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SNIPPETS – VII
(BITS & BYTES OF SHARED MEMORIES)

BY

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It has been a nice development that Padam Rosha has taken up the threads from where we left off in Snippets- VI and enabled us to come up with this issue of Snippets – VII. We trust other readers will also join in soon to contribute and ensure the continuance of the Snippets series.



Reminiscences of Padam Rosha :

1.

In 1956, Mahavir Tyagi then Deputy Defence Minister, visited Amritsar where I was posted as Addl SP . Tyagi said the Government wanted to commemorate certain historical events in connection with the 100th anniversary of the 1857 "War of Independence". He asked me to ascertain the facts and the location of the massacre of two 'Native'

regiments near Ajnala in District Amritsar.

Soon after the uprising in Meerut in May 1857, it was felt that two regiments located at Lahore were disaffected and were disarmed. A couple of days later, the men who belonged to East UP, deserted en masse and left Lahore Cantonment with the object of making their way home.

They forded the river Ravi opposite Ajnala. The then Tehsildar of Ajnala, Prem Nath, persuaded them to camp at the Tehsil and rode post-haste for Amritsar to inform the British Deputy Commissioner. The DC came to Ajnala with a company of British troops. The unarmed and demoralised Indians were taken out in batches and shot out of hand.

When I camped at Ajnala the event was well preserved in folk memory and many of the older residents described it as part of the conflict between the Goras (British) and the Kalas (Purbias). As the Indian troops were shot their bodies were thrown in two wells and covered up. These two wells were shown in the revenue records as Kalianwala Khoo (well). The villagers also recalled that the Tehsildar later contracted leprosy and died a miserable death.

2.

In 1946, I was working as a Research Scholar in the Punjab University at Lahore. A friend of mine Lt. Satbir Singh Butalia who was serving in the Navy, invited me for his wedding. Satbir belonged to a rich land-owning family of Gujranwala and the baraat was to go to Delhi. They hired a whole bogie which was attached to an over night train from Gujranwala to Delhi.

All through the night, one of the baraatis, a tall strikingly handsome Sardar, Ajit Singh

Butalia, would alight at every stop and walk up and down the platform followed by a liveried attendant bearing a silver tray with a silver flask of whisky and a silver tumbler. Out of curiosity, I joined him on his nocturnal strolls. He told me that he took his drinks only out of this one silver glass which he always carried with him. He claimed that up to that time he had drunk liquor worth over three and a half lakhs in that glass. He had been given a permanent Commission in the Army in 1933, but left after 4 or 5 years.

Many years later, in 1952, I was posted at Rohtak. At that time Rohtak was the only district in Punjab where prohibition was in force. Early one morning I was informed that Ajit Singh Butalia and his attendant, who were traveling in an overnight train from Faridkot to Delhi, had been detained for possession and consumption of liquor on the railway platform, a very technical infringement of the prohibition laws. The least I could do for the lovable Sardar who had no clue of the hazards of transiting through a "prohibited" area, was to go immediately to the railway station, get him released and put him on the next train to Delhi.

3.

In the early sixties, Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon, then Chief Minister Punjab, had called all DCs and SPs for a daylong conference. In the evening he hosted a dinner at his residence.

At the buffet table, Shiv Mathur was piling his plate really high with chicken, when Kairon came up behind him and said in a good-natured way "Dabbi ja, Dabbi ja", which would approximate to the English expressions "Keep at it" or "Press on regardless". I don't recall what Shiv mumbled in reply but Kairon sensed that he had embarrassed his guest and gracefully changed tacks and said "You see, when I lose my Chief Ministership I am going to set up a poultry farm and you are going to be my best customer"

4.

In 1975, Mirza Afzal Beg, our revenue Minister, was convalescing at Chashma Shahi. I had gone to see him and in the afternoon we were watching the sun go down. Beg Sahib asked me if I understood Persian and quoted a couplet by Iqbal which loosely translated says : In the mountains, the rivers and the sunsets I have seen God unveiled.

One of the most magnificent sights I have beheld is the Nanga Parbat at dawn. Nanga Parbat is at the western end of the Himalayan range where it collides with the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush ranges in a tortured maze. If you can be in the heights above Gulmarg on a cloudless dawn, look due north. At 50 or 60 miles the Nanga Parbat bathed in orange, dominates the horizon, dwarfing everything around it. But to feel the sheer awe it inspires, you have to see it from the other side. John Keay (The Gilgit Game) is at Gor, an Outpost at 16,000 feet above Gilgit, and this is what he writes :

Turn back from the peaks of the Karakorams and face due south. Here lies the true horror of the Himalayas. This time there is no deep and distant perspective; the horizontal is unrepresented.. You are staring at a wall; it rears from the abyss at your feet to a height for which the neck must crane back. Such is Nanga Parbat the naked mountain, its navel now confronts you. More a many-peaked massif than a single

mountain, Nanga Parbat marks the western extremity of the Great Himalaya; it is a buttress worthy of its role. Beautiful is not an appropriate adjective. An uncut stone it impresses by its dimensions, not its shape.

Edge now a little nearer to the extremity of your vantage point. But move carefully; a steady hand and nerves of steel are called for. And when you are to look over, lie down. For between you and Nanga Parbat there is nothing. The cliffs above Gor are sheer for three-quarters of a vertical mile from where you lie. Below that they continue for another mile and half of broken precipice and crag. It is probably the most frightening declivity in the world - and one only rivalled by that which faces you. Nanga Parbat too rises straight out of this trough. The top of the mountain is 26,500 feet above sea level, the bottom of the trough is 3500 feet. At a range of ten to fifteen miles you are seeing in one uninterrupted sweep the greatest slope on the crust of the earth, 23,000 feet of elevation.. That's four and a half miles from the bare black rock along the topmost ridges, down through the fields of snow and ice, down the precipices and overhangs, down the long winding glaciers, down the forest and scrub, and down the steep and broken slopes of gravel to the cliffs at the bottom.

A few more reminiscences from CVN :



Dharma Vira, the legendary Civilian who headed the National Police Commission (1977-81) of which CVN was the Member-Secretary, had remarkable qualities of grace, elegance and bonhomie which overflowed hierarchical barriers in his inter-action with people.

When the NPC visited the hill-districts in Uttar Pradesh, DV surprised the Members of the Commission by taking them on an evening stroll to a small shop in a side lane in Badrinath bazaar, vividly recalling his last visit there three decades earlier, to savour tasty jilebis ! Hardly had they recovered from admiration for his zestful memory, when he floored them by leading them further to another shop of the same vintage in a remote corner which specialised in samosas ! DV was then 73 years 'young'!

While on a visit to Shillong, DV noticed CVN's discomfort from a bad cold and recurrent sneezing with a runny nose. At the end of the day when all had retired to their rooms in the Circuit House, DV's Private Secretary, Satya Pal came to CVN's room and conveyed to him in a low tone DV's suggestion that the only effective cure for CVN's cold was to take some brandy which was available with DV ! Satya Pal added that DV had specially asked him to be cautious and apologetic even while making this suggestion, knowing CVN's aversion to alcoholic drink ! CVN politely declined the suggestion but remained touched by DV's concern for his well-being and also DV's due recognition of CVN's sensitivity to liquor.

S of the West Bengal cadre, hailing from an orthodox family, was himself an ardent practitioner of some daily religious rituals. While on deputation with the Intelligence

Bureau at its Headquarters, he applied for casual leave for a couple of days to attend to a personal religious matter. His Joint Director was D, known for his imperious and snobbish style, besides his kinship with the then Home Secretary. D sent for S and told him in brief and stern terms that officers in the IB were not expected to seek leave to attend to such relatively minor personal matters. Thereupon S drew himself up and talked back to D, insisting on the leave and adding in a measured tone that he was giving D advance notice of coming up again the next month for another spell of leave on similar grounds ! D remained frozen and speechless as S left the room and later went on his leave. It happened that sometime thereafter S left the IB to return to his parent cadre, and later quit the Service to take up practice as a regular advocate for which profession he was fully qualified. It was an ironic turn of circumstance that soon after, D, who thought he was a permanent custodian of the lofty traditions of the IB, was himself eased out of the organization. Shifted to another post when there was a change of government at the Centre, he too quit the Service on voluntary retirement.

From the corridors of the IB :

Once the Director of the Intelligence Bureau had sent a proposal that the Director be authorized to reserve an entire bogie for his use during any rail journey on official work. This was dealt with by L.P.Singh, the renowned workaholic Home Secretary who strode like a colossus on the MHA front in the 50s and 60s. He is said to have noted on the file in the following terms : “During my rail travel, I find a coupe good enough to accommodate me and my ego. This should be good enough for the DIB too !”

From the corridors of the FBI :

While on an official visit to the FBI (Hqrs) in Washington in 1977, CVN happened to pass through a room where some junior officers were seen chuckling over some passage in what appeared to be an in-house news-letter or some such paper. Yielding to the curiosity of CVN, they showed him the following passage that had caused their laughter : “Getting something done around here is like mating elephants because :

- (1) It is done at a high level.
- (2) It is accomplished with a great deal of roaring and screaming.
- (3) It takes two years to produce results.

Heard from V.R. Lakshminarayanan :

A.S.P Iyer of the old ICS was an erudite scholar with an enormous sense of humour, wit and wisdom. He adorned the Bench of the Madras High Court in the 50s. In his early days in the ICS under British rule, he had a few postings in the executive branch, as was the practice at that time. On his first posting as a District Collector, an elderly British officer who was the Superintendent of Police came up to call on him as per protocol. After some formal expressions of courtesy, he mentioned to Iyer how odd it was that an elderly person like him was required to go up and pay courtesy to a green-horn like Iyer. This comment instantly drew from Iyer his characteristic punch response : “Younger the King, more often has the older Minister to go to him with advice !” It was straight away brought home to the British SP that the Collector was the King, but willing to listen to the advice of the British SP as the Minister.