

Songs of Water



Rakhi Sunil Kumar



Himalaya Publishing House

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Dedicated to

**My Parents,
for their
unlimited blessings and love.**

**Since ages 'Songs of Water'
are sung to tell stories
about journey of water, and
this is one of them.**

Acknowledgements

‘Songs of Water’ is very close to my heart, as I always wanted to write an inspirational story, highlighting the struggle of human life. My deepest gratitude for this story goes to the Almighty, who gave me this story idea. It is very difficult for an author to explain how the story ideas click, they just come in a flash of second. An author capability lies in grabbing the idea, and exploring it to the maximum. I have given my best to develop the story in an interesting way. I leave it on my readers to decide how successful I was in my endeavour.

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And most importantly, my immense gratitude to my Guruji 'Sadguru Swami Krishnanandji Maharaj' for his continuous guidance and blessings.

With Love.

Rakhi Sunil Kumar

Water

“A journey of many folds,
from low to high,
I ride every time,
to live a new story.”

Rakhi Sunil Kumar

Prologue

Megha was alarmed by the thundering sound and looked up at the dark sky. The clouds rose high on top of the black burnt mountains, rotated like wheels, and poured out water in gallons. From countless directions, the tiny streams of water started flowing all over the dried up red land. Awestruck by the spell of nature, she gazed around, and noticed Suhani standing in midst of the fields.

An exuberant, drenched Suhani extended a part of her saree to collect the raindrops, but all of a sudden, the clouds disappeared, so the rains and the water streams. The darkness enveloped everything around. Before Megha could anticipate, Suhani collapsed like a fallen tree.

Rakhi Sunil Kumar

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2018

Mumbai-Pune Expressway

‘Enthralling! Magical!’ I exclaimed, and quickly scrolled down the window of my car and started counting – ‘One, two, three,’ and then stopped, for I was completely blown away by the view in front of me.

“A chain of milky waterfalls of all sizes – thin, thick, large, and small, flowed down the hills. More the mighty clouds roared, more the rains poured in tons.”

I stopped the car and came out. The whiff of the mist was very much in the air. The whole valley was draped in a new monsoon greenery – fresh, dewed and very lush. The wind loaded with tiny droplets splashed on my face, and blurred my vision for a while. I spread my arms, closed my eyes and stood in the rains for a while, allowing each cell of my body to be drenched. I knew this is what I had longed to do since I entered the hilly terrain of Lonavala. For that moment, it appeared to me that nature and I became one entity. I pondered, why being close to nature makes one so happy? Perhaps, nature and its dynamics are beyond human understanding. But then, the cycle of human life is no

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different than pattern of nature. They are so similar, so close to each other!

Suddenly, I was reminded of my journey ahead, and quickly got inside the car. Cruising through the misty fog, once again my car trotted down the hills. The rains, the hills and the curvy road took my breath away. Unexpectedly, like a white elephant rolling on the road, a thick fog-ball hit my car, and before I could anticipate, it stopped with a jerk. Soon a black smoke came out of bonnet and gulped up the car. Dumbstruck, I stared at the car in disbelief, but soon sense prevailed. I quickly picked up all my belongings, and groped my way out of the choking smoke.

I stood at a distance from the car, and as I stared at it, a sense of helplessness gripped me. I sat on one side of the road, and tried to think through.

Being a journalist, such situations were not new to me but for some unknown reason, I was worried like never before. The night had fallen, the stars were out for a ball, and I was in midst of a barren, population void area. It appeared to me that only two options were available to me – either spend the night on the highway or proceed to Nandgaon where my next story awaited to be unfold. But in my heart I knew, no way I could return to Mumbai without the story in my hand.

As soon I was reminded about the story, I jumped on my feet. I tried to think of the positives of the situation. Perhaps, an adventurous night or may be I will meet man of my dreams, and it made me smile. The prospects of an

adventurous night got me excited, but I also knew, at this time of night, I should thank my luck if I get a lift. Mentally I prepared myself for a long haul ahead, and started walking but soon a Jeep stopped very close to me.

The driver honked and shouted, 'Hey, beautiful! Got stuck?' He waved at me as our eyes met. Though I was irked by his tone but ignoring the barb, I shouted back, 'My car broke down. Can you please drop me to any nearby bus stop?'

'Bus? On this highway?' and he laughed out heartily. Soon he sobered down, probably sensed that I had not taken it well. He yelled, 'Tell me, where you are headed?'

'Nandgaon. Do you know the place?' I shouted my lungs out.

Straightaway he raised his eyebrows, and looked at me from head to toe. I did not liked the way he scanned me. I flashed my eyes to disapprove of it. He grinned sheepishly, 'Nandgaon? Is that what I heard?'

I snapped, 'Yes! Any problem?'

'I am also going to the same place, may I ask you the purpose?' he replied.

My mouth opened in surprise. Entirely forgetting that a few minutes ago I was edgy about this person, I quickly got inside the Jeep. He laughed, probably at my hurriedness, but ignoring his laugh, I flashed my identity card with pride and

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tried to put my best foot, 'Hi, my name is Jenny. I am a journalist, and on the way to cover a story at Nandgaon.'

Suddenly, he appeared withdrawn. He did not even give a glance to me and started the Jeep. I pondered for a while; finally concluding that perhaps my being a journalist could be the reason behind it. I decided to give him a few minutes to absorb the fact.

After a long silence, warily he asked, 'Why are you going to Nandgaon? Any bad incidence?'

I smiled within, for he had broken his silence. To mollify his doubts, I said, 'Come on, journalists are not always after headlines.' But I was equally curious to know what he had to do with Nandgaon. So I asked, 'Tell me, do you live in Nandgaon?'

'No, but I visit frequently.'

'What!' I exploded, and shouted, 'Tell me, what do you know about Nandgaon?'

He was taken a back by my excitement, and demanded, 'What do you want to know?'

I snapped, 'Surely you know it. The Nandgaon story is all over the media. 'A desert turned into an Oasis' that is what the media says! And the force behind this visit is Megha Patil, the woman who is crowned for the change! Few months ago, I met her for an interview, and she had suggested to visit Nandgaon first.'

I noticed his eyes were moist. I lowered my voice and asked, 'Oh! So you know her?'

He nodded, and my excitement knew no bound. I screamed, 'Tell me what you know, every bit about her!'

'You are very fast! But why should I tell you?' He asked with a grin.

I realized he was playing hard but I was in no mood to let go the lead I got for the story and almost pleaded, 'Please, an insider view is always of interest to our readers.' And waited for his nod but instead he stopped the Jeep with a jolt. I prepared myself for the worst – to be thrown out of the Jeep. He pointed to a roadside restaurant, and said, 'First let us have a cup of Tea!' and got down, forcing me to follow him.

I did not liked the way he iced our discussion but I had no option but to obey his decree. As we waited for the tea, I pressed him, 'Please start the story!'

He smirked, 'Story?'

Ignoring his smirk, I replied, 'Yes, Please.'

He grinned and asked, 'What did you say, your name...?'

I snapped, 'Jenny. What is your name by the way?'

'What is in a name, you can call me Raj, Vijay, A, B, C, or Z? Hardly would I itch your remembrance after this short journey.' And he laughed out heartily.

By now, I had got used to him breaking into a laugh at the drop of a hat. I understood he was unwilling, but I too was stubborn. Quickly, I remarked, 'But Mr. Raj, distance and time are hardly any factors to itch one's remembrance.'

Immediately, his jaws drooped and he stopped laughing. He glanced at me, and said, 'I got you. Let me first start with your knowledge about Nandgaon. Tell me what all you know.'

I replied, 'I know all that is in the media, how Megha Patil had worked all these years to change the lives of the people at Nandgaon.'

First he smiled and then burst into laughter. I helplessly waited for him to stop, which he did after a few seconds and muttered defiantly. 'Dear Jenny, we are talking of a place and not a human being. No single person can be credited for the change. You must know, generations are consumed to bring a place to its present state of glory!'

I interrupted. 'Agreed, so what is the story behind this?'

He paused, as if was trying to collate his thoughts. Then he asked, 'Do you believe in the power of nature, or more precisely, let us talk about the water.'

I was dumbfounded for a second, and replied guardedly, 'Like – Rains, floods...?', and waited for his approval but instead he asked another question, 'How was the dance of rain on the hills?'

I turned numb as I remembered, and answered in low voice, 'Only one word to describe, Magical!'

He smiled, and put another question, 'Jenny, do you have any idea how far is Nandgaon from here?'

'I believe 200 kilometers.' Cautiously, I stated.

'Right. Think of it, a place only 200 kilometers away from here yet hardly getting any rain.'

Now I could understand the intent of question, and answered, 'Yes, that is power of the nature!'

'Not power, but I would rather call it arrogance of the nature!' He declared and then turned to me as if he remembered something important. 'Have you heard about Songs of Water?'

'What is that?' I was now curious.

'They are songs about water.' He laughed out loudly.

I widened my eyes in anger.

He then rubbed the back of his neck, and after a few moments of struggle, spoke up, 'Never mind! Let me start. Megha was not the only protagonist of this story; beside her, there was one more person who had played an equally important role to bring out the transformation at Nandgaon.'

My interest now increased many folds. In soft voice, I asked, 'Oh! Another person, that sounds fascinating, tell me then how it started?'

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He nodded, and continued, 'I have to take you some twenty years back when the Marathwada region was reeling under severe drought. All districts in the region were affected and so was the Nandgaon village of Beed district.

Once known for sugarcane cultivation, Nandgaon now had turned into a dry land. Hardly any one could be seen in the fields. The village had a whiff of solitude in the atmosphere. Many of the houses appeared bereaved as their owners migrated to other parts of the country but many had stayed back, clinging to the hopes of a revival soon.'

He then stopped; his eyes were devoid of any expression. I was quick to prompt, 'Please continue!'

He smiled, said, 'Have patience, as I dig out those memories from the deep graves of remembrance.'

'Sorry for being so annoying!' I said.

'Never mind. I can understand your enthusiasm.' Saying he turned thoughtful, as if was trying to sew the events in a string, and after a while, spoke, 'Amongst them was the family of village head Ramesh Patil, who lived with his wife Savita, and two daughters. Megha, the youngest one was then of twelve years of age and the elder one, Suhani was of sixteen. Both sisters though always stayed together but were poles apart in their nature. If Megha was like a calm lake with depth, then Suhani was a turbulent river willing to challenge its banks.'

A smile lit up his eyes, as he added, 'Suhani was a rebel, a dreamer who lived life on her own terms. With doe shaped

eyes, and a creamy complexion kissed by the charm of youth, she looked no less than a royal princess!

Quickly then glancing at my inquisitive eyes, he continued, 'Once a wealthy farmer of the region with many acres of land, the drought had left Ramesh Patil penniless. The family would have starved, if not for his wife Savita who worked as a music teacher in a government funded school.'

He paused. Again, I could see hesitation storming his eyes, and in desperation, I folded my hands. He chuckled on my reaction and said, 'I am having second thoughts. Why should I let the cat out of the bag? After all, you are a journalist!'

I understood, that I would have to make him crawl out of his shell, or I would lose a good story. So to pacify his doubts, I assured him, 'If you wish I shall not publish the story, but I want to know the truth.'

He broke into a smile, got up from the seat and said, 'Finish your tea first!'

I heaved a breath of relief and gulped the tea in one go. Soon we were back in his Jeep. The traffic on the highway had thinned out, and the drizzling too had stopped. I waited for him to continue, which he did after a while.

He glanced at me, and asked, 'What comes to your mind first when I say 'water'.

Slowly, I replied, 'Life saving agent, I believe.'

'That much only?'

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I retorted, 'Are you going to tell me the story or not?'

'Your frown reminds me of someone!' He laughed.

If I had my way, I would have surely beaten him black and blue right there. But I contained my irritation, and waited. He glanced at me, probably had guessed my thoughts, and smiled.

I eased myself and smiled at him.

He nodded, and continued, 'I clearly remember the day when the villagers had gathered for the immersion of Lord Ganesha's idol on the banks of the Sona river. As far as one's eyes could see, the banks were swarmed by saffron flags, the drum beats had raised the cadence, and the air was thick with loud cries of 'Ganpati Bappa Morya'.



Fold 1: Tinkling Rivulets

Year 1995

Nandgaon Village

Surrounded by small hills, Nandgaon was like any other small village of India with a population of a few thousands. A rainfed river 'Sona' flowed through the village, and was the only source of water to claim for, but today the naked riverbed stood witness to the sea of people who had gathered for the idol immersion of their beloved deity Lord Ganesha.

From a distance what had appeared like a celebration, but a closer look revealed a different story of embitterment. After a week long fervor, the village was divided over the decision of the village head Ramesh Patil. Popularly known as Patil, he drew a strong support of the fellow villagers, as everyone vouched for his honesty and commitment towards the welfare of the people but at the moment, the wind was turbulent with the slogans raised against him. Amongst the crowd, also present was Patil's family – his wife and two

daughters. They were anxious of the forthcoming, but not Patil who had been through many rough situations earlier and was confident to ride the tide.

To pacify the crowd, he climbed up on a deck, specially erected for the occasion, and addressed the gathering from the loudspeaker of a PA system.

'I know all of you are angry over my decision. But look at the river! Is there any drop of water left? This year too we had no rain, and now I have no option, but to give a symbolic immersion to the Lord.'

But instead of being mollified, the crowd disenchantment grew further along the beats of the drum, but unheeding to the protest, Patil performed 'Aarti' of the Lord's idol and poured a bucket of water over it to mark the symbolic immersion. The atmosphere charged up further and one amongst the gathering, shouted, 'Patil, remember, the village will be cursed for decades to come! And none other than you would be held responsible for it.'

But Patil remained unmoved by the protest, and replied with firmness, 'Lord can never punish his children!' And gestured to the mass to disperse.

The crowd started moving, but the dissonance refused to die down. Many were of the view that the bad days were ahead but a few came in support for him. Patil waited a while for the dust clouds to settle down, then walked down the dais to meet the family, and his friend Manohar. He smiled to ease the stress on their faces, though Savita's eyes assured

support to him. They discussed the event and walked away, unaware of the impact the incident had left on Suhani, who remained rooted to the ground.

Only one thought was running through Suhani's mind, 'Let the rains come in plenty and save Baba from the crisis.'

Praying for a miracle, Suhani gazed at the sky and noticed a few footloose clouds hovering over the hills, and thought aloud, 'What color are they of black, grey...? Will they pour? Do they look heavy?' Undeterred by the pinching rays, piercing her eyes, she continued to scrutinize the clouds till Megha appeared.

Megha tried to guess what Suhani was up to. Worriedly she asked, 'Suhani, what makes you stare at the Sky so often?'

Without batting an eyelid, Suhani replied, 'Clouds!'

'What is there in the Clouds?'

'They give me a purpose. One day, you too will understand!' Suhani answered.

'When?' Megha asked with an innocence which made Suhani laugh out. She grabbed Megha's hand, and they walked towards home.

On the way back, Suhani noted that the village appeared more deserted, and remembered that last night a truck had come. Everyone knew what it means when a truck arrives – a few more families probably had left the village. She always wondered, where do they go? To the nearby cities? She had heard horror stories about their plight. Perhaps, father is

right; at least we have a house to live in, and are amongst people who are like family.

‘Suhani, what are you going to wear at the dinner party tonight?’ Megha’s question made Suhani come out of her deep reflection. How could she forget about the party, which was an annual gala affair after the idol immersion? All villagers looked forward to this party – for the feast, drink and most importantly, the music orchestra called from the city.

To reach home fast, she grabbed Megha’s hand tightly and they sprinted over the dried fields.

* * *

For the evening party, Patil had spent a good amount of money on alcohol for the villagers, and hoped to see the morning bitterness fade away in the jazz of the evening entertainment. He was proven right as no one talked about the morning incident.

The night appeared to fall short for the men folk with alcohol, the ladies worried about chores lined up next morning, young boys discussed about jobs and girls talked about prospective grooms. In the midst of all, Suhani hardly cared about anything, for her eyes were glued to the female singer of the Orchestra – her glittering dress, red lipstick, flowing long hair, and the free exchange with audience. Again and again, she gawked at the singer, as she visualized

herself in singer's place, surrounded by her Princes who blew kisses at her and showered flowers, begging her to sing again and again.

"Princes?" Is that what she saw?

Yes, Princes from her "Kingdom", a secret realm of her imagination, where she was the reigning Princess and Princes from every corner of the world were part of it. The princes would entice her with love, happiness and diamonds of the world, and of course water! They would fight amongst each other to win her but she would reject the winner. It was her world, where she made the rules and others were at her service. She would have dwelled in her 'Kingdom' forever if not for Megha who announced that mother had called for dinner. Unwillingly, she bid a soft goodbye to the Princes who displayed their displeasure but soon disappeared as she commanded.

Suhani gave a full look to the Singer before leaving, and followed Megha to the dinner area. While Megha went out to look for mother, Suhani waited, hardly aware of the fact that her drunken walk and hazy eyes, might have grabbed someone's attention, and was startled, by a shout from far off. Immediately, she turned and saw Girish.

'Suhani, where were you?' He shouted.

She ignored his call, and moved away but he quickly covered the distance and blocked the way. As he saw her, he turned worried, 'Your eyes look so different. Are you good?'

Quickly realizing, that her eyes might be still dreamy, she shunned him aside, not to give away any clue about her secret world. Girish took her gesture for arrogance. He hesitated to converse further and walked away. She thought of calling him back, but then did not and stayed quiet. It was not that she had a dislike for Girish, in fact she was fond of him as they had grown up together. He was son of her father's close friend Manohar, but at the moment she wanted to be left alone and shrugged off Girish from her mind. She looked for mother whom she found serving food in the dining area. As soon mother noticed Suhani, she came forward and instructed them to quickly have their dinner and leave for home. They obeyed her command, finished dinner and proceeded towards home.

Megha fell asleep as soon they were in bed but Suhani could not, for hangover of the party lingered. The Singer, Orchestra, and Princes – which as always lured her but soon reality dawned on her as she was reminded of the limitations of her aspirations.

Teary and restless, Suhani got up from the bed and opened up her closet, brought out a scrapbook which had a collection of cutouts of movie stars from various magazines. With deep care, she gazed at the cutouts as could identify her Princes in them. To her delight, suddenly they turned alive, and one by one complemented her, how stunning she looked at the party, and how well she sang on the stage. Filled with pride, she acknowledged the praises showered on her, soon

they all disappeared one by one, and quietly she closed the scrapbook.

Her heart was heavy with thick emotions. She opened up the window and a bounty of fresh air filled in. With tear-filled eyes, she gazed at the sky for it was densely populated with stars, hardly leaving any room for the clouds. The nearby abandoned houses appeared like ghost houses and once again, reality of the situation prevailed upon her. Water scarcity had intensified in the last few months – what human or animal, all were leaving. Many times, she too had requested her parents to leave the village. But like the captain of a sinking ship, father had decided to stay till the last person is in the village, and mother too was supportive of his decision. But how could they decide about their children's lives too? Megha was perhaps too young to have any aspirations from life but she had so many!

Quickly she wiped away the tears, and thought aloud, affirming to herself, 'My dream is to live in midst of water, and one day, I will make my dream come true, no matter what may come!'

She tried to contain her tears, and then felt someone's presence behind her, and turned to find mother. Immediately, another bout of her tears rushed out, 'Maa, no more dreams grow on this land! We all will die soon.'

Mother raised her eyebrows in disapproval but Suhani did not stop, and cried, 'Maa, face the truth! Death is inevitable if we stay at Nandgaon any longer!'

‘Suhani, don’t be a pessimist.’ Saying, mother tried to embrace her but Suhani shirked away, and shouted, ‘Maa, you amaze me. Do you never ever hope for a life where your dreams have a chance to breathe?’

Mother said, ‘Suhani, the situation is not as bad as you are making yourself believe. It is all in your mind.’

‘Mind?’ Suhani laughed out sarcastically, ‘Yes, my mind refuses to succumb to the situation. May be you are right. One day perhaps the mountains will win and not let the clouds drift away, and one day perhaps Nandgaon would turn into an Oasis but that one day has to arrive in my life time!’

Unfazed by Suhani’s outburst, mother replied, ‘Daughter, have faith in God. Situation would improve soon.’

Disappointed by Mother, Suhani rebutted, ‘Maa, being in denial will not help.’ And without waiting for an answer rushed to the bed and closed her eyes.

Mother stayed for a while, and then left the room.

* * *

Suhani woke up as soon as she heard mother shouting her name. Through hazy eyes, she noticed Megha carrying a bucket of water. Like a tigress making a move on its prey, Suhani quietly leapt out of the bed and snatched the bucket away from Megha. Her sudden onslaught made Megha