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SNIPPETS–V
(Bits & Bytes of Shared Memories)

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Here we are then, with Snippets – V. Our hope that Snippets would grow into an orchestra with many contributors joining in, has not materialized, and our compilations have remained virtually a duet by the two of us. Since we have not had any stories contributed by others, we may have to regrettably suspend further issues of Snippets . We hope an inflow of fresh stories will enable us to resume with Snippets VI at an early date.

F.L.Underwood : One of the last British IP officers to leave Madras.

His prime activity during his frequent District inspections was to go hunting for crocodiles which abounded in the local canals and for tigers in the Nallamalai forests of Kurnool District. The local staff of course had to collect and keep ready for his programme the latest intelligence on sightings of crocodiles and tigers in the district.

Camping once in the remote Peddacheruvu Forest Rest House in the hope of bagging a tiger, his wait for 3 days went in vain. On his last evening there, when he went out for a short walk, a tiger came out of the bushes and stood in front of him, almost face to face. Poor Underwood beat a hasty retreat, cursing himself for not carrying his gun at that time.

He would drive around the bumpy district roads in an old rickety Oldsmobile car. On one trip he asked his wife who was in the rear seat, “Winnie, what is that rattling noise at the back ?” Taking a dig at his love for his rickety car, she shot back, “Don’t you see Freddie, they are my bones !”

Old colonial forms of speech : The early 1950s still had a persistence of the old colonial forms of address. When NK joined Kurnool Subdivision, one of his first callers was Inspector Gnanananda Sarma of the Headquarters Town Circle. When the Inspector asked “When will His Honour come to the Station”, NK was puzzled and replied that he was not aware of the arrival of any visiting judge at any Railway station. The Inspector corrected himself to ask, “When is Your Honour visiting the Town Police Station ?” With light dawning on him, NK replied with a tentative “OK, tomorrow morning”.

There were also in those days, a sprinkling of Sub-Inspectors in charge of Police Stations, insisting on writing their case diaries in English, or rather, their version of English. Typically one encountered usages like the following in the literary works of Sub

Inspector Ramakishtappa :

“The neighbourers chased away the robbers”

“The dead body lay in the field watching the villagers”.

M.Singaravelu (Singam), the indefatigable wordsmith :

In 1960, when the political executive introduced the creation of additional posts in the same rank as IGP to facilitate posting preferred officers as Police Chief, the redoubtable Singam (M.Singaravelu) coined a special phrase to describe the new phenomenon. Drawing from medical terminology of Mycins to deal with problems like Tonsillitis or Colitis, he wrote that whenever Government was afflicted by IG-itis, it resorted to remedies like Special-O-Mycin or Additional-O-Mycin !!

Another story recalling M.Singaravelu (Singam) :

Once a hot dispute arose between the Mechanical Branch and the Security Branch of the Southern Railway over frequent thefts of fishplates from the railway track in a particular area. Maintenance staff were blamed for not fixing the fishplates tight enough, while the Security staff were criticised for slack patrolling. Chief Mechanical Engineer Braganza, known for his pugnacity and aggressive language, made some caustic observations in the file, uncomplimentary to the Security Branch. Singam, who was then Chief Security Officer, Southern Railway, took exception to Braganza's noting in the file and recorded his response in such a biting manner that Braganza immediately closed the file with a single line order, “Cease Fire !”

B.A.Harvey : A jolly old Anglo-Indian officer who decided to migrate to Britain along with the Britishers who were leaving soon after Independence.

His arrival on his last short posting to Bellary District, was as usual, preceded by the arrival of his reputation – his strengths and in greater detail, his weaknesses. Fond of his liquor, his first task on arrival at Bellary was to call NK who was then in Hospet Sub-Division, to say that he was arriving at Hospet that evening and would NK make necessary arrangements, which essentially meant arranging for drinks. At that time Madras was dry with Prohibition in force. NK felt unequal to meeting Harvey's expectation of drink, so he called upon Thandu Mudaliar, a popular local socialite to do the needful.

The practice on such occasions was to accommodate visitors to Hospet in Kailash, the guesthouse on the 'dry' Madras side and entertain them in the evenings at Vaikunt, the guesthouse on the 'wet' Hyderabad side of the new dam on the Tungabhadra river that separated the two states on the outskirts of Hospet. (Kailash and Vaikunt were so named to represent the Saivite and Vaishnavite perspectives, which some would

mischievously say, also reflected the Prohibition divide).

Harvey and Thandu Mudaliar had a whale of a time and insisted that NK join them with a peg. The first few sips of this first (and also last) experience of whisky, whose taste NK found disagreeable, confirmed his instinctive dislike of liquor. He was also worried by the thought of his having to drive them back safely. That decided NK to spend the rest of the evening pretending to sip and pretending to enjoy himself thoroughly; and also it may be added, to spend the rest of his life as a total teetotaller.

Public interest versus bureaucratic disinterest :

Towards the end of the 1960s, NK started to work on an idea of a wireless network which would enable any police officer to speak instantly to any other police officer, wherever the speakers might be, anywhere in Tamil Nadu, and whether in a police station, police office, at home or in a vehicle on the road. It was clear that instant oral communication of information from field levels and of direction from supervisory levels enabled by such a facility would have a far-reaching impact on the speed and effectiveness of police work. Based on this concept, he got Sarangapani the State Radio Officer, to work out a full technical scheme for its implementation.

Central to Sarangapani's solution was a microwave trunk circuit supported by a chain of hilltop repeaters which could link directly by line of sight into all the district wireless networks in the plains below. Expecting that Government would not sanction the expenditure for this trunk circuit, estimated then at around Rs 60 lakh, NK formulated a proposal to get it funded with foreign aid under the Colombo Plan. However, even the possibility of such a free foreign contribution would not persuade the P & T Department to release the needed wireless frequencies, simply because that would cut into their national control of all wireless frequencies from which they drew huge revenues.

In a bid to persuade the P & T to release the needed frequencies, NK sought an interview with Shenai, the Secretary, Ministry of Communications. Shenai would not budge, but offered as a solution, that the P&T would itself provide on a suitable rental, all the Microwave circuits and services that the Tamil Nadu Police wanted. In a tactical move, NK conceded that in all fairness, this could be considered if specifications, costs and time frame of the P&T offer were furnished. These details which Shenai provided soon after, gave NK what he wanted, viz. a basis for a clinching argument.

In a final meeting with Shenai, NK showed that the P&T offer envisaged provision of only 50 percent of the needed circuits in a five-year time frame, and at an annual rental equal to the capital cost of the Project as per the quotation NK had earlier obtained from Bharat Electronics. Confronted with these facts, Shenai had to admit the P&Ts obstructive position to be unreasonable. He simply threw up his hands and said

“OK, OK, I surrender. You can have the P&T clearance for the circuits !” With this clearance, and a subsequent financial sanction by Government which finally saw the merit of the project, the Tamil Nadu Police was able to establish the first and only dedicated Police Microwave Project in the country. The P&T of course, decided that they would never let this happen again !



K.V.Raghavan, old time stickler for decorum and facts :

During a meeting of district officers held by the Collector of Tiruchi District to review incidents of the day arising from the violence of the Anti-Hindi agitation, and plan appropriate counter-measures, the local Highways Divisional Engineer started to state in a casual, conversational manner, “I believe there was large scale arson in Karur and several buses were burnt” Already distraught and tense over mounting incidents reported from several places, KVR, who was SP of the district, flared up and pointing his forefinger to the Divisional Engineer, told him in a sharp tone, “Look here Mr....., we are not interested in your beliefs. Give us facts. Do you know that there was arson ?” The Engineer piped down at once. KVR’s sharp intervention shut out all further rambling talk based on hearsay, rumour and gossip in the review discussions thereafter.

The Office Manager vs the Sergeant Major : The Pen is mightier than the Sword .

The Manager of the District Police Office in South Kanara District and the Sergeant Major of the District Armed Reserve fell out over some trivial personal matter. As a result the the latter stopped sending police vehicles under his control for use by the Police Office staff. When a large consignment of stores from State Headquarters arrived by rail one day, the Manager sent a note asking for a vehicle to clear the consignment from the railway station. He managed to issue the note when the stipulated period for clearing the consignment was about to expire. The Sergeant Major rejected the request, making the mistake of saying so in a written reply. This led to delay in clearing the consignment and incurring heavy demurrage charged by the railway. Finally, the Manager hired a private lorry, arranged to pay the demurrage and cleared the consignment, and then put up a strong note to the SP bringing out the facts to show how the Sergeant Major’s obduracy had resulted in avoidable expenditure to Government. The SP had to order recovery from the Sergeant Major, who finally learnt to his cost that it does not pay to antagonize the bureaucracy.

Vigilance & Ant-Corruption in olden times :

There was once a postmaster serving in the districts in the pre-Independence days. Of uncompromising rectitude, he devised his own unique system for the prevention and detection of corruption among his post men. He would drop a quarter anna coin (64 such coins to the rupee in those days) into randomly chosen post boxes in his jurisdiction. Postmen who turned in the coin they found in the post boxes in their beat were rewarded as honest, and those who did not were punished appropriately for

misappropriation !

Years later, this story would often be narrated by CVN during his Anti-Corruption assignments, in his meetings with Anti-corruption officers pointing out the need and scope for innovative measures on the initiative of the officers themselves in their respective fields of work. Of course, CVN never mentioned that the postmaster was his grandfather !!

A snippet from the parade ground :

The occasion was a promotion test on the Armed Reserve parade ground at Tirunelveli to test fitness of Head Constables for promotion as Sub-Inspectors. CVN, NK and K.V.Subramanian who were the members of the Board conducting the test, stood on one side watching the performance of the candidates. At one stage, a Head Constable was asked to demonstrate how he would instruct an imaginary squad in front him on how to perform arms drill. Even as he was explaining some points to the squad, CVN, NK and KVS engaged themselves in some small talk for a while when they suddenly heard the Head Constable shout "Look here !". Startled by this sudden interruption, they turned to look at the Head Constable, only to find that his command was part of his demonstration. Needless to say, they avoided loss of face by openly and promptly complimenting the Head Constable on his realistic performance and including him in the promotion list !

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:

Q: "Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?"

A: "No."

Q: "Did you check for blood pressure?"

A: "No."

Q: "Did you check for breathing?"

A: "No."

Q: "So, then it is possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?"

A: "No."

Q: "How can you be so sure, Doctor?"

A: "Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar."

Q: "But could the patient have still been alive nevertheless?"

A: "It is possible that he could have been alive and practicing law somewhere."

A client of a hospital where they made brain transplantations asked about the prices. The doctor said, "Well, this Ph.D. brain costs \$10,000. This brain belonged to a NASA top scientist and costs \$15,000. Here we have a policeman's brain as well. It costs \$50,000." The client asked, "What? How's that possible?" The doctor replied, "You see, it's totally unused."

A man went to the Police Station wishing to speak with the burglar who had broken into his house the night before.

"You'll get your chance in court." said the Desk Sergeant.

"No, no, no!" said the man, "I want to know how he got into the house without waking my wife. I've been trying to do that for years"

Police officer: Excuse me, but your dog has been chasing a man on his bicycle.

Dog owner: Are you crazy? My dog can't even ride a bicycle.

The man was in no shape to drive, so he wisely left his car parked and walked home. As he was walking unsteadily along, he was stopped by a policeman.

"What are you doing out here at 2 A.M.?" said the officer.

"I'm going to a lecture." the man said.

"And who is going to give a lecture at this hour?" the cop asked.

"My wife." said the man.

A cop pulls a car over on the highway for speeding. When he asks for the driver's license, the driver argued, "Speeding??? But officer, I was only trying to keep a safe distance between my car the the car behind me."

Policeman: "I'm afraid that I'm going to have to lock you up for the night."

Man: "What's the charge officer?"

Policeman: "Oh, there's no charge. It's all part of the service"

A man on a flight strikes up a conversation with the man in the next seat.

"I've got a great policeman joke. Would you like to hear it?"

"I should let you know first that I am a policeman."

"That's OK. I'll tell it really slow!"