

# **ALTRUISM TROIKA**

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## PREFACE

Never has there been so much debate focused on anything or anyone as the humble corn! Fruit? Vegetable? Nutritious? Or just empty calories?

For decades, experts have given their views, arguments and counter-arguments.

Leaving the semantics of this never-ending academic debate aside, for those who have closed their eyes in involuntary pleasure at that first burst of sweetness from their first bite of corn, it is an unforgettable culinary joy; a comfortable and warm memory!

In the journey of life, when memories walk beside you, the strands made up of those beautiful and unforgettable people who touched lives by their selfless acts of kindness and, just like that burst of sweetness from that humblest of all substances...corn...stay with us for all times to come.

Some of these beautiful souls who crossed my path, like the outer skin of the cob, fresh, as golden as daybreak or sunset entwined with that delicate golden silk, walk beside us in the stories that follow.

Their sweet deeds with no added flavour spread their fragrance and sweetness, just as Corn on the Cob.

*I would love listening or reading to your experiences, your comments. Share them on!*

## PKK NAIR

*Smallest act of kindness is worth more than the great intention.*

—Kahlil Gibran

As the East was glowing with the golden dawn in Agartala (Tripura), barracks humming devotional songs and jawans getting ready for their duties; a relatively quiet, unassuming young Malayali guy – PKK Nair, would set out on his morning walk. Shirt well-tucked in a dark-coloured trouser, shoes shining black, a burning Panama cigarette in hand, Nair would leave the barracks every day at sharp seven in the morning. After a hurried breakfast on return, he would be the first person in the office, an hour before all troop-in. This was circa 1980. The whole of Tripura was in the throes of militancy from across the border and adjoining States. Come evening, he would head towards the other side of the town, only to be back in barracks around eight. Once in the office, he would rarely interact with colleagues except for office work or some small talk over tea and cigarette or the occasional drink late at night.

His disappearance every evening became a subject of endless debate with colleagues and contemporaries. Mistress? Secret rendezvous?

One lazy afternoon in November, upon my relentless quizzing and prodding, Nair invited me to join him. My excitement and curiosity ended once we entered the precincts of the civil hospital! What are we doing here?

The stench emanating from dampness around, coupled with spirit, hospital waste was unbearable. Instinctively, I fished out my handkerchief and held it to my nose. I saw the reproach in the look Nair directed towards me!

My mind was in turmoil. All I could do was walk beside Nair as he went from ward to ward, starting with paediatrics to general. Comforting patients and caretakers, sitting beside them and reassuring them, arranging for water and tea, administering medicines or just laying a hand on their shoulder, Nair did it all without a glimmer of distaste or discomfort.

The outbreak of encephalitis, lack of proper medical supplies and care, was too overwhelming for the hospital staff and in his own small but significant way, Nair was doing what he could do to help.

But what Nair was doing it, without any expectations of gratitude, for the sheer joy and satisfaction of rendering succour and solace to those in need, hugely impacted me and Nair got an assistant in his mission.

Whenever I could take time from my operational duties and on Sundays, accompanying Nair to the hospital became a passion. My work there taught me the first lessons of compassion and service. That year, scores of patients succumbed to the disease, while some returned home hale and hearty. This, however, impacted our respective lives enormously. Over time, our tear glands had gone dry.

I then learnt that Nair financially supported a couple of tribal children from the town in their education, sending money through postal money orders from wherever he was posted on duty. Nair lived a frugal life to support his family of four to support and his altruism. During his long CRPF service, whenever he was posted in far-flung neglected regions of the country, Nair would jump in at his best in his mission. Nair retired from active service and must now be back with his family in Kerala with a new mission of spreading kindness around. God bless him!!

Many a Good Samaritan go about their work silently without any expectations from the people whose lives they touch, not seeking any monetary help from anyone yet, more often doubt is raised about their actions and motives. They did that with Nair, too. Regardless, he continued with his journey impacting many lives, mine included.

This reminds me of a poem by Wendell Berry –

*In the dark of the moon, in flying snow,  
In the dead of winter, war spreading,  
Families dying, the world in danger,  
I walk the rocky hillside,  
Sowing clover.*

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## LOKHANDE AUNTY

*When you are kind to someone in trouble, you hope they will remember and be kind to someone else. And it will become like wildfire. – Whoopi Goldberg*

**Circa 1960.** Ensconced between an imposing Nizam era Court of Small Causes and la row of books stores, one cannot miss General Commercial Institute on the main Kothi Road of Hyderabad. From the crack of dawn till late in the night, one would find rows and rows of bicycles and sprinkling motorcycles parked by the curb. The premises would be abuzz with the furious pounding of typewriters by youngsters learning to type. On the other corner, advocates from adjoining Court getting their petitions and other papers typed from a bunch of experienced typists. Knowing to type was a sure shot for a decent living. And learning to write PBTD (in shorthand), apart from the mundane ABCD, would be like having hot chocolate on vanilla ice cream!

Bemused school kids walking past this institute would pause to hear that rip rap of machines with few resolving to learn the skill someday. Those were the days of learning the hard way of counting and accumulating Paisa, Anna and Rupee.

In her cosy round room of a quaint Ideal Villa, far away from the institute, Lokhande Aunty could be seen holding her durbar, not only resolving household matters but also reviewing the business of this and four other institutes. Her late husband had established the first institute in 1924. After his demise, she expanded the business. The family was considered the pioneers in this line of educative activity. Aunty did keep her large family and its business together, imbibed good values in her children. Sitting there, she would give good counsel and soothe frayed nerves not only of her daughters-in-law but also those of her friends in her inimitable loving, affectionate and caring demeanour.

This apart, Aunty would pull her strings to make her sons and relatives provide jobs to the needy, put her word to secure school admission or offer monetary help. Her wish was like a

command to her sons. Through her skill and experience, she would guide them on saving money or generate additional income. Although she was not highly educated yet up-to-date with how banking and insurance support works through her regular interactions with her friends during durbar.

Aunty had one unique skill - to spot the talent, help many youngsters by allowing free coaching in Shorthand and Typewriting in the institutes owned by her family, get some bicycles donated to facilitate easy commute between home and school/college to needy students. Her only advice to the recipients of her help was to respect family and societal good values when they start earning; to take care of their parents. In return, she expected only one thing from them - Do to others what you received. Many of these youngsters walked the path laid by Aunty, earned their livelihood working with Banks, Government offices or private companies and improved the quality of their lives.

Those days, when jobs were hard to come by, knowledge of typewriting and the additional skill of shorthand was the sure-shot of securing employment. Some of them were not lucky enough to pay their tributes to the Grand Good Lady but did carry forward the mantle of helping others, in however small measure as they could afford, in the true spirit of Pay it Forward.

**In the words of Viktor E. Frankl, *a human being is not one in pursuit of happiness but rather in search of a reason to become happy.***

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## WING COMMANDER RR HINGORANI [RETD]

*What you do has a much more impact than what you say.* – **Stephen Covey**

If anybody could defy his age despite fast receding hairline and a few wrinkles spread across his face, it was Wing Commander Ram Hingorani (Retd). He retired from the Indian Air Force but maintained his robust Fauji gait, always impeccably dressed in a silk scarf around his neck, a jacket, garrulous, pulling punches at you and nudging you to set up your goals and achieve. That was his way of life. Extremely polite with ladies, making them laugh, he was the perfect epitome of male chivalry. To the young lasses, his nieces and grandchildren, he would treat them with midnight snacks and dollops of ice cream. He will open the car door for them and never ever enter a shop, hotel or elevator before them.

Hingo, as he was known to his close friends, could put even a healthy young man to shame when it comes to displaying courage, energy to work more and more and still setting up goals. One could see the glimpses of Clark Gable, Ronald Reagan or Gregory Peck in him, his mannerisms and ishtyle!! He would go endlessly talking about Bette Davis, Greta Garbo, Vivien Leigh or Audrey Hepburn, his heartthrobs from Hollywood, with a twinkle in his eyes and a naughty smile on lips.

Once you announce your arrival in Delhi, he will plan everything for you: setting up evening drinks at his home to dinner at the Asiad Village hotel, not far away from his home in Anand Lok and working lunch would be fish-n-chips with chilled beer. This was how he would treat his clients from scores of multi-national companies or otherwise.

I was fortunate to have known him, worked with him for several years in the 1990s. He would personally guide and supervise the investigative assignments didactically reflecting his professional upbringing in the armed force but his personal values. Together, we had carried out several operations, successfully wiping out more than 150 look-alike brands of my company. Despite we were acting against trademark infringers, his mystical ways of dealing



with them with respect yet deriving all the necessary information about their businesses and activities, getting the police to act upon were unique. He would deliver a masterly stroke at the location and walk out victorious in the face of an adverse situation. And, here is the man who had a history of heart ailment and undergone bye-pass surgery. Need to say any more?

Although he kept his age a guarded secret, he was on the wrong side of the sixties or perhaps more at that time. Hemant, another Advocate and I would look around his Air Force memorabilia in his drawing-room to figure out his exact age. Never we were successful at it!

The whole narration about Hingo is to understand the person he was, his endearing qualities and electrifying persona and one can imagine how his peers in the Air Force must have endured with him. Endured? Yes. Once his old colleague – a retired Wing Commander mentioned how miserable they used to feel in Hingo’s company at the Officers’ Mess events or on the parade ground when Hingo used to make them toil hard to remain physically fit.

Once impressed with your knowledge & skills, Hingo would shower you with accolades; make the grandest recommendations and references about you to others, your bosses and clients.

When the Indian economy opened doors to foreign investment in 1991, he motivated youngsters to start a business or legal practice or consultancy in the service sector. He introduced them to his innumerable MNC clients such as Castrol, Adidas, Reebok, Caterpillar etc., and several Indian companies. He would secure appointments for them, travel spending money from his pocket and would never ever speak about what he did for you, to others.

I did not realize when my professional acquaintance grew into a great friendship as Hingo showered his benevolence even on me. Much before the English edition of Alchemist was released, he encouraged me to find treasure (not literally, though) without making me going to Pyramids!!

When life took several twists and turns, we rarely meet but call each other up over the telephone as often as possible in a day or a week and defying the age barriers hurling his choicest Fauji abuses at me, he would speak for hours on the telephone. And, once he called up and enquiring about my work and life, wondered when I could look him up, he ended the call saying “after his death.”

It is more than a decade and a half, Hingo left this world. I could not see him before he left. No. Man is not the best friend. Dog is. Later, I heard from his daughter that Fluffy, the dog walked after her father like a shadow and after him, her mother when she was seriously unwell.

*Even now, I miss his calls with that booming salutation: Your humble slave. Allah be praised!  
I am sure if I order a plate of Fish-n-Chips with a glass of beer, I might see Hingo at the table.*

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