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SNIPPETS – VIII
(BITS & BYTES OF SHARED MEMORIES)

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It has been a nice development that Padam Rosha has maintained the momentum in taking us onwards from Snippets- VII with a fresh crop of stories. When someone like Padam with the long eventful years spent in sensitive police assignments with the Centre and the States in the country's hotspots like Delhi, Punjab and J&K, turns raconteur, one can be sure that that he will have many a tale to tell. What makes his stories specially interesting, is the simple warmth, at once human and humane, that marks his narrative of people and events. With this issue of Snippets carrying so many of his stories, we would like to call it the Rosha Edition ! We call upon other readers to also join in soon to contribute and ensure the continuance of the Snippets series.

Rosha writes -----

Purshindar Singh Phulka joined the Indian Police in 1942. He came from a well to do Jat Sikh family of Patiala. I met him briefly in 1945 when he was posted at Dharamsala (Distt Kangra) as ASP. My father was also posted at Dharamsala as the Distt Medical Officer. As it happened, my father fell ill and had to be taken to Jullundur for treatment. Purshindar helped us out and was good enough to lend us his car and driver. I remember him as a gentle, soft-spoken, handsome young man.

At the time of partition in 1947, Phulka was posted as SP of the border district of Gurdaspur. The run up to partition saw increasing polarization among the people along communal lines, which was reflected in the administration and the police. The proportion of the communities in Gurdaspur district was almost even and the world capital of the Ahmadiyyas was located at Qadian in this district.. The Radcliffe line announced on 17th August 1947, cut through this district. It ran along the river Ravi giving one tehsil of this district to Pakistan and the rest to India.

It is the phenomenal extent of violence and atrocities which will distinguish partition as an event in history. Twelve million people were forced to move, both ways, across the bifurcated Punjab by the end of November while lakhs lost their lives. 83,000 women were officially verified to have been abducted and kept back on both sides. Each side sought to legitimize itself by stories and rumours of aggression by the other. Social complicity was visible everywhere and the rioters had a sense of immunity.

Some abiding images of the time are battered bodies lying on the roadside and on railway platforms; trains moving slowly across the countryside with people clinging like flies on the roofs ,windows and buffers; stray columns of smoke arising from burning

homesteads; harmless looking men and women turned looters; and the miles long kafilas of the wretched ousted from their lands and homes.. The old , sick and exhausted died in hundreds and the passage of these caravans was marked by hastily improvised cremations and graves.

Soon afterwards, it is said that Purshinder started having nightmares He said he was haunted by the faces of the dead, and kept hearing the cries of the women and children. He just could not sleep. Then one day early in 1948, he just disappeared, deserting his post and leaving behind his wife and children . Frantic efforts were made by the family and the govt to find him. They searched far and long but found no trace.

Years later, in 1951 a friend spotted him. in Jullundur wandering in saffron robes in the garb of a sadhu. He was re-united with his overjoyed family. The govt was sympathetic and after some time accepted his request for re-instatement in service. At that time the office of the Director, Medical Services, Punjab, was located at Kasauli .and Purshinder was called to appear for a medical examination. The evening before he was to appear before the board of doctors, Pushindar died of an overdose of opium. He would have been hardly 33 years at that time..

P.S. This Snippet may please be treated as strictly for private circulation. Even at a distance of half a century I would not like to hurt the sensibilities of the family

Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, the prototype of an 'effective' Chief Minister, did not hesitate to express his view that no politician could expect to wield real power unless he knew how to bend the administration to his wishes. Once while addressing a meeting of the DCs and SPs of the Punjab, he told us that most of us were willing to misuse our authority to favour friends or at the bidding of senior officers or even for illegal gratification, but when he asked us to do something, everyone set up a howl of 'political interference' !

In 1961, I was posted as AIG with the IGP Delhi, PL Mehta. The Akali party had started an agitation for the formation of a 'Punjabi Suba' - only this time the agitation was carried on in Delhi and not the Punjab. The Akalis would send 'jathas' of 20 or 30 people every day who would defy the prohibitory orders in Chandni Chowk, raise slogans and court arrest. They were sentenced to a week or ten days imprisonment.

This had been going on for a couple of months when we learnt that Kairon had complained to the PM that the Delhi police were too soft with the agitators who treated it as a tamasha and a sightseeing trip to Delhi.

Sure enough, a few days later, there was a summons from Bhagan Sahay, the then Lt.Governor of Delhi. The IG deputed NS Saksena, the DIG, who took me along for the meeting.

Bhagwan Sahay functioned from his residence and had a very informal and darbari style. He was half-reclining on a divan with officers in a semi circle. After pleasantries and hospitality, Shri Bhagan Sahay treated us to a long lecture on the dynamics of agitations, how they gathered strength and how they had to be put down. He said that they must learn that it does not pay to defy the prohibitory orders and the use of lathis and a few broken legs would not be amiss.

Saksena listened silently throughout and then said : ' Sir, I am here to uphold the rights of the citizens, not to trample upon them. I will only use that much force as is necessary to effect the arrest of the agitators. It is not my job to teach a lesson to any political party or its supporters".

There was pindrop silence and some red faces. Further discussions were hurriedly postponed. A month or two later Saksena was transferred back to UP.

On the 30th January 1971, the morning flight from Sirinagar to Jammu – a Fokker Friendship plane, was hijacked and taken to Lahore in Pakistan. The hijacker was Hashim Quraishi a Sub-Inspector of the BSF who was in uniform and carrying his service revolver. When the plane landed at Lahore jubilant crowds danced around it as a victory celebration. Maqbool Butt, President of the so-called JK Liberation Front was waiting at the airport and claimed credit for the hijacking. This Maqbool Butt was already something of a legend – having escaped from the Sirinagar Central Jail in December 1968, after he was sentenced to death for the brutal murder of a police Head Constable. (Twelve years later he kept his tryst with the hangman's noose , but that is another story).

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto also joined the crowds at the airport. It may be pertinent to recall that Mujibur Rehman's Awami League had got a majority in the Pakistan National Assembly in the elections held in December 1970, but the ruling junta was refusing to honour this mandate. Bhutto had, in his own style ,said that he would break the legs of any MNA from West Pakistan who dared to go to Dacca to attend the session there. Later in the evening the plane was blown up with a worldwide audience watching in horror on the TV... The passengers and the crew had earlier been taken by the authorities and lodged in a posh hotel.

This hijacking understandably caused an upsurge of anger all over the country, with the BSF in the eye of the storm. . The media and the politicians of all hues wanted heads to roll. GM Sadiq, the Chief Minister J&K came out with a statement absolving the local police and airport checking staff – what could they do, he said, when the hijacker went on board in a BSF uniform ?

PR Rajgopal who was the DD(G) at BSF HQ accepted responsibility for recruiting Hashim Quraishi and offered to resign, but the DG Rustamji, as always the quintessential leader, said the blame ,if any, was his. He said that double-agents were a fact of life and every agency gathering intelligence faced the risk that it may be foisted with a double-agent. I think it was his utter sincerity that convinced the nation and nobody doubted the bona-fides of the BSF.

At that time I was posted in the Delhi Police as DIG incharge of law & order. Belligerent crowds of 10/15 thousand at a time started converging on the Pakistan High Commission. Overnight we had to put up double barricades and searchlights around the Pak HC compound and also asked Pak officials staying outside to move in alongwith their families. For three days the High Commission was beseiged and the police bore the brunt of stones , sticks and brickbats. Our mandate was to avoid the use of lethal

force but in no case to allow the mobs to break into the High Commission. Over 300 policemen were injured but fortunately all were able to limp home at the end of the day. We made the most intensive use of teargas ever in Delhi – over 1200 shells daily.. Only once did Gopi Arora, the Deputy Commissioner find it necessary to order eight rounds to be fired in the air to keep the mobs at bay. The Press Counsellor in the Pak HC was S.N.Qutub, a classmate of mine from Govt College Lahore. He would come to the main gate two or three times every day to seek re-assurance on behalf of the families confined inside.

This hijacking had two amazing fall outs. Firstly, the Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi promptly banned overflights between Pakistan and East Bengal (Bangladesh). This had far reaching consequences in weakening the hold of Pakistani occupation forces in East Bengal and their eventual defeat later in the year. Secondly, the Pakistani authorities alleged that the hijacking was an Indian conspiracy meant to give them an excuse to ban the overflights. Hashim Quraishi was tried on this charge and sentenced to ten years RI- which he served..

Dr. Rashid Alvi was the popular Secretary of the Sirinagar Golf club when we first met and went on to become good friends. He had a house in the elite Barzalla area and a clinic in Batmalloo near the police HQ. He was about my age, affectionate with a very pleasant personality. He was very caring and indulgent with his patients.. His wife ran a welfare centre where indigent women were given free training in tailoring, embroidery and other handicrafts to make them self-reliant. They had three teenage daughters.

One night in 1990, soon after the start of militancy in Kashmir, three young men armed with Kalashnikov rifles, barged into Dr.Alvi's residence. One of them had earlier served the family as a domestic servant. The terrorists cut off the telephones, barricaded themselves in, and announced to the horror-stricken family that they had decided to take away the youngest daughter whom the ' mundoo' wanted to marry. It is difficult even to conjecture what the family had to go through that night. They must have pleaded, cajoled, invoked the teachings of the religion in the name of which the fundamentalists were acting, but the terrorists remained adamant.. In the end it seems that in order to buy a few hours respite Dr Alvi offered to get a Qazi in the morning to have a proper nikah before sending the little girl. The terrorists left threatening to return early next morning.

Within minutes, Dr Alvi, his wife, mother and the three daughters just got into the car and left Sirinagar – forever. They just drove to Jammu and then flew to Delhi and on to Malaysia. All I learnt later was that Dr.Alvi got a job there as a teacher in a medical institution. I would like to believe in the fairy tale ending that they lived happily ever after !

Another Hijacking.

It was a balmy day in Sirinagar in August 1976. Just as I reached office , I was informed by the Air Force Station Commander that the Delhi-Jaipur flight had been hijacked and

had crossed the Pakistan border.

The hijackers were five in number. They had timed their arrival at the airport to the very last minute so that they were rushed through the security formalities and the knives and dummy grenades on their persons were not detected. From their dress and speech they were easily identifiable as Kashmiris.

This time the Pakistani authorities were very correct and bent over backwards not to give offence to India. They did not lionize the hijackers, and refused to project any of their demands. They were taken into custody with only the assurance that their request for sanctuary would be considered. The plane , crew and passengers were sent back the same afternoon, so much so, that the suitcase which the hijackers had checked in, also came back .

The descriptions provided by the passengers and the crew included some valuable clues such as a tattoo A.H.D. on the back of the gang-leaders hand, a broken front tooth, etc. This was supplemented by the information collected by the Delhi Police who were able to locate the hotel in Fatehpuri where this gang had stayed for five days.

The counter-espionage branch of the J&K Police was headed by an outstanding officer, Abdul Majid Lone. The leader of the gang of hijackers, Abdul Hamid Diwani had come to his notice moving about as an itinerant preacher. In a remarkable achievement, Lone was able to identify Diwani and his four budding saboteurs, all from different villages, from the descriptions as tallied with his records.

Cinching evidence however, came from half-way around the globe. One of the passengers told us that the person in the window seat next to him had taken a number of pictures of the hijackers as they stood on the tarmac at the Lahore airport, talking to the authorities. The manifest showed that the passenger in this seat was an Australian. Within a couple of days the IB tracked him to his hometown and got the prints for us. The speed and certainty with which the entire network was pinpointed and neutralized, was greatly appreciated and Abdul Majid Lone was awarded the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Services.

Early in 1990, Abdul Majid Lone , who was living in Wazir Bagh, Sirinagar, after retirement ,was shot by the terrorists. He was flown to Delhi for treatment, but one of the bullets had pierced his liver and unfortunately he did not survive.

Syed Mir Qasim was the Chief Minister when I joined the J&K State as the chief of police, in March,1974. The very first thing he told me was that I should try and understand why India had fewer friends and supporters than it had when the State acceded to India in 1947. I would today like to pose the same question to all concerned countrymen. The question may be phrased better by asking why the average Kashmiri has lost faith in our professed ideals of democracy and secularism.

In Sirinagar, I inherited a lovely house with panelled walls, a "khatambandi' ceiling, superbly crafted furniture and carpets and an exquisite garden with tulips and strawberries. I failed to notice however, that I had also inherited a BSF contingent guarding my residence. In the very first week a colleague from the south came visiting.

As we sat down over tea he asked me "Why do you have the BSF guarding you? Dont you trust your own force?" I only hope I subsequently made amends for this singular lack of sensitivity.

Edgar Hoover, the legendary Director of FBI, was known for his carping criticism and punching pen. Exasperated at the prolonged reluctance of the Government to sanction fully the required financial support for the infrastructure of FBI, he is said to have recorded the following telling note in the FBI files.

" We, the willing, led by the unknowing are doing the impossible for the ungrateful. We have done so much with so little for so long, we are now qualified to do anything with nothing."

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Recalling some malicious and unfounded allegations made in the Senate against an unbending FBI, Hoover, in his last appearance before the House Appropriations sub-committee said : " Mr Chairman, I have a philosophy: you are honoured by your friends and you are distinguished by your enemies. I have been very distinguished."

----- gathered by CVN during his visit to the FBI