing about Shoaib was that he spoke from experience not from theory, that whatever Shoaib said he had tried himself, knew it worked, had seen it work, says it was amazing to see his unbounding optimism his confidence in the poor. Vijay speaks of Shoaib brimming with optimism, how this infected all of them, that when he came six months ago it was all still there, Shoaib's enthusiasm, confidence, trust in the people, in their power, all still infectious, like a dose of the very best medicine. How Shoaib really believed it, how it was part of his greatness. *And you know* says Vijay, the same words Shoaib himself might use, *that is what we are trying tell the world, do not look elsewhere for solutions, the solutions are all there in front of you.*

Vijay has twenty-four years of service with government under his belt, but he says the last seven have been extraordinary. So many unintended side effects, he says, so many, more peace in the families, better bonding of husbands with children. He speaks as Vijaya Bharti had, how in the past fending for the household and the children was the sole responsibility of women. A man grudgingly handed out an allowance, thought that to give anything at all was a great favour, a mark of great benevolence, a grand and generous gesture that meant he might not be able to indulge his own wishes, reduced his choices and

opportunities, no more *araki*, fewer *bidis*. In a roundabout way women bringing in money, making decisions, borrowing money, meeting within their self-help groups has changed a husband's view, increased respect, made men more responsible, reduced domestic violence hugely, given women, wives, the strength to deal with husbands who threaten beatings, actually carry them out—how the group acts to shame such men.

The project has in fact succeeded so well he thinks, because it was based on women, *why not* he laughs, *they had nothing to lose, they had been in bondage for hundreds of years, what had they to lose? What had they to gain? Everything.* In South Asia, *in our state, women are the poorest, the most downtrodden of all.* The desire to climb out of this, out of a state of awful inequity and poverty is very strong. Says in the families of the poor, poverty is skewed, women suffer most. Says *my belief, and it is just my belief I have no evidence, there is a bottled up energy waiting for release like a genie in a bottle, powerful beyond anything you might imagine.*

Were Muslim households slower to act? Without hesitation Vijay says yes, but not for long. Women from Muslim households are among those now out and away in Bihar teaching others, asks can you imagine what an incredible empowerment this is, the support from in-laws, from husbands, to be allowed to go out, in groups yes, but without a single male household member, just imagine that?

When I ask the question donors always seem to ask, 'what about the poorest of the poor' Vijay looks at me and laughs, says of course they are the target, first and foremost, shrugs as if to say what a silly question and I know it is, says Shoaib is absolutely right that social mobilisation is the best way to reach out and down to the poorest, that the people do this themselves, that self-help groups help the poorest members, give them courage, so do Mandal Samakyas, so do we all, shakes his head, asks, *who says we don't? Send them to Andhra.*

Says seriously, nothing is ever taken for granted. *We ask ourselves constantly: is anybody being left out, are we missing anyone?* Says *we have a goal; we want every poor family to be involved in the project, we have given ourselves another twelve months to move from 'nearly all', to 'every' poor rural household,* notes my incredulity, says again, *yes, every poor rural household.* Is that possible, everyone? Laughs, *just imagine ten million women coming together, just imagine,* shakes his head, laughs as if it is the best joke ever, *just imagine this, ten million really means fifty million when you count their families.*

And there is more. Coverage is not enough, alleviation will never be enough, Vijay Kumar sits there and tells me in all seriousness, says, *yes, we deliberately chose to use the term 'eliminate', we plan to completely eliminate poverty by 2015. Just imagine that* he says, *no poverty at all.* He shakes his

head. Does he really believe that rural poverty can really be totally eliminated in Andhra Pradesh? He does, he says, yes he does, they all do. They believe.

How will they do it? How will they eliminate poverty? *Forget education for a start*, he says, *yes, it is important but you can start without education*. The lady who manages the insurance in one place is a school drop-out. She keeps it all in her head, others make a government hospital work, *when our own government cannot make it happen, these women have found a way to make it happen*. Next step? More health programmes, education, *yes education is in there all right, you just don't have to start with it, but when village people want education, that is what we will do.*

More amazing statistics, in Andhra Pradesh the figures are in the millions. This, after all, is India. There are nearly eighty million people in this state alone. Vijay reels off a string of figures, three million women insured; premiums are one hundred rupees or less. The payout? Seventy-five thousand for death, scaled down for other injuries. On health, each Mandal Samakya makes its own choice, government or private hospitals. The latter are hunting for business, delighted to do deals with the Mandal Samakyas, increase occupancy rates, says *our village women are tough business negotiators*, laughs in delight, says *the best non-government organisations in India think the poor cannot do without them*, chuckles at their foolishness, says *they have got it the wrong way round, those fellows cannot do without the poor.*

Says *one of the Society's most important tasks is to act as a connector, listen to the villagers, identify the problem, link villagers with an organisation which can solve it, like credit or marketing*, and then Vijay's eyes light up, *like the pesticide-free programme*. We started with four hundred acres now there are more than two hundred thousand pesticide-free acres, the largest area in the whole of India and it is growing all the time. Shakes his head, laughs, says *through social mobilisation the way these things grow can be staggering, support organisations can be catalytic but the real movement comes from the people*. Sits back, laughs again, says he would never have thought it was possible when he was in government, never dreamed of how much energy and power was bottled up in a group of poor women, just waiting to be released, *pop the cork and out it boils.*

Is there an end point? Can he see the finishing line? Is there an exit policy? Vijay shakes his head, smiles as if this is a truly foolish question, asks *exit from what*? Smiles again, and says *more often than not donors have a very simplistic, very structured approach. They bring money, a five-year plan, an exit strategy and so on. Things just do not work that way in the villages. Exit strategies have to be written by the people themselves, not by the donors, not by us*, he says, *the people write the exit strategy, when they do not want us any more we will go. Until then we will stay. This is the way it is. The people call the shots, the people write the exit strategy.* End of story.

Came the day to leave Andhra. Overloaded with images and information it was either slow down and stay on for a month or leave before we burst. At the airport next day there was a small unassuming man standing by himself in the departure lounge. No fuss, no waiters sliding up with tea and cake, no apparent VIP treatment demanded or given although in the aircraft his seat was business class. But then again, so was ours. His approach was hesitant, would we recognise him. Of course we would, it was Raju. We spoke briefly, an exchange of trivia as you tend to do in airports, less with Raju than with many. He wastes little time on trivia, smiles, says why not join him for an informal evening meal at the Andhra Pradesh State House in Delhi. He would be staying there, would be available to talk in the evening, add any finishing touches we might have missed, still wondered about.

Why not? No reason at all. We would be delighted. Good, a driver will come.

Delhi and an aging but still elegant hotel, enormous rooms, old world charm and space, it suits us well. It is a short walk to the sprawling Lodhi gardens, shy lovers coyly holding hands in leafy bowers, family groups out in the sun-striped winter air, sitting sipping lemon tea in the hotel's garden in the chill of early evening, waiting for Raju's driver to arrive. It is not far through the tree lined streets of this privileged quarter, leaves dulled with dust, a few monkeys scamper on the verges. The tall, tight rooms of Andhra Pradesh's State House were a surprise, whispers of the Raj, its imprint indelible, or is it India's imprint on the Raj? Solid wood furniture polished until it gleamed, clean linen, enormous frigid bathrooms, tall white-washed rooms, vaulted ceilings, echoing, comfortable, bachelor spartan, built for hot weather not cold. A simple vegetarian meal arrived in tiffin-tins, highly spiced, lukewarm. Raju did not seem to notice. He is that sort of man. I ate sparingly. Felicity did not, paid for it later; she cannot escape her early training, bad manners not to dine well as a guest.

While we dip our fingers in the food, we talk of the visits by Shoaib's various Pakistan rural support programme staff. How they just don't seem to get it. Perhaps being bombarded with case study after case study becomes bewildering; after all, there are economic success stories in Pakistan, plenty of them. They need to see a Mandal Samakya at work not projects, they have projects but they do not have the marvellously linked and functioning organisations of the poor. Raju thinks, says yes, you are right, they did not see a Mandal Samakya at work. We did, we just sat and watched all day fascinated, we visited projects, yes, but what really mattered to us was to see the Mandal Samakya at work, see women save the life of a young girl, work out problems, take control of their lives. Raju agrees without hesitation, says smiling *yes, in*

Andhra our biggest advantage has been the caring nature of women, particularly poor women, this has been the main energy driving the project. They stick ferociously together, say we have come out of centuries of oppression, we are not going back to that, we are not going to let our organisation fade away. Yes, says Raju, *I see this, nothing much may yet have happened in some villages but they already value the sense, the feel of empowerment, the sense of freedom, that at last they are in control of their own lives. I definitely agree this may be the key element in our success, this intangible feeling.*

Raju considers and then says, *yes, it is possible that it is much more difficult in Pakistan than India with women's groups but don't overlook the difficulties here, our caste system, our hierarchies, the many different social groups within one village.* Raju pauses, says *this is why self-help groups are such a good starting point, groups of socially equal women rather than starting with a larger conglomerate, a village organisation.*

In Andhra, says Raju, village organisations meet every two weeks and do not assume the same importance they have in Pakistan. Why is this? Well, says Raju, remember that the major divisions within a village are based on caste and hierarchy. More likely than not there are social groups who do not really mix. Small self-help groups are thus the way to go. The significance of village organisations is to act as a half-way house, a stepping stone between the self-help groups which are small enough to allow total participation between social equals, and the Mandal Samakya which is big enough to have real power, whose members come from a wide variety of social groupings, all of whom are equals. In the Northern Areas of Pakistan Raju posits that perhaps the main social divisions were between men and women so that village organisations were the logical starting point, one for men and one for women.

Talks of Shoaib's all-important additional rule of thumb: high level organisations should never do anything a lower level organisation is capable of doing, never. Skill redundancy? It happens, of course it happens, all the time, says any of the Society's staff may become redundant as village people acquire skills. This is a given.

Gives an example. At the outset the focus was social mobilisation. The Society no longer does this, has moved to another level, and is pushing commercial banks to consider self-help groups as credit worthy organisations. Cites the usual astronomical figures, in four years credit flowing to these groups has grown to seven billion rupees. The linkage chain to the banks is now direct; the Society is not in the equation any more. Instead, women have set up loan recovery committees to support the banks, have assigned case managers to each bank branch. That is the way it works, says Raju, for dairy cooperatives, life insurance, everything, smiles, we have helped start them, supported them while village people learned, and now we are out

of it, moving on. Says Raju again, perhaps just to make sure we understood, we are out of so many things now, we are moving on in a dynamic way. The principle was with us from day one. It was one Shoaib emphasised. As a result our staff requirements change all the time. One advantage we have, says Raju, is that our people can move back to government service, back to where they came from. If we change direction our staff does not lose their jobs.

And Shoaib? Raju's reply is unhesitating, *he is my guru, I fondly refer to him always, I use his ideas to bring clarity to issues, he is more than my teacher, he is my mentor.* Talks of how, over the last twelve years, whenever he seemed to be at a dead end, an impasse Shoaib would come, provide a new perspective, never let him down. Personally, says Raju, Shoaib Sultan Khan, (Raju often uses Shoaib's full name, it adds a certain dignity to all he says) is always warm and affectionate, like a father, enquiring about my family, constantly keeping in touch, even hugging me at times. Yes, his effect on my mind has been huge, he is someone I can always count on, bank on in a crisis or need.

Raju nods his head, agrees emphatically, donors are fooling themselves if they think they can reach out to the poorest of the poor; same for any other organisations for the poor, that they can do this is a fallacy. Only communities can do this, and they do it through social mobilisation.

So much for all those outsiders, the great development banks, the agencies, the international organisations all with their poverty targeting manuals, the academics with all their high-blown theories on how to reach out to the poorest of the poor. It is all nonsense Raju agrees quietly, a great deal of donor-driven projects simply turn the poorest of the poor into beggars, cynical beggars, hands out asking for more, going nowhere.

Do women in the villages, members of self-help groups, village organisations, those who run the Mandal Samakyas, do all these women continually think 'how can we help our poorest members, the poorest in our villages?' *Sometimes a gentle reminder helps*, Raju smiles. From Raju a reminder would be gentle, but it would also be remembered.

Shoaib, Raju says, invariably asked this one question of any group when he was on tour, *what changes have you brought to the lives of the five poorest families in the village.* It made them think, made them wonder what they could do, made them understand that for it all to work, everyone had to move forward, some faster than others but nevertheless everyone had to move forward and that it was the job of the more fortunate, the smarter or richer villagers to help their less fortunate members, the poor, the sick, the disadvantaged to also go forward.

Their answers Raju believes, the way village women answer this question, is a wonderful indicator of how the programme is advancing. And unless this is

happening, unless communities are reaching out to their poorest members the entire programme cannot be considered a success. *This one question* says Raju, *perhaps more than any other question has helped keep our entire programme on track. In all this, Shoaib's concern for the poor, for the most marginalised has been inspirational.* Shoaib might once have made the mistake of not appearing to have such concerns. He will not make it again; he will not he says, with unaccustomed bitterness in his voice, let the Woods' of the world use concern for the poorest of the poor to undermine another programme.

Scaling up from the United Nation's demonstration programme to the World Bank project was, to put it mildly says Raju, a challenge. How could we do this without compromising quality and focus? Smiles, yes, we might have hesitated, I might have hesitated, yes, even me, except for Shoaib's guidance and support. Shoaib's answer to Raju's doubts was simple. Just as I found you to take the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme forward he said to Raju, so you must find similar champions to take the new programme forward. Find the best people. Each one will take the programme forward in their own area; that is what you have to do. The only thing.

Says Raju smiling, *this became my challenge, my task*; find the champions Shoaib spoke of.

A practical man, Raju knew he could not spread himself over twenty-five thousand villages. Impossible. Other champions would have to do this in his stead. Shoaib's gift? Raju smiles again, *we were given the skill and confidence to handle the programme and it has worked. The message has been taken right down to the community level.* Says with immense conviction, *in no other way could we have possibly succeeded. We have taken this idea right down to self-help group level, down to strong women who say 'we can do it, we can do it'. This is the greatest thing I have ever seen in my life.* Raju smiles his quiet shy smile. More than enough, there is nothing more to say.

And so we walked down the tall, winter-chilled white walled corridors of the State House, no doubt cool in summer, our footsteps echoing, out into the dust-hung night, back to the glowing opulence of our hotel. We felt just fine. We did not know that already a nasty brew was fermenting within Felicity. Soon she would be laid as low as you can ever imagine.

The hotel waiter hovers, dishes arrive, fruit of every sort, peeled, beautifully presented, hot buttered rolls, preserves, eggs cooked to perfection, delicious breakfast fare, drifts of fragrant coffee, we sip, we talk, we wonder. Why do they do it, all those ultra-intelligent civil servants, why do they become caught up in this amazing movement, excited, involved, totally dedicated, why do they care?

Why? They could if they wished, all of those elite, simply sit back and be respected, gain reputations as excellent bureaucrats, rise steadily through the ranks. But no, they followed Shoaib out into the villages and then carried on themselves, adding new touches, new ideas; they cared. When I ask any of them this question they are embarrassed, say it is our duty, point to Shoaib say he is the inspiration for our dedication. But they have all gone well beyond duty, well beyond the normal run of dedicated civil servants; they act as if they have a great task to fulfil, as if they are on a mission. And you know, they are on a mission, a great mission, believers all, believers in the power of the poor, believers that poverty can be banished from Andhra Pradesh

One last question. We asked it of Vijay Kumar just before we left Hyderabad. What if the Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty fell foul of some politician, what if some political party opposed the Society, tried to influence it, close it down? Vijay laughed, a deep belly-rumbling laugh, *let them try, let them commit suicide, the women would tear them into little pieces.* The elimination of poverty now sits firmly on the manifesto of every party. As for the government, money now flows directly to Mandal Samakyas. It does not follow the sometimes tortuous route through various departments. Vijay laughs again, there is just no way any government department could keep up with the pace set by the Mandal Samakyas.

We flew back to Islamabad. It was the 24th of December. Every office closed, Islamabad deserted, so we escaped, drove up to a hotel high in the Murree hills. Fifteen years since I had been there. A shock. Gone were most of the great pine forests, hills bare and denuded, waiting for the trucks, the swarming labourers of the developers, houses for the rich, havens from the heat of the plains in summer. Felicity still weak, still fragile, we strolled slowly through a remnant stand of giant Chir pine, trunks like the legs of dragons, multi-coloured scales.

Back in the hotel the astonishing sound of Christmas carols, a large tinselled tree. There was no escape. We gave in, accepted the gift, the bright smiles of the hotel staff, the wishes, Christmas. It all vanished on the road to Peshawar a few days later, vanished in the dangerous hush that followed Benazir's assassination. We waited quietly with Masood watching the hourly news, Masood occasionally on the telephone checking, until a friend in high places said the situation was less tense, danger reduced, drove on an empty highway to Islamabad, boarded an aircraft, left a country close, perilously close to flash point. God willing, we would be in London later in the day. Shoaib would be there. So would Musarrat.

A London night, lights from the shops of Edgware Road spilled out onto the streets, glistening on drizzle wet pavements. I have told my stories; Sarah's children squealed in delicious fright, jumped when the crocodile snapped his enormous jaws,

so did Shoaib and then laughed in delight, said I should write a book, children's stories, look how avidly those naughty imps, his great-grandchildren had listened. He had not seen them sit so quietly before, he says, so attentively rapt. He is relaxed, wears an aging cardigan, is happy. Sarah tells me it will last for a little bit longer and then Shoaib will suddenly announce he has to be off again, to Monaco, to New York, Bangkok, Islamabad, somewhere. This time it is Monaco but his conscience tells him it should be Islamabad. Shoaib frets, appalled by the dreadful assassination, the carnage of the bombs, shakes his head, says he is very worried, thinks he keeps his worries a secret from the family. He doesn't. They know, but the time to leave has not yet come. Not quite.

A poetess enters, one of those for whom Heather Walk is a refuge, shaking raindrops from her long black hair, flashes a smile, vanishes to some hidden nook in this nursery rhyme house. Will Goldilocks be next? The three bears? Great-grandchildren now fast asleep, look at those angels Shoaib whispers, he relaxes again, peace descends. We are given tea, snacks, Farzana, the smiling Gilgiti cook shuffles out, four-square, one of the pillars of the establishment. Doors close. There are others in the house but they are somewhere else. Shoaib is talking with his guests. So do we, we talk, while Musarrat begins the slow process of re-entering the world outside her memory filled room. In an hour, perhaps two she will ghost slowly down the staircase, step by step. Until then Shoaib is happy to hear what we have seen, done, answer questions. There are many. There always are.

Is there much difference between the way Shoaib started in the Northern Area and the approach in Andhra Pradesh?

Shoaib says not much. The main difference was that infrastructure projects were the vehicle in the north while the entry point in Andhra was a portfolio of opportunities. Says of the entire poverty alleviation programme, the United Nations Development Programme people were very good, not a lot of money but no strings to what there was. Enabled great flexibility, to go with whatever communities wanted, in Nepal for example, people generally chose infrastructure.

Is this a quirk of mountain communities, a preference for infrastructure projects?

Shoaib thinks, agrees, perhaps. Says in India, the Collectors became enthusiastic, went out and connected people with all sorts of things, even widows' pensions, used the new groups to make sure people became fully aware of their entitlements, so that smart operators could not trick them out of what was justly due to them. Says until Raju came along, until Raju 'got it', it was an uphill battle, that until then government insisted they were doing just fine, cited savings which were indeed huge but had no other direction.

Shoaib sits back, smiles, says 'next question, please'. How long has he been in London? 'Nearly long enough' he laughs, soon he will be off to Monaco, fairly soon. Next please. We slide in a serious one while he is still laughing. Are the visits to Andhra by staff from Pakistan's rural support programmes really worthwhile? Shoaib now uses Andhra Pradesh as he once used the Northern Areas, to show outsiders, anyone at all connected with the development world, the poverty alleviation world, what can be done. History reversed. A brief twelve years earlier Andhra's people had journeyed to the Northern Areas. Not anymore. The question is close to the quick. Shoaib sits forward, says with deliberate emphasis, *they are, absolutely, and I will tell you why, one reason among many*. Many of the support organisations in Pakistan are only lukewarm when it comes to village activists, they are still trying to make all the running themselves, still trying to stay in control. This is what Shoaib wants his people to learn from Andhra, to stand back, give power to the people, let activists make the running. Shakes his head sadly, says still they haven't, many of them.

Masood the thinker is one who has visited. If he has doubts so will others. Masood agrees that the success in Andhra appears amazing, but he also knows the tricks, the sleights of hand employed to show visitors the best, steer them clear of problem areas, did so himself in Chitral many times. So he questions, is it really as good as everyone seems to think it is? As for a direct transfer of methods and ideas to Pakistan, Masood, sitting now in Peshawar, the centre of a fast fermenting inverse social revolution, thinks the differences are too great. Says at the end of his tour, Shoaib assembled the visiting team in a meeting room at New Delhi's Hyatt Regency, *a noveau riche* extravaganza—its only saving grace an excellent Italian restaurant—said to them, 'you see don't you, that local support groups like the Mandal Samakyas are the way to the future'. Said Masood, *no one said anything, everyone agreed, nodded their heads in assent, but really, hardly anyone knew what they were agreeing to*. They hadn't learnt. Masood smiles a wintry smile, says not one of them was prepared to stand up and say to Shoaib the guru, hold on, it might be fine for India but in Pakistan, that is another story. A lot has changed since Gilgit days. Hussain Wali, any one of Shoaib's bright young people would not have let Shoaib get away with something like that if they were not convinced. And Shoaib would not have expected them to.

Then there is a flash of irritation. Talk of activists has reminded Shoaib of something that really annoys him. He has found out that the management of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, young Izhar Hunzai and his merry men, are doing something incomprehensible. They are messing up activists who were trained twenty years ago, people who have been working all that time, people who really know how things work. *Now* he fumes, *they are training them all over again, basic training. What for I ask you, what for, it will only create doubt*

in the minds of the activists, make them think they are not as good as they really are. He shakes his head, he is exasperated beyond words.

Sharp as a needle is Shandana, says Shoaib, he thinks she at least is beginning to understand. Shoaib says Shandana thought about all she had seen, all Shoaib had said, telephoned Vijay Kumar and asked him straight out, 'what did he think about trust, about handing over responsibilities', says Vijay boomed down the telephone, 'don't ever put limits on your trust of organisations of the poor, give them all they want, more, and whatever else you do, don't ever try and do it yourself, don't be selective and restrictive, don't act like donors, act like a support organisation.' Loud and clear, message understood. That's Shandana for you, said Shoaib. One onside, how many more to go? Too many. Yes, too many don't or won't, cannot bring themselves to let go, to believe that people's organisations really can be responsible, are not children, can be set free. They have not yet 'unlearned'.

Shoaib cites a Sindhi rural support organisation. Says they agreed there were competent activists, but did not believe they were competent enough, could be entirely trusted if given too much latitude, too much responsibility. To prove the point they set up a competition, said to the village activists, all right, you mobilise this many villages and we will mobilise this many. Three months later came back to Shoaib and said 'told you so, we met our quota, the activists didn't'. Shoaib is as angry as he ever is, *didn't they realise their job was to work with the activists not against them, didn't they realise the entire quota was theirs, that the activist's main task was to act as conduits not as competitors? Divided you have achieved nothing; working with your activists instead of in competition with them you could have achieved everything.*

And that is it. Leadership or lack of it said Shoaib. There seem to be too few Rajus, too few Vijay Kumars; those who head the support organisations and who realise that in giving away power everyone gains. Perhaps Shandana does, perhaps also Masood over in Peshawar, a few others. They do what they can but they fight an uphill battle.

Agha Javad at the National Rural Support Programme is more direct than most. Perhaps this is because in managing the organisation's finances he deals in absolutes. What he says is this. Andhra Pradesh proves all that Shoaib has ever said about the power of the people; *that what they actually do in Andhra Pradesh, most rural support organisations in Pakistan pretend to do but don't. We write about it, they actually do it; we prefer to use our own paid social organisers, they use community activists; 'oh yes, we are a long way behind in this respect*; sees it as the way Andhra Pradesh has gone so far so fast, government agencies working directly with community activists, community organisations. *In Andhra Pradesh you feel the entire state is a community organisation*; says *yes, we write about the importance of activists but in our hearts we still do not believe it.*

Only one thing really bothers Shoaib about Andhra Pradesh and it is this. The Society for the Elimination of Poverty is not an independent not-for-profit joint-stock company. Shoaib cannot entirely escape his mentor's utter disdain of government, his own deeply rooted unease, distrust, his own unwillingness to ever again enter government service. For Shoaib though, the line is fuzzier than it was for Akhter Hameed Khan. The old man would have nothing to do with government, not a thing; Shoaib will. However on one thing Shoaib is adamant. He believes rural support programmes should be as independent of government as possible, should be strictly impartial, have as little as possible to do with politics. Believes the battles he and the board of the National Rural Support Programme had with the Benazir government in the early 1990s over the return of an endowment gifted by her predecessor Nawaz Sharif proves the point.

We talk more. Shoaib shrugs, says when he started the South Asia poverty alleviation programme he knew if he worked through government agencies little would have been achieved. Yes, he agrees, most of the staff was seconded from government agencies but they worked under the umbrella of the United Nations and so were not subjected to the political and other pressures and interferences that can make life very difficult for a government servant or, he says ruefully, in Pakistan, sometimes make their lives quite profitable. In effect the programme established a number of semi-independent rural support organisations. There were no boards of governors, funds came from the United Nations, but there was the advantage that staff were able to be rotated into and out of the organisations. There were no hassles about staff training or duration of contracts. Nobody was ever dismissed. They were simply sent back to government.

Good and bad, says Shoaib.

In Bangladesh, government just transferred people at whim and so effectively closed down the programme. This happened in Daudzai too, all those years ago. Shoaib does not want to be reminded of this. He says with some impatience, *yes, yes of course*. He has come a long way since Daudzai, and yes, it was the time he lost his trust, why he watched anxiously when in Andhra Pradesh, Raju was transferred to the Ministry of Irrigation, held his breath, let it out in relief when Raju returned in an even more powerful, more influential position—overall control of the poverty elimination project.

Why wasn't an independent rural support programme set up in Andhra Pradesh when the opportunity seemed just right? Shoaib's story. Another one.

When the United Nations pulled the rug out from under the poverty alleviation programme in Andhra Pradesh, opening the way for larger funding

agencies to step in which World Bank did with alacrity, Shoaib pushed hard for the creation of an independent rural support organisation. A relatively small United Nations programme handling a few million dollars of grant money is one thing—the politicians were willing to let it run—but a multi-million World Bank project, the largest anti-poverty programme in the state, was an entirely different proposition, *an entirely different kettle of fish* says Shoaib. Too many voters are affected. As well, World Bank provides loans for such purposes, soft loans to be sure, but loans nevertheless. Some time down the track the loans have to be repaid. And as government is the guarantor, it is government who has to pay.

Shoaib says when Chief Secretary Madhav Rao was on his way to the Northern Areas, one question he asked of Sartaj Aziz, who was at the time a federal minister in the Pakistan government, was how come government supported, and financed the establishment of rural development organisations they did not at all control? One of Shoaib's firmest supporters, a believer in independent rural support organisations, Sartaj had replied that government believed this was the best way, in Pakistan at least. But in India, democracy has somehow muddled along, the elite civil service is still highly respected and maintains a fair degree of independence, and government took a different view. They would retain an interest in the support organisation, stay at arm's length without quite letting go while encouraging and empowering strong, independent institutions of the poor. But when the World Bank arrived with a bagful of money it was all too much, even for Chandrababu Naidu. Yes, Raju and the others were impeccably trustworthy, but in order to quench any hint of impropriety, any chance of anyone turning the World Bank's loan into a political issue, there had to be clear and direct accountability.

Government's presence not only had to be heard, it had to be seen. An arm's length situation would no longer do.

And so it came about, the new Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty would become a semi-independent outreach organisation of government, the chief minister would be the nominal chairman; the minister of rural development the vice-chairman, while the minister's principal secretary was to sit in on all policy reviews, providing opinions and drafting directives. Shoaib grins, *yes, even with Chandrababu Naidu, they found they would not be able to sell the idea unless they made him chairman. But they knew he would not have the time*, so probably did Naidu, and would leave it to the vice-chairman and the others to really run the organisation. And in turn, the vice-chairman did not have the time to be there all the time, attend every meeting, every discussion, so in effect the principal secretary became the de facto chairman; and guess who that was? Raju!

Shoaib shrugged. He would have preferred an independent support organisation, one embedded in civil society not one so obviously attached to

government. However, there was an upside. Shoaib shrugs and laughs, in Pakistan, government sometimes becomes annoyed with the independence of rural support organisations, and as they have no direct control, those annoyed look for ways to limit money and resources. It has never been that way in Andhra Pradesh, not once during the United Nation days, and not now under the huge World Bank project. Why would government want to hold back funds for its own programme? In his time, Chandrababu Naidu was a total supporter, and to Shoaib's relief so too was the new chief minister until he was killed in a helicopter crash in 2009, but so too will those who follow.

Shoaib will not let the talk end here.

Says yes, Rajasekhar Reddy's action in bringing back Raju as principal secretary for rural development was a great move but there is a weakness. Someone else could move Raju away again. Shoaib wants to make something very clear, he sits forward in his chair, poised, *if you really want to have long term sustainability*, he says with emphasis, *you will have to create independent and totally autonomous rural support organisations*. The Indians listen of course, Shoaib is their much loved guru, they listen and then on this one issue, they go their own way.

What can Shoaib do? He smiles, wishes them well. Perhaps they are right. He doesn't think so. Time will tell. In any case, he is heartened by an idea, by something Raju says, 'look how powerful the women's organisations have become, look how powerfully independent the entire Indira Kranthi Patham network has become, nearly ten million rural households, a quarter of the ultra-poor, a presence in every village of Andhra Pradesh', this is where Shoaib should look to see autonomy, says Raju, this is where it counts, where it hasn't happened yet in Pakistan. Shoaib hopes, he always has hope, but he doesn't hold his breath.

As a senior adviser to the United Nations Development Programme, Shoaib finished with the poverty alleviation programme in 2000, but continued on in a desultory fashion for a couple more years. Countries still asked for me, he says. Still they do. Like the people of the Northern Areas, the women of Andhra Pradesh would like Shoaib to be there, any time he wishes, stay there if he would. So do people at the top. Shoaib laughs, he is happy, says *just look at this email from Vijay Kumar*, and he laughs again, *he wants me to visit but I will be in London. Maybe February?* Any time says Vijay, any time.

The last time Shoaib visited Andhra, the minister for rural development, a Congress man, took him aside and said Shoaib must write to Sonia Gandhi, tell head office what is happening in Andhra Pradesh, how amazing it all is. *You know*, says Shoaib, smiles, *I said I will but you also had better tell Soniaji and all those around her, tell them don't bother looking outside India, don't get*

enamoured of Grameen and all that, tell them that in Andhra there is something quite unique, something entirely home-grown that in just twelve years has started to lift ten million rural households out of poverty.

Shoaib laughs and shakes his head at the improbability of such numbers, that he is still wanted, respected, still loved in India, that someone like Sonia Gandhi would listen to him, that her son Rahul, one of India's political elite, would take time to sit and listen, that her principal staff officer would want to meet him. It still makes Shoaib wonder, look over his shoulder as if someone else might be standing there. Why me he asks, and then he laughs? Because really he knows, he knows: but he cannot escape his grandfather's influence—a gentleman is always modest. So he tries, but sometimes modesty escapes him.

Why is he wanted, why do those at the top seek Shoaib out? Others may rattle sabres on the borders, Shoaib crosses them, treats them as irrelevant. Poverty has no borders. Shoaib is also a man of the subcontinent, kin to every villager, every poor woman, poor man, a man of the people. This is why the people love him, leaders seek him out.

In 2009 Shoaib was nominated for the Nobel Peace prize.

That Shoaib was a nominee is not so remarkable. What is remarkable, what is unique, is that it was not just one country—the entire subcontinent was behind him, and none more so than those at the top in Andhra Pradesh.

Henning Karcher may have been one of those prepared to let the poverty alleviation programme go, move on to other projects, but he also knew a thing or two about memories, about grand exits. Determined not to just let the hugely successful experiment quietly fade away, let memories of the role of the United Nations vanish in the face of the large amounts of funding now available, to make sure recognition was given to all those who had brought the programme to this incredible point, he decided to stage a grand finale.

Henning missed his vocation. He could have been a showman, an impresario, one of the best. Where will this finale be staged? Good question. Well, not Pakistan, not Nepal, not the other countries of the region, they would not do. And just as he may have hoped, Henning's people in his Nepal office all pointed to Andhra, said 'let us ask them'. Henning did. Raju was contacted and of course agreed, and everyone in and out of government, ministers and members, all of them including of course Chandrababu Naidu, were invited.

When Vijaya Bharti heard about it she went to Raju, said our programme is a women's programme, the grand finale, the great 'thank you' is women's business. Leave it to me I will organise it. She set about doing so; Vijaya is a remarkable social organiser says Shoaib, one of the very best.

There were tears in Shoaib's eyes, he shakes his head, you know we all went there he says, and when I arrived I could not believe my eyes. Stretching away, almost as far as Shoaib could see, ten thousand women, flags in their hands, singing, laughing cheering. It was absolutely unbelievable Shoaib says, taking out a handkerchief and blowing his nose, I was totally moved, for when the happy noise subsided a line of women stood up, activists, women who a bare eight years ago would hide their faces, hardly say a word, one by one these women stood up and walked up to the podium and in pin-drop silence they spoke, with absolute confidence, spoke into a microphone, told the story of the project, the story of their lives. Unbelievable; wonderful; the story of Andhra Pradesh.

And as Vijay Kumar boomed—'to be continued', that is the best part. Shoaib laughs at the phrase, yes he says, to be continued.

Legends of the poor

There is a new book, *Arrival City: How the largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* (Heinemann). It is worth reading. Writes Saunders, the defining force of this century, almost certainly more significant than war, recession and perhaps even climate change, will be the huge and final shift of human populations from rural areas to cities. It is a crucial issue—one that every politician, every economist and sociologist should be considering. Because the mind-boggling fact is that we will end this century as a fully urban species.

By the end of 2025, 60 per cent of the world will live in cities; by 2050 more than 70 per cent; and by century's end the entire world will be at least three-quarters urban. And this point writes Saunders, when the whole world is as urban as the West is today, will mark an end point. Once humans urbanise, or migrate to more urban countries, they almost never return. There will be migrations again, but never a mass movement on this scale. Humanity will have reached a new and permanent equilibrium.

Why is it so important to think about this now, asks Saunders? And then answers the question this way. Think of the implications—for international aid, for example. If we approach poor countries with aid money in the hope of helping villagers remain as subsistence-level peasants, as so many charities and government agencies do, we make a terrible mistake (think of the young men of Nasirabad, free to make their own decisions because Shoaib helped their fathers' to achieve higher incomes and so send them to school, they too are voting with their feet. They are flocking to the towns and cities. They want to become business people, bureaucrats).

There is no romance in village life, says Saunders and he is right (remember Masood laughing at the view of newly emerged Western university graduates of villagers as simple noble people, and their shock, dismay and disillusionment when they found villagers were not). Rural living is the largest single killer of humans today, the greatest source of malnutrition, infant mortality and early death. Life for the rural poor may have a beautiful natural setting but it can be brutal.

Concludes Saunders, the urbanisation of the species will, in the end, be our salvation.

If this fact is true then social mobilisation of the rural poor in South Asia is more than just a way of reducing rural poverty, it opens up the way to the future, provides poor rural families with the means to educate their children, with the means to be able to become farmers of the future, move to the cities with money and a skill.

Already a legend in his time, this may well be Shoaib's greatest legacy.

The final step.

This is where Shoaib has poured much of his energy; this is why he says to Kamal Hyat he cannot spend more time with staff of all the many support organisations. Over the last five years he has spent himself, 'every drop of blood' he says, grins, 'trying to persuade Pakistan's government to acknowledge the absolute importance of social mobilisation, to enshrine it as official policy.'

Why did I do this asks Shoaib? Answers the question straight away; says it was simple. Nobody, not government, not the donors, not the international non-governmental organisations, nobody was providing funding for social mobilisation, nobody wrote it into any of their projects. It was a tricky situation. Government was not opposed to the idea, they just thought they did not need to promote it, and even more, they definitely did not think they should have to pay for it.

You could get any amount of money for microcredit, Shoaib shrugs, just look at the programme for women in the urban areas, really dynamic women where the programme became self-supporting in three years. So yes, you could get money for things like that but getting someone to pay for social mobilisation was extremely difficult. What after all, can you show donors? A group of villagers sitting around talking? Not good enough. They need photo opportunities, a school, a bridge, an irrigation canal to show the folks back home, look, this is where we have spent your money.

And yes, agrees Shoaib, in Gilgit we had all the funds we needed for social mobilisation, but many of the new rural support organisations don't, so yes, to that extent they are pale shadows as Tariq Husain so firmly says. But, *no, no,* he says, *they all believe in social mobilisation but they just don't have the resources.* Don't they? Rashid Bajwa says he does, says he is a believer, but if he is, why doesn't he push social mobilisation all the time, go out and seek more funds, trim his other budgets, start handing over power to activists, to village organisations, go the next step, empower local support organisations? Why don't the others?

Shoaib shakes his head, he wants to believe in his network of rural support organisations, says it is not our people, if you go to these economists, these planners and development academics, they just do not believe in social mobilisation, they believe in their own ideas, in knowing better than the people. Oh yes, it is easy to get money, to make the donors and planners happy, all you have to do is draw up a detailed blueprint, develop a preconceived package, implement it whether the people like it or not. And of course the people will not refuse the packages. Why would they? The packages are free and just might be of use, *but people really know and I know* says Shoaib, *that few of the packages will have any success at all.*

One perennial problem for Shoaib has been a lingering suspicion by many that social mobilisation is the thin edge of a socialist wedge, represents left wing values, extremism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Social mobilisation is not socialism. It is in fact individual enterprise at its best. It encourages villagers to work together to achieve a common aim, usually an economic gain but sometimes a social one. It encourages the best and the brightest, the hardest workers, the smartest operators to include everyone, the weak, the sick, the disadvantaged, everyone in the village to work together to achieve a common goal, one that will confer economic or social advantages on the whole village.

Think of the construction of an irrigation canal, Shoaib says.

Visiting dignitaries may see an entire village turning out to work, paying themselves a meagre wage, sometimes volunteering their labour. It looks marvellous, ideal, selfless, communal, and yes, the best in people does emerge. But are they doing this for no personal gain at all? Of course not. They are working to achieve an end, the delivery of water to new fields, each field owned by an individual family not the village as a whole. Individual economic gain, that is what the water means. Water is the profit, the dividend, the return on their investment, the reward for time spent on group labour. Villagers have not so much been working for the common good, accepting low pay, long, arduous and sometimes dangerous conditions out of the goodness of their hearts. Not at all. The short term sacrifice, working as part of a village team to achieve something that individually would not be possible, is done to attain long term gains. It is what most start-up businesses do.

Shoaib has always battled with one other major contradiction: trying to balance his mentor's absolute views on life and his own more practical take on government. After his disillusionment with the Raj, after Comilla, the experiences of Orangi, and his dismay at the growing corruption and ineptness he saw everywhere, we know Akhter Hameed Khan had nothing but contempt for government. He would have nothing at all to do with it. But Shoaib does, he believes in working the system, that it is an unavoidable reality. Ahkter Hameed Khan was equally contemptuous of donors and all international bankers. Said to Shoaib, 'don't you remember the run-around your commercial bank gave you when you wanted to borrow a relatively small sum to buy a house? Well, do the big international banks give Pakistan's government the same run around?'

Do they? 'Not one little bit' said Akhter Hameed. 'They just hand out huge amounts of money because the men behind the desks are awarded for the speed with which they disburse money, for the interest payments that result. They do not care about anything else and neither do governments. All they want is to get their hands on the money. They know they are unlikely to be around in forty years when repayments are due. That will be someone else's problem'. 'And, to add insult to injury', he would grumble, 'not only do these bad bankers give money to governments to fritter away on senseless projects, they insist on the employment of foreign consultants who give equally bad advice.' He rests his case.

Fine, Shoaib had said one day, pushed to irritation, so we should just refuse any grant that is offered. His mentor had smiled. He had been waiting for this, had a story ready, a parable.

There was once a very honest, very poor village priest. One day he returned to his hut to find his wife cooking a fragrant chicken curry. But where did the chicken come from, he asked? His wife did not turn to look at him but continued stirring the curry. He asked again so she replied, well, it sort of flew into the house. No, no, said the priest, doing that sort of thing is *haram*, forbidden, I cannot eat it. His wife of course was very upset. She had worked all afternoon to prepare a wonderful meal for her family and now this. She began to cry.

All right, all right said the priest who was a kind man at heart, please stop crying. So his wife wiped her eyes and had an idea. Look, she said, the curry and the vegetables are mine so if you eat those and not the meat, won't that be all right? The good man nodded happy to see his wife smile again. When the curry was ready the priest held out his plate but as his wife ladled out the curry a few pieces of meat fell into it. Quickly she stooped to retrieve the pieces so as not to upset her husband but he just moved his plate away and smiled. No, no, do not worry wife, there is no harm in something that comes of its own accord. 'And it is the same with grants', said the old man, grinning, 'if they come of their own accord you would be foolish to reject them'.

Shoaib, of course, knew if you sat around waiting for some donor to suddenly provide a grant you might wait for a very long time. His old mentor might be a saint, but he was not all that wise in the ways of the world. Or was he?

Time and again, Shoaib believes, social mobilisation has proved its worth. Gives yet another example. President Bush orders missile attacks on the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan as an immediate response to 9/11; refugees begin to stream out of the strike areas. Then the consultant Steve Jones telephones, a man perhaps who would have been at home during the days of the Great Game because no one quite knows if he is government or not. Jones says the British government, his government, is offering a million pounds to set up an organisation to handle the impending refugee crisis.

Shoaib immediately telephones Masood in Peshawar asks, can you do it? Masood says possibly. It is enough for Shoaib. Possibly for Masood means the job will be done. Masood wastes no time, calls in the Nazims from the border districts, tells them what needs to be done and what he can do to help, the resources he has available. Within a very short time a project is in place. The British are amazed. Shoaib laughs, says *give me the resources and I will fly to the moon, take social mobilisation to the Martians.* He is in that sort of mood; he has just had some good news. Bureaucratic barriers are falling, opposition has faded back into the woodwork, it looks like his grand plans for social mobilisation will go ahead. Shoaib almost dances a little jig.

I ask the obvious question—with these sorts of examples, the amazing experiences of the Northern Areas, with the way the rural support organisations were able to work miracles in the wake of the earthquake, handle an impending refugee crisis, has all this convinced donors of the beauty of social mobilisation? Shoaib slowly deflates, his effervescent mood subsides, he gives a despairing *no*, says *sometimes I think they do not have eyes to see, or perhaps they simply do not want to see.*

Even when there are so many amazing examples, the Northern Areas, Andhra Pradesh, the orderly lines of villagers when the American helicopters arrived with food and supplies after the earthquake of 2005, the way the potential refugee crisis was managed by Masood's people on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, just one ugly photograph, flood affected villagers jostling for the food trucks in Sindh or Punjab, a man pulling a bag of grain out of the arms of an older woman, this one event will overshadow all the other positives, convince donors they are right, poor people cannot be trusted. Villagers are a rabble, they need to be told what to do, projects need to be designed and controlled by superior outsiders who are better educated, better qualified.

So you start all over again, one step, one day at a time.

This is how Shoaib has spent much of his life—taking his agenda forward one day at a time, avoiding a frontal assault on the defenders of the old way of doing things, the old orthodoxies, working around the flanks, realising that sometime, somewhere you do have to make a decisive assault, wondering when this will be, waiting. And all the while he wonders, hopes he has not missed the main chance, all the while he continues to radiate to those around him a determined optimism, an absolute faith in the ability of people, the ability of the rural poor, the ability of government, when the final chips are down, to respond intelligently to the crisis that confronts them all, to respond with dignity and understanding, to act as Shoaib thinks humans should.

At last the time comes. The final months of 2007. The ground has been prepared, all is ready, social mobilisation as a working concept is about to be officially recognised, become an acknowledged and integral part of Pakistan's development mainstream.

I cannot tell you what this has taken out of me, Shoaib sighs, at his most dramatic, says again *every drop of blood* and then he grins when I say 'not much left then, all those other drops of blood'. But he wants to be serious so he straightens his face, harrumphs and speaks. *You know it has not been easy; there are some in government who do not want the proposed social mobilisation programme to become operational, not the way it is planned*, not at all if they can help it.

The World Bank men caution patience, they do not want to be seen to be openly taking sides. They have to be neutral. They are bankers loaning money to government. It is up to government to call the shots. The Bank's only ostensible role is to say yes or no to government's proposals. This is the way it works on the surface. It is not, however, the way it works at all. Everyone knows this but pays lip service to the protocols. This is where Kamal Hyat came in, says Shoaib, why he and Shoaib met so often in November of 2007, why there was so much serious talk in the wide room that stretches across the ground floor of Falaknaz House.

The new social mobilisation fund, says Kamal, was all Shoaib Sahib. I had nothing to do with it. It was Shoaib who patiently steered it through the labyrinths of government, who fought for its approval, who did not give up when some cunning bureaucrat placed the fund in the local government ministry. When this happened Shoaib went to Kamal, asked in weary desperation, can you do it, can you manage the fund? Kamal said of course he could but Shoaib would first have to winkle it out of the ministry. And Shoaib had done it, raises those 'drops of blood' again, *that is what it cost*, he groans theatrically and then laughs.

As the year fades, the finished document languishes in the ministry of finance waiting for a signature, waiting for those who should sign it to check their backs, make sure it is safe to sign. An extremely important document, says Kamal, when it is signed, sealed and delivered it will tell the world that after all those years of not believing, government has finally openly acknowledged the true value of social mobilisation. It will be the first step, a major achievement.

Now I know at last what Shoaib has been talking about, why he has been shedding so much blood, at least allegorically—it is a loan from World Bank. Social mobilisation will become part of every future project, assured by the World Bank's loan. It is Shoaib's final master stroke, or so he says.

There is a hiccough. The World Bank's senior managers are however not entirely comfortable with the politics of the country in 2007. They want a low-key signing occasion. Some in government want a grand televised affair. Eventually, a compromise is reached, documents are signed, a few key strokes on a computer in Washington and seventy-five million dollars change hands, placed safely in Kamal Hyat's kitty to fund social mobilisation. *A landmark day* Shoaib says jubilantly; government at last openly acknowledges the importance of social mobilisation.

Shoaib happily took himself off to London for his annual holiday. From World Bank's offices in Washington John Wall sends a glowingly congratulatory email.

'Congratulations to all. I started my career forty-four years ago as a Peace Corps Volunteer in India's Block Development Programme where I saw how development should not be done. When I entered the World Bank thirty-three years ago, I observed MacNamara's 'integrated rural development', another example of how community development should not be done. When I first met Shoaib Sultan Khan and Akhter Hameed Khan I at last saw how it should be done. The rural support programme approach takes time and investment—but it works. It's hard to convince others until they go and see for themselves; but so far they've all come back convinced, as far as I know. We now have an autonomous intermediary, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, with the right mandate, support and governance, and the right implementing agencies to scale up the social mobilisation, an intervention that is going to make Pakistan a much better place for all. Cheers, John Wall'.

However, in Pakistan the only thing that is certain is uncertainty. Benazir Bhutto, set to make a comeback onto Pakistan's political stage, is assassinated in December 2007, her husband, Asif Zardari, takes over as head of the party and then as president of the country; there is fierce fighting in the tribal areas, banditry, kidnappings, murders, and suicide bombings are an almost daily occurrence. And then the flood, the absolutely unprecedented inundation. Has God abandoned our country, ask the people?

In the World Bank office in Islamabad, Azmat Isa seems to have found a vocation, can achieve things from within while still holding true to the values he learnt from Shoaib—people come first. To keep in touch, to keep his feet on the ground, Azmat says twice a year he takes himself off to some God-forsaken part of Balochistan, cuts mesquite, calls it a mind-boggling job, nurses his thorn stabs, sleeps on the floor, talks to people who have nothing, no schools, no medical services, nothing but their flocks, their pride. Smiles, says *it keeps me grounded, reminds me of why I am where I am, what I should be doing, who it is I am working for.* Masood does the same thing, returns to Chitral, sits and listens while people crowd his lawn; ask for help, for him to intervene, help sort their problems out.

Azmat says the system in Balochistan doesn't work anymore because it has not changed since the days of the Raj. The British, he says, expected performance, peace kept, no undue lawlessness, removed any Sardar, any petty official who stepped over the invisible line, and we do not. It is as simple as that. Asmat shakes his head, says instead the writ of the local feudals has strengthened and the writ of the state has eroded, calls Sindh *the United Emirates of Sindh*, where every feudal land owner has a brother in the provincial assembly, another as the district Nazim, and so on, shakes his head again about Punjab, 'no comment', he says. There is no room for the power of the people, it has been suppressed. Only social mobilisation can change this. However, says Azmat with a smile, expect opposition.

Shoaib's greatest strength, says Azmat, has not only been his passion but his perseverance, a message that has never wavered, a belief that has remained intact. Shoaib, he says, is also an example of the old saying, 'a prophet is without honour in his own country'. Yes, Shoaib is honoured to some extent, but not like he is in India. Azmat shakes his very personable head, finds it extraordinary as so many others do that Shoaib is so honoured in India. Yes, Shoaib is given medals in Pakistan, but honour, real respect, Azmat shakes his head again, a silent no.

Azmat obviously enjoys his current status, his position in World Bank's Islamabad office. He could go a long way in the international world, and once, Shoaib could have too. Says whatever happens I know I have a debt that will be hard to repay, a debt to Akhter Hameed Khan, a debt to my mentor Shoaib

Sahib. But I will keep on trying to repay that debt, it is a pledge I made to myself, a pledge I will try my best to keep.

How does Shoaib keep going, does he have a secret, did he find the fountain of youth in the northern mountains, does Azmat have any ideas?

He laughs, says yes, Shoaib must have found something like that because Shoaib Sahib seems ageless, forever young, an amazing energy level, all that work must be good for his heart, good for his health. But Azmat has not seen Shoaib grey with fatigue, retreat with a wan smile to his room, weary beyond words, seeking rest, needing solace, a hot bath, simple food, slowly recovering, while the always faithful, ever watchful Ishaq hovers, waits on the instant to serve, while Shoaib sleeps. Instead Azmat sees the face Shoaib shows to the world, the morning Shoaib. A man who briskly pulls on his trademark navy blue roll-neck sweater with the London label, shrugs on a blue blazer, neatly pressed trousers, slip-on brogues, sips morning soup in the living room of Falaknaz House, chats with the first of the day's callers, readies himself for a meeting, a plane trip, his age and the weight of last night's weariness left behind, hanging with his old, heavy cotton winter *shalwar-kameez*, left hanging behind the door of his room.

Any other unfinished business?

Lots, said Shoaib, no time to rest, so much still to be done. One of these a regret, social mobilisation theory is not on the curriculum of any university, any educational institution. Shoaib would like to see a graduate course developed, even an institute of social mobilisation.

Once Shoaib had high hopes it might happen in Gilgit, now he has hopes for the Institute of Rural Management if only Bajwa would set it free. Shoaib knows the institute should be an independent body, or at least part of Shandana's network organisation, that it might flourish if it were, knows how the other rural support programmes feel but he will not tell Bajwa to stop acting so defensively, to cooperate, to turn the institute loose, allocate funds to make this possible. And it almost certainly would be done if Shoaib said let it be done. But Shoaib will not do this, worries that the costs might outweigh the benefits, wants the leaders of the rural support programmes to come to the right conclusions the best way: by themselves. So he will talk softly, wait.

Shoaib has also often tried to interest universities in Pakistan, occasionally believed he was close to success, but he is not an academic, admits it, and so to some extent is snubbed.

Same for Western institutions says Shoaib. They are sold on their own ideas. Masood used to laugh, has told the story more than once, all those fresh young Western graduates would come to Chitral, sit in his office and tell him all

about the noble savage, the beauty of village people. Two months later they would enter his office again, slump down tiredly, say they were fed up with all the bickering, all the intrigue, that most villagers were sly, untrustworthy, out to get what they could. Yes, laughed Masood, they found that our villagers were just like them.

Is there one example anywhere, one place where social mobilisation features on the curriculum? There is says Shoaib. An unlikely foothold, the University of Nepal.

Funded by the United Nation's regional programme for a couple of years, a social mobilisation experimentation and learning centre was established. A course was developed and is now offered as a major option to students in the fourth year of the doctoral programme in the campus of the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences of Tribhavan University.

But Kathmandu is hardly a mainstream academic enclave, Nepal unstable still and Shoaib knows this. How many foreign students would willingly enrol in a Nepalese University?

So on Shoaib goes, talking up social mobilisation whenever and wherever he can. But he needs someone to make it happen, he needs an academic Hussain Wali Khan, he needs a professorial Masood, he needs a Tariq Husain on the inside, a Raju vice-chancellor, a Shandana, someone who will make it happen. Until then it won't, nothing will change. New university graduates arrive at a rural support programme fresh and eager, but before they are ready to be turned loose as social organisers, before they are judged ready to go out on their own, they need another year's training, an internship, before they will be of any use. How wonderful, Shoaib dreams, how marvellous if they could have this year as part of their university course, a final year of polishing so they would be ready to run when they are employed. But even if someone (Sartaj Aziz for example) says yes, let it be done at my university, who will teach the courses, where is the staff with the right experience, the right knowledge, the right qualifications? Impatient with the question, Shoaib waves it away.

But still Shoaib is always delighted to see the young graduate recruits soaking up the ideas of social mobilisation during their orientation year, delighted to see the way they seem to light up, their enthusiasm fired by what they hear and see. The change, Shoaib says, is amazing, inspiring, gives him a reason to go on.

A U-turn in Shoaib's outlook and thinking. The cause? Andhra Pradesh.

Women, he says, he has said it before, thinks it so important he wants to say it again, says he really had no idea how to deal with the other vital half of any

rural family, admits in the past he did not know what to do. What on earth could I do, he says, I didn't know and nobody could tell me? So he reasoned this way 'if you aim to help the entire family then you help women'. Well, you do, but not as much as you might like.

Yes, he laughs, *despite living for all my years with someone like Musarrat, I was not as sensitised as I am now. Even now*, he says, *I have no idea what packages women might want, men too for that matter.* What Shoaib does believe though is that it is essential to separately mobilise women as a priority, give them the confidence, the skills to be able to speak up, say loudly and often what a women's programme should be. He brightens, says *as they do now in Haripur, the place where I gave my latest award to a woman activist because she deserved it far more than I did.* But Haripur is an exception in Pakistan; has a few unique social features. A district in the North West Frontier Province, the people happen to be a little different from the norm, Hindko-speakers instead of Pashtu, a liberal Union Council and a relatively liberal approach to women. Shoaib says it is a place where women's organisations seem to be highly successful. Why is this not a surprise?

Shoaib says *you know it took me a long time to persuade Rashid Bajwa and some of the others that women need to be specially sought out.* Shandana is dismissive says *hah, they all might talk the talk but do you ever see them bringing their wives to receptions, to meetings? How can they say one thing but do another?* These days, says Shoaib, he counsels all rural support organisations to appoint two women social organisers' for every man. Do they listen? Do they actually do this? Probably not. And there we have it, then and now, the difference between Shoaib in the Northern Areas, Shoaib in Andhra Pradesh. In Gilgit he had the power to command, took it, would say do this and it was done; in Andhra Pradesh Shoaib's counsel was highly regarded, he would suggest and again it was done. Now, Shoaib suggests, and if the staff of a rural support programme does not agree they say 'of course'; and then as Shandana says, they drag their feet.

Shoaib thinks about the issue a little more. *Yes*, he agrees, *it is not segregation that is the issue. If men and women's groups want to meet and act separately then so be it, it is emancipation that is the issue; women raising their heads and actually doing something.* But to raise their heads in Pakistan they will need to be encouraged. It is not happening, or if it is happening it is not happening fast enough.

Despite this, Shoaib says he has become increasingly convinced that the way forward for social mobilisation is through women. I tell this to Masood who listens, thinks and then says gravely, *well, this is a very profound statement; yes, there is a need for such an approach, but it is not going to be easy.* Smiles, says,

in the Sunni areas of Chitral, very conservative areas, women now come out and meet you, well, they come out and meet Masood the Prince. Laughs, *recently three busloads of women arrived at my house, sat on the lawn, took tea, asked whether I could arrange a drinking water supply for them. This just would not have happened ten years ago. Another group of women marched around the Chitral bazaar, again protesting about a water issue.*

Of course, Masood's position in Chitral is unique. People, men and women expect him to be able to make things happen. And more often than not he does.

Drosh, a town in southern Chitral, bazaar wall-to-wall with men, dirt grey, drab, dirt-brown clothes, not a glimpse of colour, seeming to bristle with hostility, threatening, curt glances, some turn away, spit. A few heavily bundled figures scurry, their escorts glance my way with hooded eyes. A man walks towards me, a big man, hairy-limbed, drab brown clothes, frowning. I smile, the dark beard splits, teeth brilliant as he smiles, welcome stranger, welcome guest, tea? I am a man, a guest, there are no women in sight, no women wanted. Masood tells of the federal government's secretary for the tribal areas' hardscrabble territories, not yet engulfed in a bitter insurgent war, this man described the impossibility of most non-government organisations ever working in the tribal areas. Why is this? Well, says Masood, imagine this. Some of those funded by Western donors are contractually obliged to ask the question, 'are contraceptives used'? A stupid question; minds shut, doors close, women are hustled out of harm's way, weapons are unearthed. The question is insulting, the questioners curtly told to leave. Masood shakes his head, says if you are idiotic enough to start that way you are finished before you start.

High in her Bangkok apartment, Roohi did not beat around the bush, posed her own very emphatic questions, answered them. Yes, she was encapsulated in Thailand, living the privileged life of a United Nations staff member, but she had something to say. Said it. Fresh from several years in Islamabad she says *you have no idea how ready the women of Pakistan are. I have to admit I don't.* The problem in Pakistan says Roohi, is that many men are simply unable to accept the possibility that women should be free to act as they wish, and quite a lot of them are working for Shoaib's support organisations. Roohi laughs then, cites a question asked at a recent workshop in Bhutan—'are women better at running things than men, likely to be more honest'? The answer from one delegate 'the problem with women in India is that they are starting to get just as corrupt as men'!

This I read somewhere, I cannot remember where—as the world becomes increasingly chaotic, as it becomes more frightening, it becomes more difficult, harder for men and women to behave with decency. An old fashioned word hardly spoken any more, decency was the very essence of Shoaib's

grandfather's attitude on life. If a chap behaved with decency then that was all anyone could ask. Shoaib thinks for a moment, thinks of his own family, his friends, says *yes, I think decency is still there.* But does this answer simply reflect Shoaib's eternal optimism, how he would like the world to be, the world of his family, the greater world without, rather than how it really is? Does he see people acting with decency because that is the way he believes they will act, because he believes in them? Is decency at the heart of social mobilisation? Do people at all levels, from village to boardroom, people who get together to think and then act in the common good, believe decency is the heart of the matter?

Without hesitation, Shoaib says *yes, of course it is, you are absolutely right, it all really does depend on decency*, on the decency of activists, on the decency of people who are prepared to give their time and energies, be totally honest, sympathetic to those who have not been all that lucky, those who need a helping hand, those who will help themselves, people who act as they do so that the common good will benefit—they act with consummate decency.

For Shoaib it is these people who are the embodiment of social capital. Individual decency and social mobilisation go hand in hand. One does not exist without the other. But is it becoming harder to act with decency? Shoaib thinks for a bit and says *no, it has always been hard.* Then he bursts into laughter, says *but you know there have always been black sheep, always some who behaved badly, behaved without decency, in this world always. It is the nature of humanity; what else would anyone expect. But still there is decency in the world, still one can look to the future with optimism.*

Ladakh. A Buddhist enclave high in the Himalayas 'where life was once simple, a matter of sharing'. Not any more, said a local Indian government official, 'our role is to bring this backward society into the world of today; to teach the people to want more and more goods; to change them from a society that does not demand very much at all, is not interested in goods and possessions, to change them into a society of consumers'. The message of so many development projects, the message of the West; teach people to want, to compete without mercy, to consume.

What is it that makes social mobilisation unique, a world apart from the scenario that Indian official saw as the ideal future? It is this. At the same time as economic improvement is promoted, so is community spirit. Rather than the worst, social mobilisation brings out the best in people, expects people to behave well and funnily enough they do. What is known as the rat-race in the West where everybody is out to fill their own pockets as their top priority is the very antithesis of social mobilisation where every pocket is to be filled, some more than others of course, where people will work together for group gain that

ultimately benefits individuals too, where some will sacrifice a little in order that this can happen, where life proceeds with decency.

When I have said all this Shoaib's face lights up; he is a headmaster and I am his star pupil. Visibly affected, he clears his throat, says, *yes, I mean the economic side only acts as the glue, and you need some sort of glue but all that we have spoken of today, all those other things, they are the things that are really important, they are at the very heart of social mobilisation.* And then he laughs and adds, *but there is no self-sacrifice involved* and then he laughs again, a joke is coming, *always be wary of a self-sacrificing man* he cautions and then begins to chuckle, splutter almost, says *anyone who will willingly sacrifice himself might well sacrifice you*, and then he laughs, a real stomach shaking laugh, merriment at its very best. But he believes what he has just said. Shoaib will never trust a person who sees himself as self-sacrificing. He knows human nature just does not work that way, not outside the family anyway.

Then we talk of the future.

The future, *ah yes the future.* Shoaib's brow creases, the future is a worry. Says *yes, I have been trying to withdraw quietly, to give time only where I think it needs to be given but it is not easy. Too little and things may falter; too much and it may limit initiative, it may seem as if I am breathing down their necks. But really*, and he says this a lot, *but really, I move to those areas where I think I can contribute the most, where I can be most effective. There are some rural support organisations where a little push here, a little encouragement there is needed*, and then he laughs, *but not Shandana, and not Bajwa or Masood, they do not need pushing or encouraging, they know when to call on me.* Who does need it then? Sindh, Punjab, and I wonder why he leaves out Sono? I do not think it a deliberate omission so I ask. Shoaib says immediately, *Sono, of course Sono, why not?* And then continues with his theme. Yes, he has been quietly trying his best to withdraw as unobtrusively as possible, but yes, he still expects to be called upon occasionally even by his brightest stars, frets if he isn't.

Do they need him or are they just asking because he is there? Does he worry too much?

No says Shoaib, *I think I am getting more and more relaxed.* It does not look like he is, and I remind him of the constant stream of visitors knocking on the door of Falaknaz House, the phone calls, meetings, chairmanships of this committee and that, calls from government, board meetings, a frenetic travel schedule as we already know; Shoaib seems to be always on a plane, in a car, on foot, in a hurry going somewhere, meeting someone. *Yes, yes*, says Shoaib impatiently, *but it is changing. Once there was a time when almost every federal government secretary had been my probationer or a student at the academy, but today there are hardly any, fewer and fewer offices where I can just walk in and expect to get things done.* But he hasn't really answered the question.

Luckily for us, the interim government meant that a lot of Shoaib's peers had been hauled out of retirement, the old brigade, men who dropped everything, ignored the corridors teeming with petitioners when we requested an interview. Writing a book about Shoaib Sahib? Of course they had time, just say when.

Despite his protestations, even after the old guard is put out to pasture again Shoaib will still command attention at the top, in any country in South Asia, and at any international forum. People who hold the most important positions in international agencies, international banks will listen when he speaks. In Pakistan, there is no one else. Shoaib knows this, is unsettled by the thought that when he is gone, *dead or addle-brained* he laughs, there will be a void. *You know I have tried*, he protests, *I have tried to give them all exposure to people at the top, the experience*, but he knows he has not really succeeded.

Roohi agrees, says *I am the champion of his work but not just because he is my father, and yes, I have taken Ami's place as his adviser, as his conscience, and he likes to come to Bangkok and talk.* Says *he is such an amazing man, known in so many places, I just cannot imagine how many of those who now serve as leaders in the very curious world of development, how many of these once served as interns in the Northern Areas, served as a staff member, visited and talked, so many. People in high places still open their doors to him, they are still his pupils.* Her father, she says, is a rarity.

But Roohi also believes her father should start letting go, says she often tells him to just sit back and let it happen, stop rushing out to every meeting, out to the field to answer every call for help. But Shoaib lives or dies for those who need him, invigorated by the cries for help, the meetings people beg him to attend.

And if Shoaib needs to sit back, take it easy, let others take over, who will these others be. There are very few possibilities. Roohi says she thought there was one once, a bright young man in Balochistan. Was this Azmat Isa? Roohi says he was just like a son, thought surely he is the one, but it did not work out; the young man became disgusted with government, with other hassles, joined World Bank. Masood might, she says, although she does not know him very well, but not Shandana. Roohi thinks Shandana will eventually become totally fed up, will leave, go somewhere else where her talents can be given free rein. And why wouldn't she?

Is Roohi ready for leadership? The question comes as a surprise. For the first time she is uncertain in her answer, *not sure* she says. Said to be as volcanic as her mother, her sisters laugh and say Roohi can be ice cool but that her rages when they occur are wonderfully incandescent. Roohi smiles, agrees, says her

father used to try and calm her when there were specious idiots dragging their feet at meetings, asking vacuous question, creating blockages just because they could. Her father, she laughs, would say quietly, 'darling, darling act your age'. Roohi smiles very sheepishly, admits she would get so angry she would even snap at her father, and then feel very, very bad.

Roohi believes social mobilisation could morph into one of the world's great movements; that the time is almost right. Says she would love to go out and champion the cause, then she sits back, deflates, excitement ebbs, says in a small voice, she does not really know how or where to start such a movement, does not even know if Shoaib would sanction it. Then her eyes flash again, she says *without this, without him it will all fizzle out, there will be division not unity, acrimony not understanding. Only Andhra Pradesh will be left*, calms, says reflectively, *yes, only the women of Andhra Pradesh, free from poverty, free from men, they will remember their guru.*

Regrets? Of course there are regrets, says Shoaib. Some things I did not do, some things I neglected, some things I now know I should have handled very differently. The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme? Yes, there I recognised too late what I should have been doing, learnt this in Andhra Pradesh. A huge regret, one that weighs heavily on Shoaib's heart. He nods, shakes his head, says what a fool he had been, says I waited too long in the Northern Areas, far too long to emphasise organisations of the people, I should have done it right from the beginning, built on the village organisations. Yes, in Gilgit we tried clusters but it was our idea, not the villagers. We decided which village organisations should make up a cluster and which not. Sometimes it worked, as in Garam Chashma, but more often than not it didn't. We should not have decided who should join with whom; just created the atmosphere, provided the means for the people to do it themselves. Shoaib pauses, reflects, shifts in his chair as if he is in pain. Perhaps he is because what he says next is said with such regret, such passion, that he could be in pain. If the whole idea of local support organisations, if this idea had become solid reality by the time Hussain Wali and I disappeared from the scene in 1994 then the people would have laughed at Geoff Wood and all that crowd, would have been able to resist the stupidities, would have been strong enough to do what they wanted to do and not what others wanted them to do. Is this wishful thinking? Shoaib smiles, shakes his head says look at Andhra, try telling the women of Kurnool what to do, try telling them to do something they do not want to do, try telling them their organisations should be abandoned.

We are finished. There is no more to say. The book waits ready to be written.

Shoaib knows this, but cannot resist saying one more time *whatever is written, never forget that social capital is not the organisation, not of the people*

or for the people. Social capital is shorthand for the small band of village activists, men and women, who make social mobilisation work. Without these people nothing will work at any level. Activists, the social capital, they are the key. Yes, Shoaib says to himself, and then smiles an apology, says *I feel this all so strongly, all of it, but you also have to add two more ingredients. The community must be wholehearted in its commitment, must be absolutely willing; and there must be a dedicated support organisation, an organisation whose staff really listen, whose staff know they are the servants and not the masters, who do not think of office hours or personal confort, who are ready to serve. More, they must also be ready to be made redundant, to leave with grace, to know that they are expendable; that is the true meaning of service. Knowing when to leave and leaving with grace.*

Does Shoaib wonder how he too can leave with grace?

In Lahore, when he had cleared the air of his views, had finished his lecture because really, that is what it had been, and why not, Sartaj Aziz, a man of many parts, a man who has held high office in Pakistan, in the international world, and was then, as we know, vice-chancellor of a very well regarded university, Sartaj sat back and beamed. Shoaib, he says, what do I really think of my old friend? *Well, I think this. Shoaib has all the attributes of a missionary. At another time and in another place that is what he might have been. In this life he does not pursue a career, he does not do a job, he is a man with a mission and he gives everything to it, everything.* To have indefatigable energy in pursuit of his mission, to combine a superior intellect with immense practicality, to be able to shed all the baggage of an elite civil servant and sit happily and totally at ease with poor rural people, to relate to their problems, to have them admire and love him, to still be able to open doors at every level, to be respected even by hardened political operators, to be a very good human being, to project simple goodness and nobility, that is an amazing capacity, that is a man with a mission, that is a man who can attract the very best people, that is why they become totally loyal, totally committed to him, to his mission. Sartaj beams again, he knows he has spoken well.

However, men like Sartaj Aziz, like Shoaib worry about the apparent slow pace of scaling up social mobilisation in Pakistan. It has been almost twenty years since Sartaj Aziz engineered the half billion rupee endowment that allowed the national rural support programme to open for business, but since then, despite the formation of other provincial rural support organisations, at best only 30 per cent of the country's rural poor have been touched, and the touch is sometimes feather-light. Sartaj says look, in Bangladesh the Grameen Bank has six million borrowers on its books, in Pakistan there are a little more than one million for all programmes.

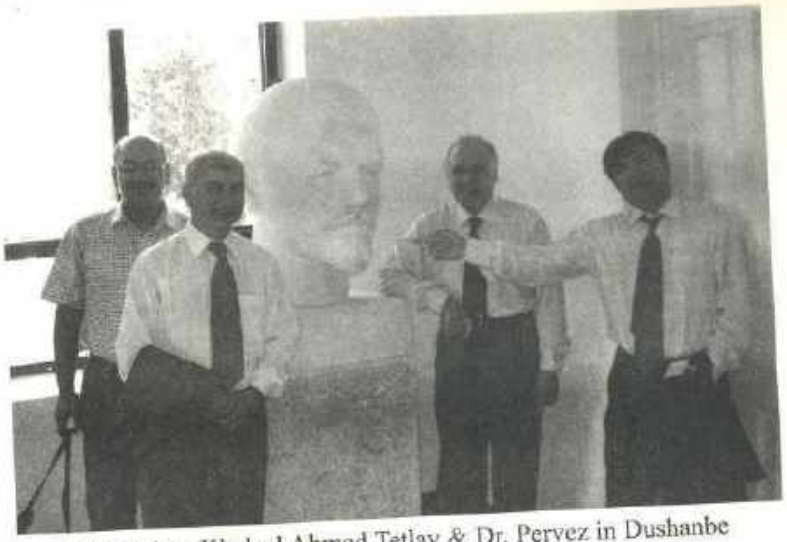
Is it our policies, he wonders, is it because we have so many entrenched feudal areas where the flower (of social mobilisation) is not allowed to sprout? Or is it that there have been too many periods of heavy-handed military rule, too many periods where the main activity of those who led the country was an unseemly and ruthlessly self-serving scramble for money and power? Sartaj Aziz thinks for a moment, says yes, all that is possible but what troubles him most are the many critics of rural support organisations, of their relatively limited reach to date, their muted effect, the failure to live up to initial expectations that the rural support organisation concept would spread like wildfire throughout the entire country, would mirror the miracle of the Northern Areas. This hasn't happened, he says, but this is not so much the fault of the concept of social mobilisation as it is of Pakistan society at large.

On this one last point he is adamant. The failure is not Shoaib's, it is the failure of the nation-state of Pakistan to truly serve its people.

Has the load been heavy, has Shoaib ever wavered, ever had doubts, ever wondered if the game was worth the candle? I think he has. Shoaib has and does become depressed, he has and still does have doubts, regrets, but almost always he has kept these to himself, tried not to show a single weakness to the world, rarely given those who rely on him for everything cause to worry. Once only has he done this, once only, crushed by the death of Falaknaz and his two grandchildren, this we know, it is no secret.

Why, you may wonder, why does he still slip out to take the long walk whenever he can, why does he linger, why does he never seem to give up grieving? Perhaps the reason is this. His constant pilgrimage is a reminder of his own fallibility, a reminder that God spares no man the pain of loss, a reminder that he must never give up, never lose heart, otherwise the deaths he mourns, all of them, such losses, his and the losses and hardships endured by those he has always sought to help, the poor of South Asia, millions of them, all the losses, all the sacrifices, his and theirs, all of them would be for nothing.

And that would be unbearable.



With Izhar, Khaleel Ahmed Tetlay & Dr. Pervez in Dushanbe



With Tariq Siddiqi & Akram Zaki



Flanked by Governor State Bank Dr. Ishrat Hussain and Cabinet Secretary Ejaz Rahim with Agha Ali Javad extreme left at a VO/WO Meeting (2007)



With Nobel Laureate Prof. Yunus on a village visit in Pakistan



With staff of AP SERP,K. Raju and Jogananda



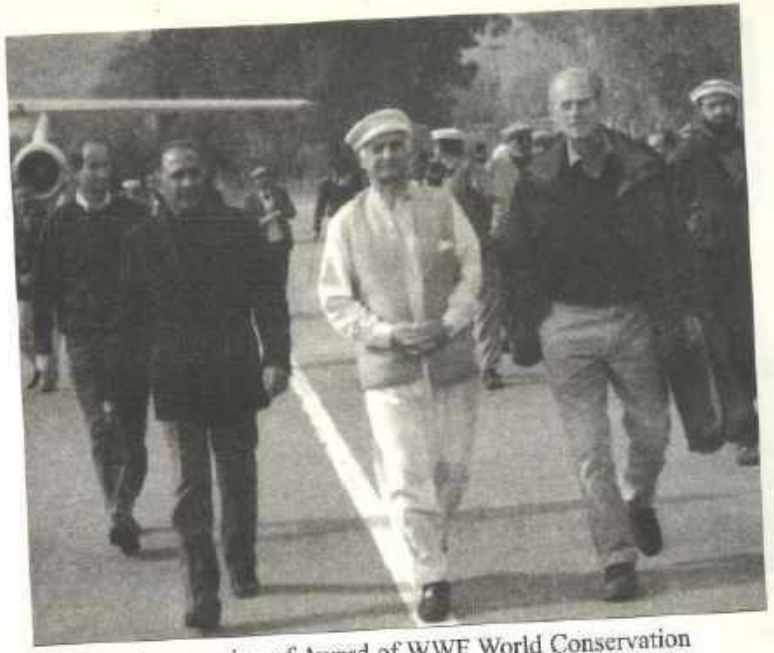
Minister Jairam Ramesh flanked by K. Raju (right) & Vijay Kumar (left)



With Dr. Humayun Khan and Roomi S. Hayat at a function of the newly IRM



With Rajsekhar, CEO, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), India



On the occasion of Award of WWF World Conservation Medal by the Duke of Edinburgh



With Rahul Gandhi & Sampath Kumar (second right) at Vision Workshop, Raibareli, India (2008)



With Rahul Gandhi and Vijaya Bharati (right) along with participants of the Vision Workshop, UP India (2008)



With personal staff Abdul Rauf (right), Ishaq (left) and Driver Ejaz (center)

EPILOGUE

The Story Teller's Story

Four years have passed. Peripatetic, the manuscript has flown on electronic wings back and forth across the Indian Ocean, has sat on desks in Pakistan and India, had pages turned by people sitting on cushioned lounges in air-conditioned havens, on sparse verandas high in the northern areas. There have been comments, suggestions, corrections, all duly noted and included and then the fine-tipped pen of an eagle-eyed editor. For the book, time has stood still, but not for those whose lives speak through the pages. Not for me either. But now it is finished. The last editorial touch has been applied, the penultimate spell-check, the key has been pressed and the entire manuscript has flown out into the wider world. I sit back and try and remember what it is I have written; how it all came about.

I had known Masood ul Mulk for many years, ever since the time I flew into Chitral several decades ago on my way to the valleys of the Kafir Kalash. Why was I there; what was I doing? Well, that is another story that may one day be told, but having left Africa in 1987, except for one brief episode in a devastated Somalia, I had gravitated between a valley in eastern Australia, and the mountains of the Hindu Kush, with intermittent ventures into the deserts of Balochistan, or across the porous borders into a war-torn Afghanistan. And increasingly, I knew that something was not quite right, in fact when I think about it I had sensed this right from the start. Yes, Felicity and I had led an adventurous and sometimes exciting life, the first to venture into areas and systems previously rarely touched by outsiders. We were the spear-head, the forerunners, we carried the message that, no longer need the rural poor of Africa and Asia expect to live forever in abject poverty. There was a way out, improvements were possible, but these improvements would be derived from developed systems in the West, would be applied by teams of consultant experts. 'We know best' was the message and all anyone needed to do was to follow our instructions. So profound was our failure, that by the time I first met Shoaib, many donor countries had decided that development simply did not work and

had begun to divert resources instead to disaster relief and other short-term relief and rehabilitation work. We were wrong, of course we were wrong, and although I had known this almost from the beginning, short of recommending that it would be better for a donor to simply leave a situation alone, which we did on many occasions and were of course ignored, I had no idea what else to do until I met Shoaib. And that is what this book is all about, an uncannily simple message that has the power to transform the developing world. But I digress.

In 2007, after a passing parade of events including a memorable and serene period in a converted rice barge on the inland waterways of Kerala, a hectic month in New York, after a number of other minor ventures, there was one of those pauses in my life, a brief period where the world you have known seems to go silent. There were no messages in my inbox, no invitations to go here or there. 'No worries', as my Australian neighbour said, there was plenty to do in our own valley. Then just as we were finally settling in to the valley, one day a message from Masood. An attempt had been made to write a book about the life of Shoaib Sultan Khan. Masood wasn't happy with the outcome. It was not good enough. Would I like to see if I could come and sort things out?

Would I? Of course I would. In blissful ignorance I told Masood I thought I could do what was needed in about a year-and-a-half. I would also need to travel for although I knew Shoaib reasonably well—we first met in Gilgit in the late 1980s—I only knew the tip of the iceberg. There were places I needed to go, people I needed to talk to. And so began a journey of discovery, up into an autumnal Northern Areas, across the Shandur Pass into Chitral, back down again to Falaknaz House and two weeks with a captive Shoaib, his voice a whisper at first as the nasty throat and lung infection slowly subsided. Then, on the road again: Karachi, simmering with unknown threat and an extraordinary hunting lodge; the fading grandeur of the old civil service college in Lahore; and then Delhi and down to 'Andhra shinning' as Shoaib says. I will also never forget the tense two days with Masood in a dangerously silent Peshawar in the days following Benazir's tragic assassination, and then the mundane counter-point of outer Edgware Road in London, light spilling from shop fronts across the shining, sleet-wet footpath to Heather Walk and Musamar. Then it was the tunnel train to Paris, onward across France to Tim and Shelley in Monaco, a side trip to old friends in Portugal and then at last, after a brief three days in Islamabad with Masood, Shandana and a few others, to Ruchi in her apartment in Bangkok, high over the Menam Chao Praya river.

Back to our valley in Australia carrying boxes of taped and recorded interviews, a dozen notebooks crammed with ideas and interview notes, several cardboard cartons of papers, books and other notes, more on the way by courier. I unloaded it all onto various shelves, tables and cupboards, set up my computer,

donned my earphones and ... well, sometimes life laughs at you. Three grandchildren arrived with their father, our son. Adjustments to be made, time taken, willingly given of course. Eventually I could once more give attention to all the material I had assembled. I began to work. A year later I sat back with a sigh. I had listened to, and transcribed several hundred hours of taped interviews; read a thousand or more pages of personal notes and other records; waded through dozens of reports, books, papers, had catalogued and arranged the lot into sections that might make sense—I was ready to write.

But it was three years later, yes, three years: there were of course other interruptions, they happen when you live in an extended family—before the first draft was ready. I cannot tell you how much I admired the patience of those waiting to see what I would produce, the belief that I really would 'come up with the goods'. Three long, introverted years. I begrudge none of them. The slow journey of discovery, the writing and re-writing of pages that just would not get the end-result, it was worth every long day at my computer.

Then of course there were the inevitable corrections to be made, additions and subtractions, some mistakes, some better stories to add, others to remove. And then the publisher's first impression: the book was too long; seven hundred pages! Was this really too much to span such a remarkable life as Shoaib's? Cold economics—it was. Sent down to Rehana in Karachi, a woman whose ability to précis a longish section, to cut through repetition or irrelevancies, to correct my sometimes woeful grammar or punctuation was just what was needed. But you know, when I began to receive the edited chapters at first I put them to one side, circling them like some beast of prey certain that the seemingly delectable pieces of meat were in fact a trap.

They weren't, of course they weren't. They were just what was needed. So I summoned up my courage and with increasing pleasure, sat and worked through the edited pages, accepting most, re-thinking others. The end result? Five hundred or so pages, and a far better book. Let's hope others think the same. As for those who gave of their time, told their stories, all I can say is, thank you. I hope that having your name listed will be enough.

And what of those who appear in the books, the cast of real life actors central to this remarkable story. Four extraordinary years have passed and in the paradox that is Pakistan, there have been happenings above and beyond anything I could have imagined. Once, the windows of Falaknaz House were blown out when an enormous car bomb destroyed the landmark Marriot Hotel just a few blocks away, and everywhere else, events were taking place that would test the strongest heart.

In London hearts need to be strong. Musarrat's dynamo is running down, gravely ill, she fights on. Shoaib is fraught. So many elsewhere still depend on his presence, look to him for inspiration but Shoaib cannot help himself. Musarrat is failing and more and more he feels he has to be by her side. Does she need him? She says not, calls him a silly man I am sure, but she smiles when he is there. He cannot think what it will be like when she isn't. Nor can the rest of the family. Shelley and Tim and their two beautiful girls fly over from Monaco as often as they can while Roohi has exchanged Bangkok for Brussels but is now in London tending Musarrat. Afshan is also there, distraught and distracted, love and chaos in her wake as ever.

Shoaib stays for a while and then leaves, as he knows he must, with a heart heavier than it has ever been, but he leaves because he knows Musarrat would want him to. He must maintain the dream. And he does. More than ever Shoaib cannot stay still. If he does, he once said he may not be able to start again. So he travels, constantly. There are boards to chair, ministers to influence, staff and activists to encourage, villagers to inspire, new ventures to encourage such as the rural support programme in Azad Kashmir. His spirit is undimmed, his vision unclouded, his energy that of a man years his junior.

In Pakistan, Shoaib's 'bright stars' still shine. They need to; the nights are dark, some days are deadly. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa natural disasters march hand-in-hand with those made by man. Floods, earthquakes, suicide bombers, occasional rockets, kidnappings and banditry, insurgents and hell-fire missiles waiting on the wings of whispering drones, all are part of Masood ul Mulk's life. He shrugs, thumbs a message on his blackberry, works on because out in the villages social mobilisation is alive and well. There is even a microfinance project, short of funds but up and running nevertheless. Shoaib smiles to himself. He knows Masood will manage and Masood does.

Down in Sindh the story is equally fraught. Banditry and floods, poverty and feudalism, and yet out in the border deserts Sono talks of a vision for the true empowerment of women. Thardeep is not his only task; Shoaib's persuasive ways worked and Sono now also heads the long-troubled Sindh Rural Support Organisation. He does so with enthusiasm, does not flag, will not give up, his idealism shines. A bright star. He laughs, he survives.

Not so bright in the north where Izhar Hunzai still leads a now quiescent AKRSP. In some ways things never change – there have been moves from Karachi to oust him but he has survived, so far. He has ideas, tries to put them in place, sometimes earns a frown from Shoaib, knows his job is far from easy. Life has changed in the north. The new generation of young want more than their fathers and mothers; tourists now crowd the bazaars in summer; money is made. They are poor no more and do not ever want to be that way again.

From his offices in Islamabad, Rashid Bajwa soldiers on. He is a believer, in Shoaib but not the villagers. He doubts they can manage on their own; believes they need a guiding hand. His forte has been microfinance and he has done this very well. He has a bank and is trying now to realign, to target two women for every man. He has been to Andhra Pradesh.

Shandana is also still there. Last heard she was walking in Swat, eating raspberries and loving the wild rivers and streams, ignoring the rubble. She is a formidable woman, holds in her hands the strings of the network of eleven rural support programmes. Efficient and very effective, Shandana's message to every one of the eleven is as Vijay Kumar once said, 'don't ever put limits on your trust of organisations of the poor, give them all they want, more, and whatever else you do, don't ever try and do it yourself, don't be selective and restrictive, don't act like donors, act like support organisations'. Some hear the message; some don't. It is hard going at times. She shakes her head; wonders sometimes how Shoaib keeps on going.

There were so many others, men and women in the far-off villages of the Northern Areas of Pakistan, in the hardscrabble farms of the Deccan plateau of India, in offices, people who met us in hotel lobbies, in banks and businesses, so many and I do not know how the years have treated most. Of some I do. Ejaz Rahim, one of the stalwarts, Ejaz is still working, this time with RSPN heading a USAID project to ensure that organisational systems and procedures are in place before USAID funding is given. A poet, it is his passion as is painting, for that quiet banker par excellence, Kamal Hyat, who, as far as I know, still paints, still banks.

One piece of news gladdens my heart. Humayun and Munawar live on in Peshawar. Humayun works with friends from India on a civil society effort on Kashmir, while Munawar, chairperson of the Sarhad Rural Support Programme, is there as a crucial support for Masood.

In India, Andhra still shines, and out of this wonderful project has come the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, a national programme to span five years and with a budget of seven billion dollars. Raju and Vijay Kumar are of course involved, and no less a luminary than Sonia Gandhi will chair the programme through the National Social Council. Her right hand man, the Minister of Rural Development, Jairam Ramesh whose foreword begins this book, will oversee implementation. It is all on a grand scale, an Indian scale as Shoaib once laughed. And as if this isn't enough there is Sonia Gandhi's son Rahul, a man who sat and listened to Shoaib and then acted. And so in 2012 we find Shoaib walking the humble laneways of the villages of Uttar Pradesh where the Rajiv Gandhi Mahila Vikas Pariyojana project works. He is at home again.

And as this book goes to press Shoaib is still at work, still walking village paths, talking and planning, in hardscrabble shacks, in banks and boardrooms, rubbing shoulders with the poor, with the great and the good, spanning boundaries, bridging borders, building new lives, a man well loved.

Ah yes, I forgot, what, you may ask, have I gained from writing this book? Yes, our travel costs were covered and they were not insubstantial, but, just as Shoaib now moves across the subcontinent, the years I sat and wrote in our valley in Australia were a labour of love, no other word for it.

Have I been rewarded?

The answer of course is yes, many times over—it has been an amazing privilege to walk the pathways of Shoaib's life. But there is more because we have also been rewarded by the most precious coin of all—the time so many gave so willingly, and the friendship of people throughout the subcontinent. 'You are family now' said Mussarrat one day, and so we are. Felicity and I, so we are. What more could we ask.

And if by happy chance this book is bought by many and royalties accrue then let them be spent in the same way Shoaib has spent his life, let us ask the people, let us see if they too agree that the money should be spent on scholarships for girls, on the future as Shoaib sees it. But please do make sure—ask the people. Otherwise, what has anyone learnt?

Noel Cossins
Demon Valley, Australia
June, 2012.

Those who made this book possible:

Islamabad/Peshawar/Lahore/Karachi

The Shoaib Sultan Khan Interviews: 29 taped interviews with SSK at Falaknaz House, Aga Khan Road, Islamabad, recorded over a three-week period in November 2007 (170 pgs). Subsequent interviews also in December in Islamabad and in January at Heather Walk London.

Afsana: notes of many informal discussions in Islamabad during Nov/Dec 2007

Captain Sohail Sultan Khan (in Karachi) December 2007 Dec 2007

Mahmood Sultan Khan (in Karachi and Islamabad) Nov/Dec 2007

Mrs Rahat Lodhi (& her son Sherry Khan in Peshawar) Dec 2007

Dr. Humayun Khan CSP (ret); Nov 2007

Mussarrat H. Khan Chairperson, SRSP; Nov 2007

Akram Zaki CSP (ret) (other titles?) Nov 2007

Shandana H. Khan RSPN Islamabad; Nov 2007 – also various valuable comments, commentaries & pers coms, including Shandana's interview with Husain Wali Khan in Gilgit, March 14/15/ 1998.

Masood ul Mulk; CEO SRSP (formerly RPM Chitral, AKRSP)

- a series of interviews in Chitral, Peshawar and Islamabad; Nov/Dec 2007
- various papers and 'think pieces' (unpub) regarding social mobilisation; village organisations; micro-hydels; AKRSP; and many other topics

Dr. Shahida Jaffrey, the irrepressible Vice Chancellor Women's Univ College, Quetta; Nov 2007

Tariq Husain (one of the AKRSP 'famous four' in Gilgit from 1982-88); Nov 2007

Mahbub Hussain (AKRSP, 1980's-one of the first women appointed to a management position); Nov 2007

Izhar Ali Hunzai, General Manager AKRSP; in Islamabad and later in Hunza (another of Shoaib's bright young people). Oct/Nov 2007

Ikramullah Jan SRSP Peshawar (an old Daudzi 'hand') Dec 2007

Dr. Riaz Ahmad Khan (veterinarian, former AKRSP Gilgit & Govt of Punjab) (7pgs) Dec 2007

Khaleel Ahmad Tetlay, RSPN (formerly AKRSP); various pers. com. interview notes outspoken and insightful) January 2008

Dr. Sono Khangharani, Thardeep, Sindh Dec 2007

Hamid Saeed Satti (receptionist RSPN, who wanted to tell a personal story) Nov 2007

Abdul Rauf (Shoaib's secretary and invaluable 'right hand man' since 1982) Dec 2007

Kamal Hyat, CEO, PPAF (also accomplished artist, experienced banker) Islamabad Nov 2007

Agha Ali Javad; Chief Financial Officer NRSP Islamabad Nov 2007

Dr. Rashid Bajwa; CEO NRSP (former CSP) Islamabad Nov 2007

R.F Yacoub; CFO Pakistan Kinashbal Fund; Nov 2007

Qazi Azmat Isa; World Bank Islamabad; Nov 2007

Fayyaz Baqir; (Director, AHKRC) Nov 2007

Sartaj Aziz (titles) Vice Chancellor Beaconhouse University Lahore; Dec 2007.

Jehangir Khan Tarin (Minister of Industries and Special Initiatives) Lahore; Dec 2007

Ejaz Rahim CSP (ret.) Minister for Health; Dec 20, Dec 2007

Dr. Shamsh Kassim Lakha, Minister for Education Dec 2007

Kanwar Idris CSP (ret.); Karachi office & the Sindh Club; Dec 2007

Dr. Mohammad Sulaman Sheikh CSP (ret); Chairman SGA Karachi; (3pgs) Dec 2007

Fazlelahi Qureshi CSP (ret); (4pgs) Nov 2007

N.M. Mannan UNICEF (ret); CEO SRSP; (4pgs) Nov 2007

Abdul Karim Nayani (Islamabad) (6 pgs) Dec 2007

Northern Areas, (Gilgit; Hunza; Yasin; Shandur) and Chitral : November 2007.

Mohammad Shah; Chinar Inn Gilgit (the 'keeper of the keys')

Syed Yahya Shah; Nagar, (the 'reference' and activist everyone wanted us to meet)

Abdullah Beg; Gilgit (AKRSP field accountant ret.)

Mohammad Saral (and his lovely wife); Village Khyber, Upper Hunza (Activist ret.)

Mohammad Abdullah Malang; Gilgit (poet and activist, who wears a pakhol as if it is part of himself).

Subedar Faraj Khan, an 'original' VO President, Ahmedabad (the 'model' village)

Nambadar Tawallad Shah; one of SSK's first Social Organisers

Abdullah Baig; field accountant; Lower Hunza (another 'original')

Naib Khan, Gilgit (Shoaib's driver and factotum, who took us on a journey, a time-traveller)

Ahmed Din or 'Dina'; Gilgit (AKRSP driver and character)

Nasirabad village gathering; Social Welfare Association members.

Dining with *Mazafaruddin* ... (RPM AKRSP Gilgit; once a Shimshali shepherd) and his wife *Yasmin* at the Serena Hotel.

Sahib Khan, AKRSP field engineer (and a ball of energy) associated with the building of the Soost canal. A hunter and a barely repressed ball of energy.

Haji Faiz Mohammad Nasirat, Chairman, District Council Baltistan (ret.)

Senior AKRSP staff (incl. Izhar Hunzai and his wife), Serena Hotel, Karimabad 2007

Hazir Shah, Yasin; (activist and story teller)

Ahmed Jami Sakhi; Gilgit; (AKRSP Training Organiser, 1984-1995)

Mohammad Abdullah Malang, Gilgit (Poet & activist)

Shukrunnisa (a most serene person and mother of Yasmin's), Karimabad, (Women's organisations; activist)

Sahib Nadir Khan, Lawyer and man of many parts, Chitral. (4 pgs; also previously AKRSP Board member)

Shahzada Mahboobin , One of the most influential and interesting men in Chitral

Shahzada Khushamad ul Mulk; gardener extraordinaire and one of the kindest of men; Chitral.

Mohamad Wali, Durdana Shah, Amir Wali; Yarkoqh; Garam Chashma LSO; Chitral

'The Secret of His Highness The Aga Khan's union with the Rural Support Program:

Poem by Gul Hasan Shah Darvish (Transl. by Fayyaz Baqir)

Andhra Pradesh:

K. Raju, IAS, Principal Secretary, Rural Development Department, (interviews in AP and New Delhi); Dec 2007

T.Vijay Kumar, IAS, CEO SERP, Dec 2007

Jagannatha Rao, IAS, SERP, Dec 2007

Vijaya Bharathi, Kurnool Mandal Samakaya, Dec 2007

Dr. P. Krishnaya, IAS AP; Dec 2007

Kurnool ; *U. Mahesh & Subbamma*, (community coordinators) Dec 2007

Ravi Kumar, (NGO coordinator) Dec 2007

B. Prakash Rao; Livingstone .....

Kurnool Mandal Samakaya.

London/Monaco/Bangkok

Mazarrat Shoaib Khan: (Shoaib's amazing wife and a major force in his life) summary transcripts of a week of late night interviews at Heather Walk London; January 2008.

Shoaib Sultan Khan: 'at home' at Heather Walk, London; January 2008.

An evening at Heather Walk with *Sarah Metcalfe Pouwa* of the lovely voice; January 2008.

Tears at breakfast with *Shelley Le Breton* in Monaco; January 2008.

Later with the quietly thoughtful *Tincle Breton* in Monaco; January 2008.

High above the Menam Chao Phraya River with a 'seeker of the truth', *Raabi Metcalfe* in Bangkok, January 2008.

Books; Reports; Notes and other reference sources:

Pakistan:

Notes for the Record: 1982-2008: a review of every 'Notes for the Record' on file on-line at the AHK Centre Library (there are several hundred). Most were written by SSK and contain a wealth of insider information and detail.

AKRSP: Reminiscences and Personal Reflections. Shoaib Sultan Khan 2007 (manuscript)

Shoaib Sultan Khan Aiteh:

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Standing (L to R)

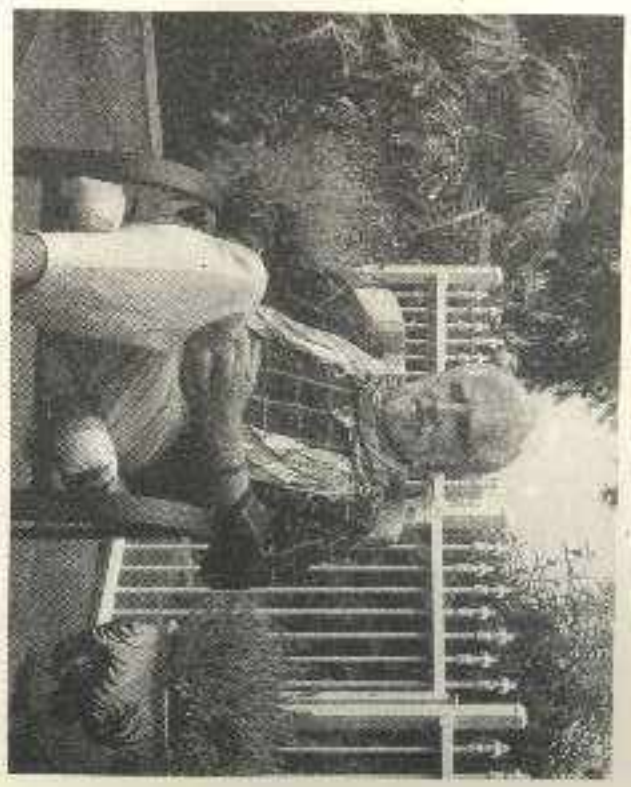
Khalid Mohtadullah, Naseer M. Nizamani, Rashid Rajwa, Shandana Khan, Attique ur Rehman, Rostam Saeed Hayat, Wali Mohammad Roshan Bharoobro, Abdul Malik, Masood ul Mulk

Seated (L to R)

Pervez Tahir, Muhammad Azam Khan, Nazir Memon, Shoaib Sultan Khan, Khalida Ghaus, Munawar Humayun Khan, Fazalullah Qureshi



Felicity (Author's wife)



Noel Cossins (Author)

"The book presents a beautifully written account of the life story of Shoaib Sultan Khan, the man whose noble efforts made a difference to the lives of millions of poor in Pakistan and many other countries. It traces the journey of a man who for many decades, has served to lift people out of poverty and forge a way for development at the grassroots ..... The question arises as to how and why community members accepted the mobilization processes as an empowering and enriching experience. The answer has been provided quite aptly in this book ..... This life story of Shoaib Khan is an invaluable read for all his followers, for development practitioners, for those whose lives have been transformed by community mobilization initiatives, and for the world which is inspired and grateful for his efforts."

Jairam Ramesh
Minister of Rural Development, Government of India

"I was glad to learn that a new book is being written about my friend Shoaib Sultan Khan and the work that he has been doing for many years for the people of Pakistan, and beyond Asia..... He was trusted by the people as a friend, without in any way patronizing them..... His plans were backed by international donors, of which I am glad to say that Britain was one, and endorsed by His Highness, the Aga Khan, who lent his name to what became the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, or AKRSP."

Sir Nicholas Barrington KCMG, CVO
British Ambassador & High Commissioner in Islamabad (1987-94)

"No doubt, his inspiration came from the legendary Akhtar Hamid Khan, but his commitment to the field and for the marginalized came always from his own motivation..... He was able to convert sectarian rivalries into a healthy diversity worthy of respect and mustered the energy, that Pakistanis have in abundance, to build trust and an economic base in society..... His projects had solid financial support but remained modest in their approach and style. ..... To see so many beautiful lives bloom into valuable assets for society is an amazing transformation..... This book will now add value to all those who read the extraordinary achievements of development activists like Shoaib Sultan Khan."

Asma Jahangir
Advocate Supreme Court, Pakistan

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