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SNIPPETS–IV
 (Bits & Bytes of Shared Memories)
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Here we are then, with Snippets – IV. We remind readers again for contributions of snippets from their experience. The funny side to police life should not to be lost to society or posterity.



N.Ramiah Pillai : A promoted officer, with a frail frame, but with nerves of steel, and an unusual combination of guts, a sense of humour, commonsense and sound professional expertise. As his headquarters ASP in South Kanara district, CVN learnt a lot from him and between them grew a relationship of mutual affection and regard.

Years later Ramiah Pillai who was then SP at Cuddapah, invited CVN who was travelling by train to lunch at the Railway retiring rooms during the train halt at Cuddapah. The leisurely pace of the lunch made CVN restless because the halt was a brief one. Sensing his unease, Ramiah Pillai patted CVN on the back and assured him that the train would not leave till CVN returned to his carriage after lunch. It was then that CVN noticed that Ramiah Pillai had also invited the guard of the train to join all the police officers at lunch. That was the practical person that Ramiah Pillai always was !



D.P.Kohli : Architect of the Central Bureau of Investigation and Exemplar of quiet efficiency, perfect organization and impeccable integrity. This was his classic advice to his officers : “If you encounter any obstacle to your work, try to get rid of it; otherwise try to get over it; or finally, get around it, and go ahead with your work !”

From the days of the Raj :

Under the British Raj, the regulations for police uniforms reserved trousers to be worn only by the ‘officer’ cadre. Subordinate ranks from Inspector downwards had to wear khaki shorts, with shirts tucked in and with a belt to maintain order at the waist line. This dress ill-fitted the contours of officers with a liberal build of body. Visualise this when you read the next paragraph.

An inspection note recorded by an imperious British officer in a police station was sharp and highly derisive in its reference to the parade and drill put up by the Inspector and his men. It read “The only thing that stood out in this morning’s drill was the Inspector’s hydrocele !”

The following is another inspection note of those days : “I find the Sub-Inspector’s work totally unsatisfactory. I therefore award him a censure. Office will comply with the formalities” ----- A far cry indeed from the present day insistence on reasonable opportunity to explain and all that stuff !



More snippets on Singam :

Singam’s (M.Singaravelu) sense of humour centred often on a play with words, typically with his name, Singam, which, in Tamil, means lion. When he was Commissioner of Police, Madras, he sent a New Year greetings card to his Assistant Commissioner, C.T.Lyons, inscribed “From Lions to Lyons”. CVN happened to see this card on Singam’s table, and playing similarly with his own name, Narasimhan, which is the name of the half-lion half-man avatar of Vishnu, CVN later sent Singam a New Year card inscribed “From a half-lion to the full lion”. On receiving this card, Singam rang up CVN merely to laugh aloud, and then say that it was not Singam speaking, but the lion roaring with laughter !

Singam would show his irrepressible style on many occasions in surprising ways. On one occasion, senior officers had gathered, as was customary, for a group photograph with the medal awardees after the annual medal parade put up by the Madras City Police. At this gathering it was usual for the IGP to formally congratulate the COP on the parade performance. On one such occasion, Arul who was the IGP missed congratulating Singam who was the COP, and proceeded straight to sit down for the photograph. Singam made his point while saving embarrassment for everyone, by suddenly walking up to Arul and vigorously shaking his hands with the very audible observation, “Congratulations Sir ! We had a very good parade !”



K.F.Rustamji : Founder DGP of the Border Security Force, gifted with a fine sense of humour. He was a model of physical fitness even in his advancing years, and was unsparing in his criticism of officers who did not bother to keep their waistline within limits. Even as he sighted an approaching officer with an unseemly bulge in the middle, he would exclaim “There comes Capricorn” or “There comes Cancer”. CVN was puzzled when he first heard this expression in KFR’s company. KFR then pointed out that the approaching officer’s belt was not in the middle Equatorial position of his bulging belly, but had to be accommodated above or below at positions corresponding to the Tropic of Cancer or the Tropic of Capricorn !

Corruption in the language of cricket :

CVN, as Director CBI, had once gone to N.K.Mukherji, the Cabinet Secretary, to convey some information received against a high ranking officer. A quiet preliminary enquiry was then made which confirmed the credibility of the information. CVN again met NKM with the result of the preliminary enquiry and pointed out that the matter called for a regular open investigation. A great lover of cricket as he was, NKM used that game's dialect to express his reaction with the words "So you have gained a first innings lead against so-and-so ?" CVN replied "Yes, I may finally win the match also, provided the umpire is fair". NKM had a hearty laugh and assured CVN that the umpire would definitely be fair !

Authority of a senior vs experience of a junior :

While undergoing practical training in Pithapuram (Andhra Pradesh) in 1949, CVN engaged in his first investigation with examining a witness and recording his statement. Just then a young advocate barged in and insisted on being present when the witness (his client) was being examined at the Police Station. In the absence of the regular Sub-Inspector, CVN felt unsure of how to handle the situation. Sensing this, a senior Head Constable came in from the adjoining Station Writer's room with a copy of the Cr.P.C and, flaunting it before the advocate, asked him pointedly to show any provision in the Cr.P.C which permits an advocate to be present during police examination of a witness. The advocate felt stumped by this poser. On his silence, the HC went on to say that he could even be hauled up for obstructing a police officer in the performance of his duty ! The advocate withdrew at once and left CVN in peace. The experience demonstrated how experience and resourcefulness matter much more than mere hierarchical rank in practical police work !

C.Balakrishna Odayar : Risen from the ranks to retire as a Superintendent of Police.

He was always obsessed by an urge to make someone or the other responsible for everything so that he himself could be responsible for nothing. One day when Odayar saw NK struggling to open the bonnet of his car, he promptly advised NK to make his driver responsible to open the bonnet !.

Weird ways of the bureaucracy :

As SP of Tirunelveli District, NK sent up a proposal which would make for better use of the manpower resources. It involved closure of a small police outpost serving a quiet area, and shifting its manpower to a problem-ridden police station where the manpower was not adequate. Government promptly ordered closure of the outpost and abolished the posts of its manpower, while at the same time ordering that the augmentation of the strength of the police station could wait for better times !

In the mid-50s, the Consular Corps were required to sell their imported vehicles to the State Trading Corporation whenever they imported replacements. Vehicles so acquired by the STC were then supplied at low prices to Government Departments. A number of posh Station Wagons were thus supplied to the Madras City Police for its Law & Order needs. These vehicles were allotted to the Commissioner and his Deputy and Assistant Commissioners. The vehicles were fitted with wireless sets and enabled these officers move around the City actively, and to rush quickly to problem spots. This naturally had a profound impact on subordinate alertness and public confidence. The visibility of the officers in these vehicles, occasionally and incidentally at some private functions, while on their rounds of the City, rankled in the minds of some bureaucrats. Thinking of pinning them down for irregular usage, the Home Department called for copies of the log books of the vehicles. Aditya Nadar who was then Deputy Commissioner, Law & Order, deliberately reported that making such copies would take a lot of time and effort which existing staff were too overworked to take on, and hence would require sanction of a post of one clerk for 3 months to do this work. Believe it or not, the post was sanctioned and three months later Government received a huge bulk of log book copies full of round-the-clock entries, all uniformly saying "Patrolling station limits" ! For once, the bureaucracy felt foolish at its own narrow vision, while the clerical staff at Police Headquarters felt happy with an extra post for three months, thanks to Aditya Nadar !



K.R. Shenai : DGP : Great for helping anyone in distress who went to him for help; and a genius for Public Relations.

On one occasion, as COP Madras, he asked for additional strength of 200 men to meet the needs of a special Law and Order situation in the City. He was told that available manpower was already stretched elsewhere and that he would have to manage on his own resources. He did manage with his resources and when asked how he did, his simple and straight answer was that he took recourse to his never-failing source of strength – a peg of whisky – and sure enough it worked and gave him the strength of 200 men to handle the situation !

Quoting from the scriptures :

In his early days as SP, CVN's habit of 'reading and assimilating as much as possible' had helped him to have a good grip over departmental rules, regulations and circulars. The Manager of the District Police Office, Kurnool (Andhra) was an old hand and felt greatly embarrassed when the young SP started quoting old circulars to point out inaccurate notings from the office. It happened that CVN was then using a green ink pen to make marginal queries on files. The Manager saw his chance in this circumstance, did some

research in the record room and ferreted out an old circular issued several years earlier during British rule, prohibiting the use of green ink in official notings. He promptly submitted it for CVN's perusal, with unconcealed glee, silently suggesting that he could also quote from the scripture with the same facility as CVN !

Correcting misinterpretation and misreading errors of higher-ups :

The annual conference of Collectors and SPs of 1957 was a pleasant event, its pleasantness derived mainly from its venue being the hill station, Ootacamund.

During the discussions on one of the subjects at the conference, there was a critical reference by one of the participants to an ASP not presenting a prosecution case properly in a court. At this point, Lobo Prabhu, the Home Secretary (an imperious ICS old-timer) bristled with the sarcastic comment, "What did this police officer know of the law and what business had he to conduct the case in court ?

CVN got up at this point and said "Sir, the ASP in this case was not an Assistant Superintendent of Police but an Assistant State Prosecutor !" To Lobo Prabhu's discomfiture, the whole hall broke into laughter and obviously reflected appreciation for the young SP who had made bold to correct the Home Secretary, who in those days was still considered a high and mighty mogul, whom no one would dare to contradict, much less correct !

A similar mixup in interpreting or misreading abbreviations in a case of murder in Sivaganga in the 1950s led to its acquittal by a High Court Judge known for his capricious and intemperate responses to arguments. After the case had been heard in court, the Judge perused in his chamber the hand-written police case diary in which the Inspector had noted that the ASP had also visited the crime scene along with him. The reference was to the Probationary ASP then under training at Sivaganga. The Judge misread the letters as APP and instantly concluded that the investigation had throughout been guided by the Assistant Public Prosecutor on the spot and was therefore flawed. He acquitted the case on this sole ground. CVN, as SP, was directed by Police Headquarters to deal with the Inspector for his misconduct. CVN immediately protested to the IGP that while it was bad enough for a true case to have ended in acquittal, it was worse that an honest Inspector was to be hauled up for the indifferent misreading of letters by the Judge. The IGP saw the point and dropped the matter.

A case of breach of protocol :

In a sensational case of robbery and murder of a Bank Accountant in Madras City in the early 1960's, NK, who was Deputy Commissioner (Crimes) at that time, was relentlessly engaged in tracking down the two offenders who were involved. Working on slender clues, one of them was finally located in an interior village in Uttar Pradesh, and

arrested in true film style, while proceeding in his baarat procession to be married.

There was information that the other offender, Mohammed Husain, who had been working as a film extra in a local film studio, had made his way to Pakistan and could be located in film studios in Lahore. NK therefore made efforts to set up contacts in the film industry in Bombay, who had film contacts in Lahore, to try and entice the offender to come to Bombay. These efforts were unsuccessful. Not willing to give up easily, NK telephoned to ask help from a senior bureaucrat in Karachi, who had worked with his (NK's) father in New Delhi in pre-partition days. This telephonic contact obviously showed up in the security monitoring mechanisms, and was reported to the External Affairs Ministry at New Delhi, who promptly said NK should be hauled up and his explanation obtained for this impropriety.

R.M.Mahadevan who was then Commissioner, Madras City ascertained the facts from NK. He had great regard for NK, and was clearly not willing to let the incident harm him in any way. He therefore wrote a letter to Foreign Secretary, Y.D. Gundevia, who was known to him personally, and asked NK to deliver the letter personally at New Delhi and also offer his regrets personally to the Foreign Secretary. NK did this with a lot of trepidation, but was greatly relieved to find that officer a warm and cultured person who obviously saw that bonafides could always excuse an impropriety that came from inexperience. His parting advice was "Young chap, you can chase criminals only up to our country's borders, not beyond, otherwise it is you who will get caught. I am sure you won't attempt this again !"

Tailpiece :

Great Moments In Law

Reported in the Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyers Journal, the following are questions actually asked of witnesses by attorneys during trials and, in certain cases, the responses given by insightful witnesses:

1. "Now doctor, isn't it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn't know about it until the next morning?"
2. "The youngest son, the twenty-year old, how old is he?"
3. "Were you present when your picture was taken?"
4. "Were you alone or by yourself?"
5. "Was it you or your younger brother who was killed in the war?"

6. "Did he kill you?"
7. "How far apart were the vehicles at the time of the collision?"
8. "You were there until the time you left, is that true?"
9. "How many times have you committed suicide?"
10. Q: "So the date of conception (of the baby) was August 8th ?"
A: "Yes."
Q: "And what were you doing at the time?"
11. Q: "She had three children, right?"
A: "Yes."
Q: "How many were boys?"
A: "None."
Q: "Were there any girls?"
12. Q: "You say these stairs went down to the basement?"
A: "Yes."
Q: "And these stairs, did they go up also?"

Great Moments In Law (contd)

Reported in the Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyers Journal, the following are questions actually asked of witnesses by attorneys during trials and, in certain cases, the responses given by insightful witnesses:

13. Q: "Mr. Slatery, you went on a rather elaborate honeymoon, didn't you?"
A: "I went to Europe, Sir."
Q: "And you took your new wife?"
14. Q: "How was your first marriage terminated?"
A: "By death?"
Q: "And by who's death was it terminated?"
15. Q: "Can you describe the individual?"
A: "He was about medium height and had a beard."

Q: "Was this a male, or a female?"

16. Q: "Is your appearance here this morning pursuant to a deposition notice which I sent to your attorney?"

A: "No, this is how I dress when I go to work."

17. Q: "Doctor, how many autopsies have you performed on dead people?"

A: "All my autopsies are performed on dead people."

18. Q: "All your responses must be oral, OK? What school did you go to?"

A: "Oral."

19. Q: "Do you recall the time that you examined the body?"

A: "The autopsy started around 8:30 p.m.."

Q: "And Mr. Dennington was dead at this time?"

A: "No, he was sitting on the table wondering why I was doing an autopsy."

20. Q: "You were shot in the fracas?"

A: "No, I was shot midway between the fracas and the navel."

21. Q: "Are you qualified to give a urine sample?"

A: "I have been since early childhood."