

(For private circulation only)

SNIPPETS – III  
(Bits & Bytes of Shared Memories)

BY  
C.V.Narasimhan & N.Krishnaswamy

-----  
June 2007

Here we are then, with Snippets–III. The response to Snippets–II has been heart-warming.

A new feature we are introducing from this issue onwards is a tailpiece giving an example of police humour drawn from across the world. This illustrates that police humour, like humour in general, knows no boundaries in its human appeal.

At the time of Independence, Madras Presidency inherited a few Indian IP Officers, in a spectrum that ranged from the best to the worst. The best among them, without doubt, were R.M.Mahadevan and F.V.Arul. At the other end of the spectrum, without doubt, was ....., oh well, never mind, it is best he is forgotten.



To recall an example of the best : R.M.Mahadevan

In 1969 RMM and NK were summoned by Chief Minister Annadurai to respond to the severe complaints of his party leaders that the Police arrangements in the recent bye-election in Nagercoil, were supportive of the Congress, and had led to the defeat of the DMK party. It was clear that the leaders were targeting NK whom RMM had placed in charge of the arrangements, and which NK had planned and implemented with an iron hand, without fear or favour. Finally when CNA asked what he had to say, RMM said in firm, measured tones that none of his officers should be blamed for anything, because he personally held responsibility for the entire arrangements. Sensing his firm stand, CNA called the meeting to a close and gracefully added that all could now forget the past and address the future.

Mahadeven was truly a fine leader and a gentleman Police Officer.



To recall the second example : F.V.Arul

In March 1971, NK and CP Joshi, (Director, Police Wireless, MHA, Govt of India) were finalising a contract with Bharat Electronics, Ghaziabad, for the prestigious Police Microwave Project, the first of its kind, for Tamil Nadu. NK had in hand a Government sanction for the project for Rs 96 lakh. BEL now revised their quote to Rs 102 lakh and said that this was subject to a further 10 percent increase because of revision of their internal sub-contract rates, in the new financial year which was just 2 days away. BEL offered to waive this increase if the present quote was confirmed immediately by a letter of intent on behalf of the Govt of Tamil Nadu. In a rash and bold step, NK issued this letter of intent on the spot and finalized the contract.

Later the Chief Secretary to Government called for NK's explanation for acting without authority and committing Government to additional expenditure. In his reply, NK pleaded bonafides in serving the interests of the State and added that if his bonafides were not accepted, he would offer to resign. Arul took up the matter with the Chief Secretary, taking personal responsibility for NK's action. On this the matter was closed. And Tamil Nadu had the unique privilege of being the only State Police Force in the country with its own dedicated Microwave network that provided telephone connections in all Police Stations, and in all offices, vehicles and residences of supervisory officers in the State by the early 1970s.

A tale of two Police Colleges :

In 1976 when President's Rule was imposed in Tamil Nadu, NK was posted as Commissioner of Police, Madras City to handle large scale disturbances that were expected to accompany the change of regime. When such disturbances did not take place, much of the credit was assigned to NK who thought he had done no more than what his job required.



When the Presidential Adviser, P.K. Dave (photo at left) indicated that, in appreciation, the Administration would like to do something for the Force, NK took the opportunity to suggest that the State Police Training College, till then located in Tipu Sultan's stables in the Vellore Fort, could be shifted to a more decent new complex of police buildings that were just then getting ready in Madras for accommodating Armed Police Companies doing Law & Order duty in Madras City. Dave agreed to consider this if the Home Secretary inspected the Vellore campus and certified its unsuitability. NK promptly rang up C.Thangayyan, the then Principal of the PTC, Vellore to tell him of the Home Secretary's impending visit, and added to Thangayyan's utter astonishment, that every effort should be made to make the Campus look as lousy as possible. Thangayyan was greatly relieved when NK told him that the possibility of the PTC getting a new campus turned on his making a good job of what NK had advised. Of course, Thangayyan did a good job, even though there was not much to do, and a few months later, the PTC moved to its new campus at Madras.

This experience of NK had its parallel in CVN's experience too, illustrating once again, as adverted to elsewhere in these Snippets, how closely their stars remained inter-locked. CVN was then working as Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry, and his silent coordination of the nation-wide operation effectively to deal with the major Railway strike of April 1974, and the later roundup of top smugglers under the COFEPOSA in September 1974, drew Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's appreciation of these massive and successful Police operations. When Home Secretary N.K.Mukherji made his customary New Year call on the PM, on the 1<sup>st</sup>. January, 1975, she indicated her desire to do something for the Police. Promptly Mukherji recalled the long standing request of the Police Service, recently reiterated strongly in a proposal from S.M.Diaz, who was then Director of the National Police Academy, that the Academy be shifted from the old military barracks at Mount Abu to a modern campus that had been built at Hyderabad, but which had been stalled by political interests in Rajasthan who opposed the shift. The suggestion won the PM's instant approval, and the shift was carried out by Diaz so speedily that it would become a fait accompli before it could be pre-empted by second thoughts.



### B.N.Mullik : The Architect of the Intelligence Bureau

Within a few months of his posting to the IB at New Delhi, in 1957, NK was soon confronted by a serious situation at home. His little son, who was severely mentally challenged and had many other related problems, was unable to stand the cold of the winter. NK therefore requested BNM for an IB posting in Madras where managing his son would be easier. Receiving a blunt refusal, NK sought a meeting with BNM and explained his predicament in detail. Curtly, BNM said “You are so occupied with your own problems that you do not realize that I have to consider the needs of this huge organization”. NK replied “Sir, in balancing the needs of your organization with the difficulties of your officers, one would expect your sympathies to lie with officers in cases of special difficulty”

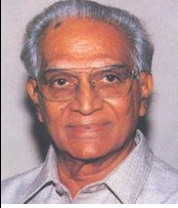
After a few moments of stunned silence, BNM lifted up the telephone and told the Joint Director, Administration, that NK could be sent back to his State. He then curtly dismissed NK saying, “Well, you can go.” But he did not look again at NK, which left the latter wondering whether he did not want to show that something had touched him.



### M.Singaravelu – better known as Singam : A jewel of a man among the old guard.

When CVN arrived at Tiruchi to take over as DIG from Singam, the latter was away on a visit to Nagapattinam in Thanjavur District. Having to hand over that day, Singam did so by a telegram which he arranged to be sent from Sikkil, a nearby temple town. The telegram read : “Best wishes from Singaravelar”. Interesting, because it reflected Singam’s grace, elegance and warmth together with his penchant for playing with words : “Singaravelar” was not only his name, but also that of the presiding deity at Sikkil !

Once S.B.Shetty, (then IGP) forwarded to Singam (then DIG Tiruchi) a letter from a close friend of Shetty, requesting the favour of a specific posting for a Sub-Inspector. Singam chose to maintain the dignity of his office by forwarding the letter to the SP Thanjavur with his handwritten endorsement that read “You may see and ignore this letter”. Thereby he also kept the SP informed of the currents that were at work in the matter.



K.Ramachandra Reddy : A fine old-timer of Madras who later retired as IGP Andhra, endowed with a great sense of humour, and often taking the form of pranks.

One day he rang up to L.R.Adige (Picture below) who was then SP in North Arcot, and imitating the imperious tone of the IGP, T.G.Sanjevi, ordered him to meet him at once at Madras.



LRA discovered later that it was one of KRR's pranks. Unfortunately some time later, when Sanjevi himself called Adige on the telephone, Adige chided him and told him to come off it. Poor Adige had then to go to Madras in response to a message from Headquarters, to get a thorough dressing down from Sanjevi

#### Devara : Constable Orderly, 1950 Model

When NK joined his first Sub-division in Kurnool in 1950, Devara was posted as his home orderly. Devara was not his name, but because he used that word (which was really a titular Telugu word for a divinity), to address NK following the prevailing practice, he was known in NK's home as Devara Orderly. He was no more than a village rustic, and his new incarnation as a constable could hardly hide his simple rustic beliefs and practices. But he was a good soul, pure concrete neck upwards, as Wodehouse would say

When NK would start out from home in his car, Devara would run to open the gate. This was an operation which he could not quite manage. When he opened one door of the gate and moved over to open the other door, the first one would swing back to the closed position. He would alternate thus between the two gates, opening one door, always looking back to see whether the door he had opened earlier was swinging back. He would then motion like a traffic constable to that gate, bidding it to stop. When NK showed him that a brick could be used as a stopper to prevent the door swinging back, he was filled with awe and admiration for the new master.

One day NK attempted his first smattering of Telugu to tell Devara that something lay dead in the next room. Devara registered deep shock and asked NK anxiously who had died ! Apparently NK had used the Telugu word for "someone" instead of "something"

Anonymous : A young Assistant Collector with a 'strong weakness' for drink. One day when NK called on him at his residence, he made his appearance, with just a single piece

of clothing, a dhoti, which was wholly in his hand, and not worn around the waist.

When NK narrated this to CVN, the latter promptly recalled a description in a P.G.Wodehouse novel, of a situation where one of his characters is in a fix, having been deprived of his trousers. The passage that describes this situation is vintage Wodehouse : “There comes a moment in every man’s life, when one asks oneself the question, do trousers really matter ?”

Dr.A.N.Subbaraman : Old time District Medical Officer, a good friend and a person with a homely sense of humour.

Dwelling on his service experiences in the army during World War II, he described what happened to his colleague in a trench in the war front in the midst of enemy fire thus : “suddenly a shell whistled past just over our heads; this was followed by a loud report. I then found that my friend had passed a broad motion”

Once a patient wanted to be reassured that a vasectomy would not render him impotent. His advice in homely language was :

சனி விட்டுதுன்னு இருங்கோ

Referring to the perils of potency, his advice in translation reads “Take this as the fortuitous end of the influence of Saturn in your life and as a good riddance of a deleterious impulse !”



Sub-Inspector Jayaraman : Ace detective and specialist in fowl thefts :

The wife of a senior bureaucrat, who raised poultry in her backyard, reported thefts of her fowls every now and then to NK, who was then Deputy Commissioner of the Madras City (Crimes). NK referred these cases to Sub-Inspector Jayaraman who was able to detect them promptly and recover and restore the fowls. The SI's technique turned out to be quite simple. He established contacts in the Poultry section of Moore Market, and got prompt replacements for the stolen fowls as and when the need arose. The lady who reported these cases seemed to have no difficulty (or qualms) in identifying the restored birds as the ones that were stolen, while NK found it intriguing that fowls could be identified with such speed and certainty to be the ones that had been stolen.

The dialogue of the deaf :

This is a phrase often used to describe two persons arguing at cross purposes. There was an interesting occasion which led NK to coin another similar phrase. In an argument with his daughter one day, his slight hearing impairment led him to misconstrue what she was saying and to protest. That led her to go on raising her voice to make her point, which NK continued to misconstrue further and to respond with increasing anger. Hearing the unusual disturbance, NK's wife came running anxiously into the room. After taking stock, she calmly asked NK why he was arguing so vehemently over something on which their daughter was in complete agreement with him. Realizing that his hearing had let him down, NK had to sheepishly confess that it was a case of being in "violent agreement with each other."



Sub-Inspector Muthukrishnan and the Kodaikanal Dacoity Case :

NK was worried when a dacoity case was reported from Kodaikanal. A few days later when he was driving to Kodaikanal to take stock of how the investigation was progressing, he was met on the way by Sub-Inspector Muthukrishnan who was coming in a jeep from the opposite direction. With great aplomb, the SI announced that he had detected the case, and the offenders were in his custody, in fact, in the very jeep in which he was then travelling. He then called out to the dacoits to appear before NK. They turned to be a bunch of meek under-nourished villagers, suggesting that a petty village incident had been exaggerated to appear like a dacoity. Sensing NK's doubts, Muthukrishnan asked him not to worry and he would have them successfully prosecuted in court. NK knew that this meant that the "dacoits" would confess in court to some minor offence, in return for a square meal.

Snippets from the parade ground :

Early morning drills in the Armed Reserve parade ground often threw up interesting snippets.

Between his two postings to Ramanathapuram District in 1957 and 1963, the following incident illustrated to CVN the small decline in disciplinary standards over these five years. The morning spell of drill would generally provide a small interval of rest for the squad standing at ease in the shade. In 1957, he overheard the officer in charge chiding the squad during that interval with "Stop talking !" In 1962, the chiding became "Stop talking loudly"

The early attempts to introduce Hindi words of command into the parades proved unsuccessful. Apart from the prevailing opposition to use of Hindi, it was thought that one other reason might have been that though the Hindi and Tamil words sounded identical, their meanings were terribly different :

**सावधान** , the Hindi word meant "Attention" while

**சாவு தான்** , the Tamil word meant "Only death"

The drill sequence for a promotion test one day, saw one constable, turned out spick and span, quite sure that it would get him noticed. Called upon to handle the squad, he gave the loud command, "Squad, ATTENTION". Unfortunately, the force of his delivery of the command, blew his new dentures out his mouth and they dropped to the ground in front of the squad. This was one of those rare occasions when the stern discipline of the parade ground was unable to contain the laughter of the entire squad.

Tailpiece



A male driver is pulled over by a cop and the following conversation takes place:

Man: What's the problem officer?

Cop: You were going at least 75 in a 55 zone.

Man: No sir, I was going 65.

Wife: Oh Harry. You were going 80.

(Man gives his wife a dirty look.)

Cop: I'm also going to give you a ticket for your broken tail light.

Man: Broken tail light? I didn't know about a broken tail light!

Wife: Oh Harry, you've known about that tail light for weeks.

(Man gives his wife a dirty look.)

Cop: I'm also going to give you a citation for not wearing your seat belt.

Man: Oh, I just took it off when you were walking up to the car.

Wife: Oh Harry, you never wear your seat belt.

Man: Shut your mouth, woman!

Cop: Ma'am, does your husband always talk to you this way?

Wife: No, only when he's drunk.