

Note for Record
(August 15-19, 2018)

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Subject: Visit to the “End of the World”

After conquering Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary was in search of new adventures equally challenging and he chose to conquer Shimshal Valley in Kojal part of Gilgit district adjoining Hunza valley. As General Manager AKRSP, I had gone there only by helicopter. Once a BBC team was making a documentary in Kojal and came across one of my successors Steve Rasmussen, who said to the team he was going to the end of the world when the team enquired where he was going? They made a documentary on Shimshal and gave the title “End of the World”.

During my stay in AKRSP from 1982-94, whenever I went to Shimshal, they would refuse to discuss any other development intervention except demanding AKRSP help them build a link road from Shimshal valley to the inhabited world, which was Passu, separated by horrendous terrain comprising all imaginable hurdles of a deep river hurtling through high steep mountains, glaciers and treacherous ravines carrying big boulders plunging into the river. It used to take Shimshalis seven days to reach Passu from Shimshal. The Mir of Hunza used to banish his political opponents to Shimshal. It was like Andaman Nicobar islands where British used to banish their mischief makers.

His Highness (HH) the Aga Khan, founder of AKRSP even sent a message to me if AKRSP can help Shimshalis build the link road. The productive physical infrastructure (PPI) which AKRSP helped communities to construct, numbering thousands, this was the only PPI about which I received a message from HH and regretfully I had to convey AKRSP’s inability to help the Shimshalis because of

average cost of PPIs AKRSP could help was only US\$ 10,000 (Rs.250,000) and the link road needed hundreds of thousands of dollars. Mir Ghazanfar once requested President Ziaul Haq to give him 20 million rupees to construct the Shimshal link road and on being informed there are only 120 households, the President told the Mir to ask Shimshalis to shift from there to the main land.

After making a couple of abortive attempts by helicopter to persuade Shimshalis to undertake some village level PPI like an irrigation channel, as they had unlimited land holdings which could be brought under irrigation range but the Shimshalis remained adamant. One day, a delegation of Shimshalis representing the Village Organisation, as they had agreed to accept AKRSP's terms of partnership, namely organizing all the household in a village organisation (VO) numbering 120, meeting weekly under the leadership of an honest and dedicated member from amongst the VO and adopting discipline of savings by each member, according to individual capacity, appeared in my office at Gilgit and informed me that the VO by self-help has constructed the first 11 km from Shimshal village towards Passu and entreated me to help them start the construction of the link road from Passu towards Shimshal.

Fortunately, one of my student probationers, when I was Deputy Director at Civil Service Academy Lahore, got posted to Gilgit as Commissioner as head of the administration for the districts of Gilgit, Baltistan and Diamar, I mentioned this need of Shimshalis and he agreed to make a million rupees available to AKRSP for the link road which was matched by Mir of Hunza, who as member of the elected Council of the three districts, had received some development funds. I persuaded AKRSP Board of Directors to top this up by another million. Thus fortified with three million rupees, I persuaded Commissioner Khalid Mahmood and Mir Ghazanfar to come with me to Shimshal by helicopter and hold a dialogue with Shimshal VO making this offer, because AKRSP never engaged contractors to implement a PPI, it were the VOs which had to do it with technical and engineering assistance from AKRSP professionals. I was a bit crestfallen

when their spontaneous response was to reject the offer, as the amount was too little for such a massive undertaking. I tried to convince them that this was the only chance to initiate the construction of the link road from Passu. The Commissioner and Mir Ghazanfar strongly urged them to accept the offer and after some discussion amongst themselves, they agreed to accept the offer and pleaded to the Commissioner to include the construction of the link road in government's Annual Development Plan (ADP). The Commissioner promised to do so, in due course of time.

The VO true to its promise, constructed first 12 km of the link road with the support received from AKRSP in 1985. The distance from Passu Karakorum Highway (KKH) to Shimshal was 55 km. This reduced 4 days journey to 2 days when the 12 km was completed plus the portion done by self-help towards the end of my tenure as GM AKRSP. Luckily government did include the link road in its ADP but it finally took 18 years to complete the road in 2004.

The current GM AKRSP Muzafaruddin, who comes from Shimshal and in his childhood used to shepherd the animals in the high pasture, joined AKRSP in 1991 as Intern and on a regular position in 1993 after completing his education. He informed me that Shimshalis want me to visit them as they wish to thank me for the construction of the link road. Muzaffar offered to arrange the AKRSP helicopter to take me there. I declined the offer with thanks and requested him to arrange my travel to Shimshal by road. He seemed a bit hesitant as the link road was a very narrow jeepable path with the river hurtling down by the side. I assured him I genuinely want to go by the link road just to experience what the villagers have accomplished.

Finally, we set out for Shimshal on August 17 from Passu, driven by Mirza, elder brother of Muzaffar, who had set a record in Guinness Book by taking his jeep from Passu to Shimshal in reverse gear followed by Guinness team.

Muzaffar and Sharif Khan of village Ghulkin accompanied me in Mirza's vehicle. There were two other jeeps following us. Sharif during my time, was President of VO Ghulkin which today has over Rs. 30 million savings and I used him for more than a year in NRSP as a resource person to impart techniques of Social Mobilisation by visiting all the regions of NRSP. Both Sharif and Muzaffar in their student days, traversed on the Passu-Shimshal-Passu hazardous route. Sharif narrated how once his uncle roped him in to carry 20 kg load of a foreign tracker. Midway he threw the load on the ground and howled with tears. His uncle asked him to take some rest and join later and in the meanwhile he took his load also on his back. Sharif only joined his uncle when he had reached his destination. Muzaffar as a student, worked on the AKRSP funded portion of the link road by fixing explosive charges in the steep rocks, lowered from the top by a rope. I couldn't believe my eyes that one was now President of the Hunza Regional Council and the other GM AKRSP.

The link road is, of course, not for the faint hearted but I was pretty well acclimatized having spent 12 years travelling on such tracks in small distances. It is not difficult to imagine how difficult it must have been to chisel the link road through rocks. Three Shimshalis laid down their lives constructing the link road. Even now it passes through some hazardous spots. At one place just short of Shimshal, a fast running ravine passes over the road with boulders in its wake and the water increasing as the melting of snow increases with the sun. We saw more than a dozen volunteers with implements keeping the portion clear of stones and praying hard that the water level remains fordable. I was greatly touched by the spirit of the volunteers. The 5 km wide glacier over which the old route used to pass, was indeed a death trap. No wonder Sharif threw his load and revolted against his uncle. Fortunately the link road was carved across the river where the glacier in jet black mounds of glistening ice mocked us. The link road has been blocked at one point by falling rocks but had been cleared a couple of days before our journey.

Nearing Shimshal, I was amazed to see habitations and greenery miles before where I used to land by helicopter. The road both sides was green with wheat crops and trees and satellite villages of Shimshal had solar street lighting, unique compared to other villages.

It took us exactly three hours to reach central Shimshal where I was first taken to the house of Bakhtubhai, the moving spirit in the VO behind the construction of the link road. I had no recollection that his body had arrived from Karachi where he had gone for treatment, I allowed the helicopter to carry his body to Shimshal. The family had not forgotten this, although I was visiting Shimshal after thirty years and wanted to thank me by lavishing their hospitality on me. Muzaffar knew that during my 12 years stay, I never accepted nor allowed the staff to accept even a cup of tea while on visits to VOs. Muzaffar asked me if I would be willing to make an exception. I could not even dream of refusing such hospitality which touched my heart beyond measure. We were entertained in a lovely Hunza hut type of a house by Bakhtubhai's sons and others.

The reception at central Shimshal where many men, women and children had assembled comprising VO members and their office bearers. The meeting began with singing of a poem on AKRSP by three girls accompanied by a boy playing Rubab and Daf. This was a poem written by a local poet on my first visit of AKRSP. Its words are so good and it was sung so beautifully that I asked Muzaffar to make it AKRSP's anthem. We also met the Mukhi (religious leader) and a local Shimshali Aleem who had the distinction of climbing K-2 three times, not done by anyone else. Meeting him I felt a strange feeling, as if I was meeting the super most human being of the world. Mind boggles even to imagine how much strength this man must have, climbing the second highest peak in the world three time. But he was so humble and ordinary looking no one could have even suspected how great he was.

The Local Council Chairman Shaheen Karim welcomed us followed by Ms Shamshad Begum and Zulfiqar, office bearers of the Shimshal Local Support Organisation (LSO) describing the profile comprising 4 villages with 230 households belonging to 8 VOs and 8 women organisations (WOs) having four million savings. The LSO has facilitated setting up of a National Trust in 1996 and a Health Welfare Trust in 2011.

Besides link road, the LSO got a hydro power station built by government supplying electricity to whole of Shimshal, planted thousands of trees, completed irrigation channels, bridges and initiated training programmes including Yak farming, forged linkages with Aga Khan Education Services, Health Services, government departments, have helped in setting micro hydels, middle schools, pony tracks, development schemes, all boys and girls are in schools besides public private partnership ventures.

Challenges facing the LSO included annual maintenance of the link road and unemployment. They see potential in mining, setting up of green houses, marketing and institutional management.

Sharif Khan advised them that the 25th October celebration of the construction of the link road should also be used to generating funds for maintenance of the road. He shared his 13 months experience with NRSP travelling all over Pakistan.

Muzaffar spoke about leadership of women and how in AKRSP the Regional Manager, the District Programme Officer and Institutional Development, namely Yasmeen Qalandar, Saima and Naeema present here, are all women. He narrated how his uncle lamented when he told him that most of the AKRSP programmes are now for women. "We men must have committed great sin that God now prefers women".

Muzaffar also narrated how when he was selected as GM, he was advised to consult Shoaib Sultan Khan (SSK) and seek his advice. When on return to Pakistan, he met SSK, he responded what does he know about the situation in AKRSP area now. SSK offered to let us go to the people and ask them and they will tell us what to do.

Daulat Amin was the first matriculate from Shimshal, now aged 77. He did not accept lucrative offers and returned to his home village to start a school. All current generation graduates from Shimshal are his students including Muzaffar. In November 1983 he met AKRSP Social Organiser Mutahir Shah and Engineer Sher Ghazi in Jubilee Hotel of Gilgit. Besides teaching, as he was also interested in social work, when the AKRSP people invited him to tea, he refused to have their tea instead gave them a dressing down that all development and government agencies only work in Gilgit and Hunza but never in Shimshal. As he got red with anger, they tried to pacify him by insisting on his sitting down and having tea. One day Mutahir and Ghazi in March 1984 accompanied him to Shimshal and when Mutahir Shah had to literally crawl on his knees on the track to Shimshal, he agreed that he would also have been as angry as Daulat Amin was. They helped in formation of the VO and Daulat Amin was elected as President and Farmanullah as Manager. The dialogue for link road was held on 30.5.1985 and the work started on 15.9.1985. He praised the attitude of AKRSP staff compared to departmental staff. Now hundreds of Shimshalis have graduated both as managers and professionals, all taught by Daulat Amin. Many are serving abroad. Daulat Amin changed the destiny of the youth, both men and women, by educating them.

I request the Chief Secretary to recommend Daulat Amin for life time achievement civil award to Government of Pakistan. It reminds me of an incident when Deputy Superintendent of Police Nazrab of Sherqilla came to my office one day and said he had seen His Highness in dream telling him to go to Shoaib Sultan and he will

help you. When I asked what help do you want from me. He replied I only came to tell you my dream. A few days later I was going to Phander and Nazrab asked me at Gupis if he could accompany me which he did. On the way I saw a distraught young girl sitting on a rock by the roadside. I stopped and Nazrab got out to enquire the reason for her sitting there all alone. Next I saw Nazrab hurtling down the steep river bank. What had happened was that a family of more than a dozen had gone to the sulphur spring situated in the area and on the way back their jeep swerved, at the point the girl was sitting and fell down the steep bank in to the river. The girl was thrown out on the road. Nazrab's lightning action saved seven lives he retrieved from the river. The rest were found dead because of the fall. I was greatly touched by Nazrab's timely action. Without telling us, he came into action, as soon as, the girl told him what had happened just a few moments before our arrival on the spot. I recommended Nazrab for an award and the Commissioner recommended him for Tamgha-e-Shujaat, which he got.

In my speech, I thanked them and described how people of Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral have made me world famous by their work. As to the link road which Shimshalis have constructed, it is no less than a wonder of the world. It is not work of humans but of super humans. I was so touched by the love and affection, the people of Shimshal bestowed on me, although I was visiting them after 30 years that I could say no more and overwhelmed by emotions, thanked them and sat down.