

A TRIBUTE TO A
MARTYR



P.SRINIVAS
(1954 -1991)



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ABOUT P.SRINIVAS



Kirti Chakra P.Srinivas

P.Srinivas belonging to the Indian Forest Service was brutally murdered on 10th November, 1991 by the notorious sandalwood smuggler Veccrappan. Srinivas was a young man who, without expectation of any reward, strove with singular determination for the betterment of our society by seeking to eradicate evil, never allowing himself to succumb to the temptations of compromise which could bring safety. He worked endlessly for the protection of the living creatures that share this planet with us be they animals, trees or other, and what are regarded as lesser

beings. He was a martyr to the nation and his bronze statue at Chickmangalur stands in testimony to the sacrifice of this young man who died upholding the values that dominated his life : honesty, simplicity, dedication to duty and the courage to stand by principles.

Childhood and Education

Pandillapalli Srinivas was born in Rajamundry, East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, on 12 September 1954; the first son of Ananta Rao and Jayalaxmi, Srinivas spent most of his childhood in his grandmother's village of Kamarajupeta in Rajahmundry. He completed his primary education in Nagaraju Junior Basis School and Higher Secondary from Lantern High School Rajahmundry. He graduated from Government Arts



Parents of P.Srinivas

College in Rajamundry and in 1976 completed his Masters in Life Sciences from Andhra University and secured a gold medal.

Service

In 1979 he qualified for the Indian Forest Service and was allotted Karnataka Cadre. His first posting (in 1982) was as Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) in Chamara-janagar of Mysore district, which was already the activity of Veerappan, then a small time poacher. Srinivas was elevated to the post of Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF) Chamarajanagar in 1983 and stayed there till 1987. As ACF he compiled a directory of all sandalwood smugglers and poachers operating in the area and procured and circulated photographs of these criminals. He established



Srinivas during his IFS Training at Dehradun

and coordinated networks between the police and foresters, drew up strategies to curb the activities of smugglers and poachers and successfully isolated and cornered a large number of them. When the Centre banned sale of ivory and ivory products, along with making possession of ivory articles beyond a limit a cognizable offence, Veerappan switched to sandalwood smuggling.

Encounter with Veerappan

Srinivas was the first and only person to arrest Veerappan in 1986 while the SAARC Summit was in progress at Bangalore. Veerappan was brought to Budipadaga Forest Rest House in Chamarajanagar Division for interrogation. Based on the information gathered, Srinivas conducted many many raids in the gang's hideouts in Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. When Srinivas was out on one of these raids Veerappan escaped from custody. An enquiry was ordered into this escape and some police officials were indicted. Although Srinivas was not at fault, he felt responsible and this probably explains the tenacity with



which Srinivas pursued Veerappan when he could have taken up softer postings elsewhere.

In 1987, Srinivas was transferred as DCF at Chickmangalur and within few months of his transfer, Veerappan murdered Mr.Chidabaram, Range Forest Officer, Satyamangalam Range. Srinivas rushed and assisted the local administration in investigating the case. He developed a network of informers against Veerappan in his native village Gopinatham. Veerappan, however brutally murdered the informants and hanged their heads as an example in the village. The nefarious criminal also doled out part of his ill-gotten wealth amongst the villagers. His excellent knowledge of the terrain coupled with the silence of the villagers, out of fear enabled him to extend his activities.



*P.Srinivas with K.U.Shetty, IGP
Special Task Force*

Treading the path of Satyanveshan



Srinivas with the locals

Post 1989 Veerappan took up sandalwood smuggling in a big way in Mysore and Coorg districts of Karnataka and the adjoining areas of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. A Special Task Force was formed to tackle Veerappan and his activities. While the task force followed the methods of aggressively patrolling the forests and raiding hideouts, Srinivas

adopted the unconventional strategy of building goodwill with people who helped Veerappan. He evolved the concept of *Satyanveshan* from the ideas of two stalwarts who inspired him— Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Vinobha Bhave, concentrating on non-violent methods of persuasion to change the hearts of Criminals and reintegrate them with society.

Philanthropic Activities



Mariamman Temple built at Gopinatham Village

At Gopinatham, Veerappan's village, Srinivas built a temple for the Goddess Mariamman, at the cost of Rs.3 lakhs raised through contributions. A fixed deposit scheme was launched to pay the salaries of the temple workers as well as meet the maintenance costs of the temple. He provided drinking water to remote tribal villages in his jurisdiction; devel-

oped roads to inaccessible villages and obtained motor transport connections between these villages and nearby towns. He started a mobile dispensary for the people and even learnt basic medicine to assist in the dispensary. At Chickmangalur he planned and built a modern forest complex spread over 50 acres, comprising offices, official residences, a temple and private houses for foresters under a self financing scheme. He took up an ambitious tribal housing programme where he built 40 houses for the homeless people of Gopinatham village. He used his own salary and borrowed from friends and relatives to finance many of these humanitarian activities. He was an outstanding forest officer committed to his job and the people he served.

He raised the forest nurseries successfully in the deep forests by impounding available hill top water. He conducted afforestation drives, improved communication networks and set up high altitude watch towers. He understood that forest development and tribal development are intrinsically related.



Srinivas at his dispensary

Rehabilitation of Criminals

Srinivas organized co-operatives to sell the minor forest produce collected by the villagers. He provided livelihood to the villagers by employing them in forest nurseries and other developmental works to discourage them from destroying forest wealth and wildlife. Eligible people were identified and appointed as watchers and guards in the forest



Srinivas with his family members

department. VCCRAPPAN's gang members were also encouraged to avail of these employment opportunities. As a result of Srinivas efforts, public support base on which Veerappan thrived was eroded. Srinivas offered the gang members a rehabilitation package including legal justice if they would lay down their arms and cross over. A major breakthrough was achieved in 1990 when many of the hardcore gang members surrendered before Srinivas. VCCRAPPAN's gang dwindled from over 40 to a mere 8-10 members. Among those surrendered was Arjuna, the younger brother of Veerappan. When they were jailed, Srinivas personally engaged advocates on their behalf and got them released on bail.

The Last Encounter with Veerappan

In July 1991, Srinivas's tenure with the STF expired. He stopped getting his salary and the security provided to him was weakened but he stayed on as he felt that Veerappan's surrender was imminent. On 09th November, 1991 he received a wireless message at MM Hills that Veerappan was ready to surrender if Srinivas met him unaccompanied and unarmed. Without hesitation Srinivas set out alone the same night. He met Arjuna who had been missing for over a month, at Ponnuswamy Gounder's (Veerappan's uncle) house, stayed the night and



Srinivas six days before his murder by Veerappan

left for the encounter in the morning. The last message received from him said, "We are hoping for the best. God will help us" Instead on November 10th 1991, 37 year old Srinivas was brutally shot while crossing a nullah 6 kilometers from Gopinatham village.

Innate Goodness

Why did Srinivas trust Veerapan when all that the latter did, through the years, clearly showed him undeserving of such consideration? Did he let conviction cloud reason? Hope overtake common sense? Hard to tell but, if one looks at his brief life the answers are all there. His belief in Satyanveshan was absolute. This was reflected in the manner in which he chose rehabilitation over reproach. He realized that circumstances of their hard life in the forest made them take to poaching and smuggling and he tried to ameliorate their suffering by involving them in developmental projects and providing them opportunities to work for a living. Veerappan's own family members were beneficiaries of Srinivas's generosity. He employed Veerappan's sister Maari in the dispensary and tried his best to counsel Veerappan's brother Arjuna to abandon his outlaw existence. His death is a testimony to his commitment to the innate goodness of man.

Award of Kirti Chakra

The State Government announced a reward of Rs.1 lakh and recommended him for the Presidential Gallantry Award. He was given a State funeral with the gun salute and police honors. On 26th January, 1992, Srinivas was posthumously awarded the second highest peace time gallantry award the **Kirti Chakra**, received by his mother from the President of India at the Defence Investiture Ceremony held at Rashtrapathi Bhavan. For Srinivas, the most fitting tribute came from the fact that grief over his death was



Mother of P.Srinivas receiving the Kirti Chakra Award from the President

was most palpable at Gopinatham village where he was seen not a mere government functionary but as a social reformer. His presence looms larger than life in the area and still watches over the villagers.

P.Srinivas - A Martyr to the Nation



Bronze Statue of Srinivas at Chickmangalur

I don't think we will see an officer of this type again. He was like our family member. He cared for others and not about himself. These houses, the water facilities, the roads- everything was done by him. We have re-named our village after him.

-Shri. Basappa, Kunjanur Village

We are very poor people. He never denied us anything we asked for. He used to say "Don't hesitate to ask me anything. I am your brother". He helped us whenever and wherever we approached him. Our grievances may not have been his concern but he would take up the issues and get it done.

- Smt.Lakshmi, Kunjanur Village

He is our Hero. We remember him everyday. We see his work everywhere.

- Villagers of Sandhemara Halli

Message From The Director General

Sri.P.Srinivas was a truly professional Forest Officer who believed in the transformation approach to reform the forest produce smugglers. His conviction and commitment for the cause of forest protection was commendable. He had become extremely popular amongst the public for his integrity, intelligence and dedication to duty and exemplary courage in tackling very difficult situation.

He is a martyr who made the supreme sacrifice of his life in its prime for the cause of protection of forests. He will always remain a source of inspiration to the future generation of officers for his legendary courage, exemplary integrity and his dedication to duty.

P.Srinivas who laid down his life for a noble cause has proved:

"Cowards die many times before their death but valiant tastes death but once."

-Shafiquz Zaman, IAS