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SNIPPETS – II
(Bits & Bytes of Shared Memories)

BY

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Our Snippets-I compilation, ‘Snippets of Shared Memories’, was largely focused on the year 1948-49 which we spent in Mount Abu under training for our career in the Indian Police Service. That compilation more than fulfilled its objective - to enable our batchmates to relive that fun-filled year – batch-mates who, Padam Rosha referred to as cell-mates, in the context of our tongue-in-cheek description that likened our time at Mount Abu to a one year term in jail.

The uniform response of our readers was that we continue this documentary with more snippets, covering later years and more experiences. All were agreed that police life, as indeed life in general, had often a funny side that certainly took the edge off its harshness.

Here then, is the next instalment of our compilation, under the title of ‘Snippets - II’, a title that could imply even more snippets to come. Readers may accordingly alter the title of our earlier compilation as “Snippets - I (Bits & Bytes of Shared Memories). Some of the stories that we have put out in these compilations have a local flavour with a context that is specific to Tamil Nadu. This is because that is where our own experiences were largely centred. But we expect that this may not detract from the wider appeal of the stories themselves. We would however, like to widen the context to cover stories from the Centre and other States as well. We would therefore request police officers who have served in those locations to contribute such stories to provide these Snippets an all-India flavour. We would request that such contributions maintain the same spirit, format and length. And of course, we shall be glad to provide a minimal but necessary editorial function.

There are inevitably a few examples where some police officers happen to appear in an unfavourable light. We have taken care to mask their identity. Misbehaviour within the police, of course, makes for more juicy coverage in the media, but this should not be taken to represent a broader phenomenon within the police. We have seen enough of human nature, to assert that misbehaviour is more or less uniformly distributed, both within and outside the police and, luckily, is more the exception than the rule in both.

We are quite certain in our minds that these compilations will bring back to our readers, similar snippets from their memories, and make for many more days filled with laughter for all.



T.K.Venkataraman, who occupies a central place in our memories as mentor, first for NK who started his practical police training under him at Kurnool, and later, for both CVN and NK, in the most formative professional years of their early district charges at Madurai. Nor was his influence only professional. He drew us too, into the rich intellectual heritage of philosophies such as those of J.Krishnamurthi.

TKV was a person of remarkable character who, as a young directly recruited Sub-Inspector, boldly flouted the unforgiving Brahmin orthodoxy of the 1930's, by taking under his protection a child widow and later giving her a home and a happy married life with him.

One of his early postings was as Sub-Inspector in charge of Flower Bazaar Police Station in Madras City, always considered a "gold mine" for those posted there. And there, he maintained his integrity by declining his share in the sizeable monthly contributions of the local commercial establishment, called "Mamools", that added substantially to the regular salaries of the staff. Recalling this, TKV said he was able to survive in that environment because his mamool share was taken over by the Inspector, under whom he worked, an arrangement he wryly described as "satisfactory to all parties".

He would recall often with pleasure the memories of the years we spent together, and often regale us with the fascinating experiences of his own earlier years. On one of his last days at the ripe age of 90, he expressed his gratitude to NK for handling all the personal problems of his years after he had retired from service. When N K said he had acted only as a humble instrument of God, fulfilling what He had ordained, TKV responded calmly in measured words, "NK, take it from me, even God needs an instrument to fulfill Himself". That was the wonderfully human person that was T.K.Venkataraman.



A.C. Madhavan Nambiar, master raconteur with a rollicking sense of humour, and infectious laughter, specially when narrating the foibles of many police officers with whom he had come into contact.

One of his favourite stories was of his discovery in his office desk of the Bank Account of an officer from whom he had just taken charge. What was interesting, if not intriguing, about that Bank Account was that over several years it showed only deposits and no withdrawals

whatever !

ACM was often bullied by V.P. Nair, a senior officer in the Headquarters Office. When asked why he was putting up with it, when just a word from his powerful contact, Mrs Ammu Swaminathan, would silence VP Nair for good, ACM's reply was characteristic : "I am reserving Mrs A.S for more difficult occasions "



M. Krishna Menon, DIG at Madurai, in the later '50s.

With an insatiable appetite for juicy official gossip, he would use the technique of "leading suggestion" to extract the latest news from his visitors. When we called on him, he would start saying, "You know, this enquiry against So-and-So", and he would leave the sentence in mid-air, while keenly searching our faces for the least inkling that we knew something. And if our eyes betrayed us, he would immediately jump on us, with an animated "You heard that ? what did you hear what did you hear ?" Of course, after a few occasions of being taken in, we got to understand his technique and learnt to present a completely bland face, where he knew he could not extract any response from us.

Sometimes, he would let go a pregnant sentence, "No wonder he hates him ", without any indication of the identity of the persons referred to as "he" and "him". If we happened to nod our heads even in the slightest measure, he would immediately pin us down to tell him whom we had in mind ! Of course, all these experiences quickly made us masters of the poker face



K.Viswanathan Nair : One of the most remarkable police officers we have encountered in our service. With little or no schooling he started service as a constable and retired as a Superintendent of Police. He was a fearless officer, better known as “Thee Chatty Govindan” because he led a funeral procession crying “Govinda, Govinda”, carrying a “Thee Chatty”, or pot of fire, with four constables disguised as local villagers, carrying a collection of rifles covered by a shroud, to resemble a body. At the cremation ground they pounced on an unsuspecting gang who had till then successfully escaped the reach of law by using this venue at night for their gambling activities,

Nair was very impatient with younger officers who flaunted their university degrees and knowledge of English. He believed that, having served in the British days, his own English was much better. One young officer in particular, who held an Honours degree in English Literature , was often singled out for his unsparing comments. Referring to that officer’s report describing an injured person who lay on the ground, groaning, Viswanathan Nair pounced on him for this usage. “Do you know the meaning of ‘groaning’ ? Do you know the difference between ‘groaning’ and ‘screaming’ ?”, thundered Nair, “do you know how to groan ? Come on, show me now how to groan”. And when that officer was at a loss for words, Nair would proceed to demonstrate dramatically how to groan, producing his own unique sound version, hardly recognizable by anyone of us who was present, as groaning.

He would often harangue his officers at meetings, on how much he had to din his advice on them, with the words, “Here I am, all the time dinning, dinning, dinning.... But you never din. In fact, none of you know what is dinning. Can anyone here tell when you last dinned ?”, and he would go on and on, on the subject of dinning in its various nuances.

His notes of inspection of police stations would always be strongly critical, and certainly colourful. Typically, he would say, “Village visiting is very very unsatisfactory. Some villages have not at all been visited by the staff. In fact, they dare not visit these villages

Nair was also quite distrustful of statistics. Once, on receiving a Legislature Question from Headquarters calling for the district figures of suicides for the last five years, he wrote out a reply on the spot with whatever figures occurred to him on the spur of the moment. He believed reasonable guesses were adequate for all administrative purposes. He peremptorily dismissed NK’s suggestion who was then present, that verifiable figures should be compiled and provided to Headquarters. Nair responded with “Everyone only asks questions. No one is interested in the answers. And who is going to take the trouble of verifying the answers ?”



T.T.P. Abdullah : As AIG (staff officer to the IGP) at the Police Headquarters, he was always on pins when reports on incidents came in, as that meant his having to present the facts to the IGP. His solution was to delay having to take cognizance of the reports. If a field officer rang him up to report something he would ask him to report it in a wireless message. If a field officer sent a wireless message, he would ask him to discuss the matter with him on the telephone.

His period as AIG was often marked by the issue of warning memos from Police Headquarters to field officers on even the most inconsequential infractions. This led CVN to author the following hypothetical memo that might issue one day : “It is seen that you have not been warned so far. You are therefore warned”.

In 1951 NK wrote to CVN that his wife had gone to her parents’ home for her first delivery, in the following words : “Meena has left for her parents home and will be away for the next couple of monthsthe rest is logic”.

CVN found this suggestive mode of communication often useful. He used it. for example, to provide the following explanation to a friend on how a certain couple who were constantly fighting with each other were able to have six children : “The first child was the logical result of love, and the rest, the biological results of proximity”

C.S.Ramachandran , an officer of the old ICS, a simple man with a good sense of humour.

The Kumbhabhishekam of the Meenakshi temple at Madurai in 1963, saw milling crowds that posed a severe challenge for the police arrangements. NK, CSR and a few others, in their informal home wear of shirt and dhoti, were waiting for darshan just outside a cordoned enclosure opposite the sanctum sanctorum, in exercise of their ‘VIP’ status. A Head Constable drafted for duty from another district, not recognizing NK, took exception to his standing outside the enclosure. On hearing the HC’s sharp comments on NK’s presence, CSR drew the Head Constable aside and told him in hushed tones that he had made the ghastly mistake of pulling up the SP of the neighbouring Tirunelveli District. Greatly embarrassed by this disclosure, the HC moved away to a respectful distance and started a dialogue with CSR bemoaning the difficulties of the police in dealing with VIPs. Noticing this, another person nearby, who knew both CSR and NK, pulled the HC further aside to tell him that the person to whom he was confiding his woes was a Joint Secretary to the Govt of India at New Delhi ! On this the HC decided to disappear from the scene altogether.

A new political dispensation was swept into power by the Elections in Tamil Nadu in 1967. As the new powers-that-be felt the need to have their own choice of police

officers in key positions, (read “yes-men”), many senior officers already in those positions were eased out by the convenient method of seconding them to posts under the Govt of India.

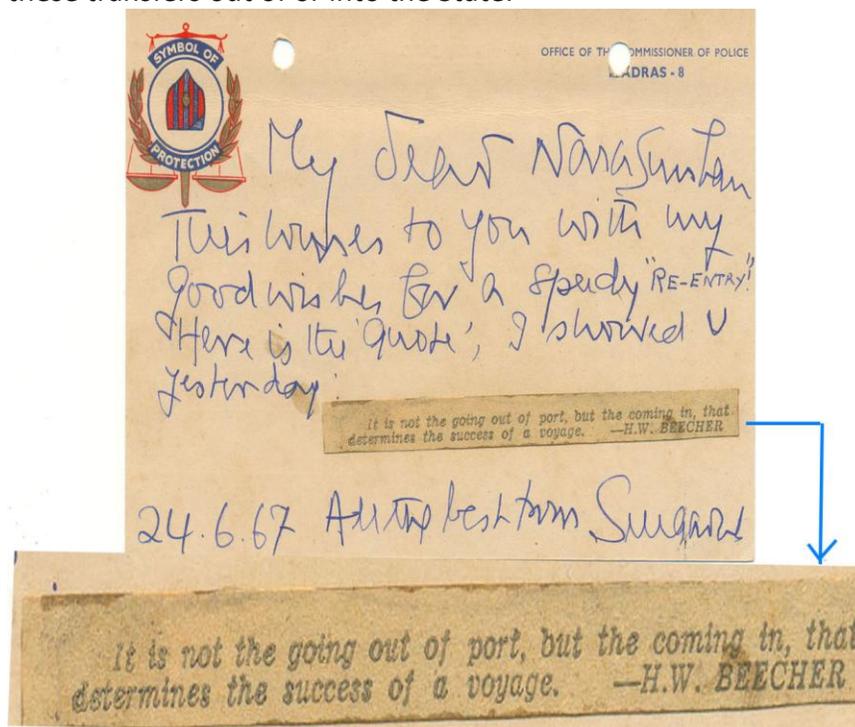
While most other colleagues preferred to remain silent and / or distant from those officers seen to be in political disfavour, two of them alone had the courage to demonstrate that their regard for officers remained unaffected by which way the political winds were blowing.



P.Kuppaswamy, then DIG Armed Police, Madras, made it a point to invite CVN and NK on their posting to New Delhi, to a farewell lunch at the Gymkhana Club. He went on to show them his personal warmth and regard by personally serving them with some of the dishes at that meal !



M.Singaravelu, better known as Singam, was, true to his name, a lion among men. Here is the message that Singam, who was then the Commissioner of Police at Madras, sent to CVN on the latter’s transfer to New Delhi. In this message, Singam, who loved to play with his words, has used the then popular idiom of satellite operations of entry into orbit and re-entry to earth, to describe these transfers out of or into the State.



A tale of two Police Commissions :



M.P.Sivagnana Gramani, a great Tamil scholar of Tamil Nadu, who was a member of the First Tamil Nadu Police Commission, coined three key words in Tamil to beautifully sum up how the political system sought to influence the Police. NK embedded these beautiful words in the Commission's 1971 Report :

முறையீடு - தலையீடு - குறுக்கீடு

These Tamil words found a remarkable echo, translated into their English equivalents and recorded by CVN in commenting on the political process, a few years later in the 2nd. Report of the National Police Commission in 1979 as follows :

Intercede – Intervene - Interfere

One only wishes the political system had the maturity and wisdom to see the critical relevance of the processes expressed by these three words; how the first two are essential to healthy political process, and how political preference is often for the third, even though it is harmful to the body politic.



C.P.Joshi : Director, Police Wireless, Govt. of India - architect of the modern wireless network of the Police in the country. A warm human being with a great sense of humour, and full of anecdotes, that kept his listeners rolling in laughter. Seeing the good cheer he always created around him, one never suspected that he suffered so many health problems – diabetes, blood pressure - high cholesterol - name it and he had it. When asked about how he coped with all these, he would say there was simply no medicine like laughter. And would also add, that for a long life, one must suffer from a chronic disease. His point was that it was only a chronic disease that kept you aware of your health and imposed the necessary disciplines along with the medicines, that assured you of a long life

Head Constable Kshetrapal : A skilled assistant to Investigating Officers of the Vigilance Department, he was able to quickly contribute to their successful trap statistics by organizing traps to catch corrupt officials. He would arrange the trap, and marshal the witnesses and their evidence to the satisfaction of his DSP who would thereafter proudly

and confidently project the case as his own case and charge-sheet the accused in court. During the trial however, all the witnesses would turn hostile and the accused would be acquitted. There was a vague surmise that all this was as already amicably agreed between them.



M.J.Holmes : Old timer DIG who set exacting work standards for everyone but himself :

Given to sleeping during working hours, he would use his remaining waking hours mainly to first deciding the priorities for his scrutiny of the files that came in every day, and then arranging them in suitably labelled priority-wise stacks on tables all around himself. Visitors could only get brief glimpses of him at his office table through the gaps between these stacks, and they would leave with the impression that he was indeed a heavily over-worked officer. At the end of the day, no files would have been disposed of, but Holmes would be happy that he was upto date in his prioritising work. He would then apply some of his free time to take his subordinates severely to task for delays in disposal of papers

O.L.Burrell : One of the last colourful British IP officers to leave Madras. A great stickler for simple procedures, and impatient with needless paper work, he found a memo from the SP's Office in the SI's desk during a Police Station inspection. At once he wrote on it and signed in his own hand as follows :

"Returned to the SP Salem; The information you have asked for should already be available in your Office : (Signed) Oscar Burrell, for S.I of Police"



S.B.Shetty, IGP :

On his return to Madras after a short stint in N.Delhi, NK wanted to get experience of working in the City, and therefore requested Shetty to post him as Deputy Commissioner (Crimes), Madras City, which

post had just fallen vacant. Shetty peremptorily dismissed the idea, saying that post needed a more experienced officer. He obviously had in mind another officer with proven experience in serving political and private interests. When Shetty submitted a chain of seven postings to make sure of his choice for the City, Chief Minister Kamaraj, with his native commonsense, asked why seven transfers were proposed when there was only one officer waiting for a posting and only one vacancy to be filled. That was how NK was posted as DC Crimes.

Not to be deflected easily, Shetty communicated the posting order with a rider that it was a temporary posting. NK however stayed on in the post for five years, marked by unprecedented professional accomplishments. NK's final satisfying experience in this post was detection of a specially interesting case. NK took the opportunity to produce the offender named Krishnan before Shetty to demonstrate how he had committed the offence – which was a burglary in Shetty's own residence !. It provided an unspoken reminder by NK to Shetty of the temporary posting the latter had unwillingly given him five years earlier.

The Medal Parade one year was, as usual, an impressive event, with everything proceeding with clock-work precision. After the parade and distribution of the medals was over, Shetty escorted the Governor to introduce him to the 20 senior officers who were lined up for the purpose. Never at a loss when facts and figures failed him, Shetty introduced the 20 officers in the line-up, not by their own names, but by whatever names occurred to him on the spur of the moment.



V.N.Rajan : Allotted initially to the old undivided Madras, and later to Kerala. A straight talking officer, with a clipped accent, a curt manner and what unfortunately was less visible, a heart of gold.

In the run-up to the reorganization of the States in 1957, there was a severe tussle between Kannadigas and Malayalis over which State should have Kasargode Taluk in South Kanara District. An over-enthusiastic Inspector at Kasargode solved a situation precipitated by Kannadiga agitators by loading them into a

Police Van and leaving them in the middle of a forest area from where they had to walk back 20 miles, without food or water. A loud outcry by the Kannadiga leadership of the district led to Rajan's transfer from the post of SP of the District, simply because he was a Malayali, and therefore considered partisan, and replacement by NK because he was neither a Kannadiga or a Malayali (and therefore considered neutral). Both VNR and NK became aware for the first time of the linguistic identity conferred on them by the play of politics. The reorganization of the States soon thereafter found Kasargod allotted to Kerala, and also interestingly, VNR allotted to Kerala, and NK returning to Tamil Nadu, almost as if in formal confirmation of their linguistic identities till some years later when their posting to New Delhi provided the reassurance of their Indian identity.



H.G.C.Barboza : A tall, handsome, striking personality, generally known for his passionate interest in sports, (apart for other passions) matched only by his deep allergy for administrative and paper work. All Police Sports events were largely left to him to manage. During an Annual State Sports Meet in Madras, CVN found his team from the Southern Range, placed under some event scheduling handicap, and Barboza turning a deaf ear to his oral protest. CVN therefore decided to place his case before

Barboza in a long written report. The result was electric. Barboza raised his hands in surrender and entreated CVN to keep the report and instead tell him what he wanted done. The needful was then promptly done. The pen is certainly more powerful than the sword in surprising ways.