

SAM

A long, narrow hallway with arched doorways and potted plants, serving as a background for the text. The hallway is dimly lit, with light streaming in from the far end, creating a sense of depth and perspective. The walls are textured and aged, and the floor is made of stone or concrete. Several potted plants are placed along the sides of the hallway, adding a touch of greenery to the scene.

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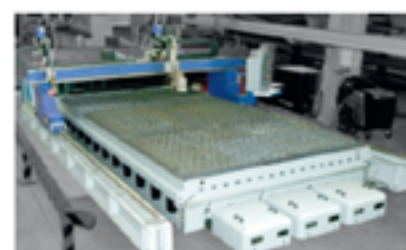
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~ ARMORIAL BEARING ~

The wings of progress are placed prominently on top with a pair of callipers passing through them, indicating a practical measuring instrument, symbolising control by measurement. The shield is equally divided between the tiger, representing strength and proud leader among living creatures of the world and an assembly of a shaft running through the boss of a spoked wheel which typifies design, machinery and production. The scroll above the shield carries the motto “sapientia et labor” in Latin meaning “by wisdom and labour”. This free translation would be appropriately through theory and practice.

The colours are maroon, white and green; maroon for strength and depth of learning, white for purity and balance of approach, and green for nature, realism and practice.

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President's Letter

Sunil Bajpai '80

Years ago, at an unfamiliar station, we were welcomed by a smiling and deferential rickshawwala, who took us to the destination without needing so much as a word and dropped us off on the porch to a charmed life.

The place took hold of us immediately, sheltering us and preparing us for life outside of it. We grew together, forging bonds that would last the lifetime, learnt about life itself, formed a worldview and, in time, undertook another journey to some distant place in the country.

This happened each year for over nine decades, but change is inevitable and more change would undoubtedly occur in future.

"O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

What defines Jamalpur? What is its essence that has remained constant through years of change, and which could be our legacy in the future?

Stories define an institution. There are some that others relate about us, both complimentary and

otherwise. But it's the stories we tell ourselves that are important.

Some of our stories are about extraordinary achievements: in sports or battle, academics or business. These stories involve the stars of our tribe and we gain in stature by association with them. But most of us lack the abilities of an olympian, so we may imbibe a lesson or two from the legends but do not see ourselves replicating the success.

Then there are stories of small personal triumphs, that begin "when I was an AME and was put on the mat by this fellow who thought no end of himself" These end with a guffaw and a swig from the glass. They regale our friends and liven up the party but do not define a legacy. They are selective memories of the punches we landed, made notable by amnesia otherwise. A lifetime of such victories doesn't amount to much.

The prodigious achievements of a few make us feel wistful and connected, though at risk of being undeservedly smug. Small triumphs are like the

tapas to complement the drinks: best enjoyed in moderation.

Finally, there are stories that speak to Sapientia et Labor. These stories aren't testimonials about ourselves. They reveal how we think and what we consider important. They show our priorities because we choose to tell the stories, which may not even be about members of our tribe, but in their telling we reaffirm who we are.

I've heard such stories from SAMs in their thoughtful moments, sometimes in their offices and at other times in less formal environments. These are stories of kindness, of humility, of wisdom in being authentic (sapientia entis realis) and the willingness to take the difficult or uncomfortable action.

Not told at the parties, these stories get less air time. They are also not prime fodder for the slapdash, often uncivil, world of WhatsApp or Facebook. That's unfortunate because their exclusion removes an important mechanism for establishing our culture and legacy.

We've benefited from the wisdom of those who came before us. They guided us when we needed help, took interest in our personal and professional growth, and groomed us for responsibilities that were sometimes due only decades later. Back then, looking towards our seniors was natural and instructive because the organisation changed slowly, if at all.

The good old days are over; upheaval looms on the horizon. In this world, youngsters might feel like they have straggled in when the party's over. It isn't true, of course. These are unprecedented times but they bring unprecedented opportunities too. The youngest members among us, no

less important than any other batches, need support and guidance so they may thrive in the environment they find themselves in.

Collectively we have a wealth of experience but the new environment is unfamiliar to everyone. Therefore, lessons from the past don't automatically apply. What we need is a thoughtful evaluation of who we are and what we truly stood for all these years.

The memories we have shall remain for as long as we live. Our place in the history of railways in this country is secure. Our place in the future would depend upon the values we communicate and the manner in which we do so. The SAM magazine could provide space for this conversation and exchange.

While its pages must now substitute for Gymkhana to allow members to relive their memories, the magazine could be the vehicle for reaching out to younger members so they have access to the legacy and support they need, just as much as batches before them did.

Stories are more durable than physical infrastructure or cadres or technologies. We know some that have exerted influence over civilization for centuries. The stories we tell in these pages and in our conversations have similar power to preserve our legacy and to provide sustenance to the members who would be there to raise a toast at the sesquicentennial.

- Sunil Bajpai '80

Editor's Ramblings

J L Singh '65 and Mayank Tewari '89

If Club Day comes, can SAM be far behind? Club Day Celebrations in the times of COVID have gone virtual and SAM has gone digital. Looking at the brighter side of things, we are connecting with Sams across the World more frequently and with greater ease. And a digital SAM magazine is accessible to the entire community, simultaneously, on the 14th of February itself - a thought that makes us very happy!

While the virtual world bridges distances we still yearn for the face-to-face-chat-sessions, honed into a fine art while at the night mess and on the terraces of good old Gymkhana and continued ever since. While those get-togethers may still be a while away, the physical copy of SAM is not. The perseverance of a few, in getting us enough advertisements despite the pandemic, has ensured that SAM Club Day 2021 shall be delivered to you as a physical copy as well. A special thank you to those few knights in shining armour for fuelling our efforts to maintain an engaged and connected SAM community.

Interestingly, though the SCRA scheme was launched in 1927, it took 40 long years before, in 1967, a concept was born – the concept of a magazine to keep the Sam community in touch. The brainchild of S K Chopra '64 (Chopsy), SAM started as a Newsletter that was pasted on the notice board at Gymkhana. The idea caught on immediately, evolved and expanded very fast into the magazine that we know. It is heartening to note that despite all kinds of difficulties and challenges, SAM has survived for more than 50 years: we are now in our 54th.

If the late 60s were early years for SAM, by the early 70s an institution was in place and there has been at least one issue of SAM every year, since. We made an effort to trace the Editors SAM who have passed on the baton over the years and have shared the list with you, on page 141 of this magazine.

As editors, what pleases and encourages us is the range of writing and thoughts that we are receiving across batches. A rising trend

we welcome is the increase in the number of contributions by Simis and the powerful impact this has had on enhancing the quality and readability of the magazine. Here is wishing for, and actively seeking, many more such contributions.

SAM Club Day 2021 is now the 3rd issue of SAM being published from Delhi in a post sans SCA world. We believe we are now on a firm footing with the magazine and feel bold enough to attempt the next adventure - growing our presence in the virtual world.

The portal jamalpurgyrkana.in is ready and waiting. Please expect to receive your login and password by the end of February 2021. Explore the portal and then help us to shape it into the platform you want. You could contribute to or even own an existing feature or help us develop a new one. Please drop us an email on edsams2020@gmail.com if you wish to be a member of the core team handling this portal. We see this as the next step forward in continuing

to maintain an engaged and connected SAM community.

We shall wait to hear from you.

As always, we enjoyed putting together this issue of SAM Club Day 2021. Hope you enjoy it too! Happy Club Day and Many Many Happy Returns of the Day!

Cheers!



J L Singh '65



Mayank Tewari '89



WITH BEST
COMPLIMENTS FROM

Premco

Milestones

Engaged:

- Priyansh K. Agarwal'2k9 engaged to Sukrati

Married:

- Anshu Priya'2k9 married to Mohit
- Devendra Kushwaha'2k9 married to Monika
- Atul Kumar Gaurav'2k9 married to Megha
- Prachi Lincon Patra'2k10 married to Aradhana
- Swadhinata Das'2k11 married to

Born:

- Jogendra Meena'2k7 blessed with a baby boy
- Vanchhit Johri'2k7 blessed with a baby boy
- Lokendra Meena'2k7 blessed with a baby boy
- Suryakant Munjewar'2k9 blessed with a baby girl
- Paras Chandra'2k7 blessed with a baby girl

Died:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| • Krishna Gopal Uppal '47 | 16.10.2020 |
| • Satya Mitra Bhargava '48 | 13.12.2020 |
| • Mrs. Manju Mithal W/O Anirudh Mithal '57
and mother of Rahul Mithal '85 | 18.12.2020 |
| • Mrs. Kusum Sehgal, wife of Vinay Sehgal '58 | 25.12.2020 |
| • Bharat Bhushan Modgil '67 | 01.10.2020 |

Letters to the Editor

My hearty congratulations to the editors and everyone involved in bringing out this issue. Apart from the contents, the design, the quality of print and photographs were a delight. A thorough professional job! A very high benchmark has been set. Keep it high.

Congratulations once again

- Anup Sahu '73

Dear J.L.Singh Sir and Mayank,

Congratulations for the excellent publication of the SAM 2020 Autumn Issue. It is entirely due to your tireless efforts in keeping the SAM spirit Alive. The e platform is very convenient and apt for the present day technology of SMART phones, Tabs, Laptops. It saves a lot on printing costs for which we used to struggle. In Corona times handling printed version has its own challenges.

My wife Jayanthi joins me in thanking you for publishing her Poem.

With Best regards

- Gajanan Malliya '79

Sir,

I just went through the pages of the magazine. I must appreciate that each page and its design is beautifully done. And the articles have been given personal touch esp in Au Revoir, dad-son duo, last rememberings. Overall I can just say one word in appreciation- 'Amazing'!

Thank you for the magazine.

Regards

- Poonam Kumari Saha (SCRA 2013)

Great job. Very readable.
Nostalgic as expected.
Kudos to both of you.

- Subhash S Godbole '63

Hello,

I am in receipt of e-edition of SAM Autumn publication. Thanks. It is a stupendous effort. Kudos to J.L. Singh & you. Thanks too for getting my article included. It sure would gladden the hearts of us 1955rs.

I do have another request. I keep scribbling something or other and about what I wrote recently there is a dispute between me and Masihuzzaman. I'd say that in December 1961, Mr. PN Mathur (1932) was the CMENR. Masihuzzaman differs. Maybe it'd be possible for a N. Rly SAM to capture the incumbency board and WhatsApp it to me at 9448905255. It is not very important and if it is a hassle, please ignore this request.

Regards & Best Wishes.

V. Narayanan

We would like to hear a lot more from you

✉ write to us at "Editor SAM, P.O. Box 30, New Delhi, 110001"

@ send an email to edsams2020@gmail.com

🌐 Reach us at jamalpurgymkhana.in

Flood us with news, views, ideas, opinions...

- Eds

Man Mohan Suri '45

- J L Singh '65

Born on the 13th of January 1928 at Lahore, Man Mohan Suri began his academic career by studying at home in Hoshiarpur up to the eighth standard. Even after matriculating from a Government School at Gurdaspur, it would have been difficult to foretell that this young lad would evolve into a world-renowned engineer and inventor. After graduation from Government College at Lahore in 1945, he joined as an SCA at Jamalpur as a member of the 1945 batch.

He started his working career as any other Sam passing out of Jamalpur. He became an Assistant Production Engineer at the Jamalpur Workshop in 1949 and Assistant Mechanical Engineer at Howrah in 1951. From 1954 to 1958, he was posted in London, UK, as a Railway Inspecting Officer with the Directorate General of the Indian Stores Department. Later, he was posted as a Joint Director (Diesel) at the Central Standards Office at Simla (now Shimla). It was only in 1957 that the Central Standards Office was amalgamated with the Railway Testing and Research Centre at Lucknow to form the present-day RDSO.

It was in 1955, when he was posted in London, that the idea of what came to be known as the Suri Transmission struck Man Mohan Suri. He was only 27 at that time. Having got the idea, he realized that it was so simple that he found it difficult to believe that it would work. Working on the idea, after as little as one year, he applied for a patent. Not just one patent, but he had to take four different patents in this connection - for fluid mechanical synchronizing coupling, controls, safety devices and the transmission itself.

Of course, it was his good fortune that he was posted in London at that time and had access to facilities for research and experimentation which might not have been available in India. Suri recalled later that he had incurred a heavy debt during the experiments and only a loan by a British bank made the experiments feasible and the results possible.

What is this Suri Transmission that took the world by storm? In short and without the technical jargon, it was the perfect solution to the problem of avoiding waste of a diesel engine's power.



Man Mohan Suri

The problem had exercised the minds of railway engineers for half a century and its magnitude could be judged from the fact that 20 to 25 per cent of diesel power was considered a "normal waste" at that time. It was essentially a transmission for transferring the output of the diesel engine to the final drive through a fluid-cum-mechanical coupling. Suri's invention was greeted with acclaim everywhere except in his own country where bureaucracy sought to pour cold water on his enthusiasm. At one stage, he even thought of resigning from the Indian Railways. He had received numerous lucrative offers from foreign locomotive manufacturers.

A brilliant engineer with a scientific bent of mind would have been lost to the country but for the intervention of Karnail Singh, then Chairman

of the Railway Board. During one of his routine visits to Britain, Karnail Singh came to know of Suri's work. After consulting British experts of the utility of the invention he extended all possible help and assistance to the latter.

After his stint at RDSO he was deputed as Director CMERI (Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute under CSIR) - handpicked by the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawarlal Nehru, to promote research in engineering so that the country would not remain dependent on imports for capital goods. It was here that he and Chandra Mohan, Padma Shree and founder of Swaraj Tractors, started their pioneering work on the Swaraj Tractor. When transferred from RDSO, the staff of the Diesel Wing recorded their



The Samadhais - R C Tandan & M M Suri

farewell address in words. A copy of the address can be seen on this page.



In 1968, Man Mohan Suri resigned from the railways to formulate a consultancy called MM Suri & Associates, one of the first turn-key consultancies of the country. He was already introducing the concepts of harvesting solar and wind energy to the government along with opening up to computer technology.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Suri wanted to give the advantage of his expertise to the country. He did so by setting up SAN Engineering and Locomotive Company Ltd. at Bangalore (now Bengaluru) in 1969. Set up as a locomotive manufacturing company, it grew in leaps and bounds over the years. Today, SAN is a multi-product, multi-market enterprise that provides solutions in all segments of industries. Starting

with chain-drive locomotives, it developed its first hydraulic loco by 1975 and was recognised as an R&D centre a year later. 1977 saw its 100th locomotive being turned out.

Unfortunately, Man Mohan Suri, the inventor, the scientist, the entrepreneur, Padma Shri awardee, passed away in Delhi on the 25th of July 1980 after a massive heart attack, hours before a meeting scheduled with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to discuss his ideas on development of the country. He was certainly a man with a vision far beyond his time.

Man Mohan Suri was a student of Indian philosophy and had read a great deal of Dr. Radhakrishnan. He was fond of music, Indian as well as Western, and wrote poetry in his spare time. He was married on the 6th of March 1949 to Suniti Varma at Simla (now Shimla). The couple had two children - Rajan and Mala. The son, Rajan, is Professor Emeritus, Manufacturing Systems Engineering, University of Wisconsin, USA, while the daughter, Mala, continued the Sam connection: in 1978, she was married to Rohit Tandan, son of Ramesh Tandan of the 1942 batch. Ramesh Tandan '42 and Man Mohan Suri '45 were the first Sam *samadhis*.

Jottings On a Brown Paper Napkin:

The saga of my train journey across Canada

- Atulya Sinha '83

Oct 7 – Indian Summer

It is a beautiful autumn day in London (Ontario) and the FM channel is forecasting a prolonged “Indian summer” – I wonder if I can claim the credit for having brought it with me!

As a string of holidays is coming up, I decide to buy a 12-day CanRail pass for \$395. That seems quite a fortune when converted to rupees, but I intend to make full use of it – and I start by reserving a seat for Vancouver on the Pacific coast, nearly 5000 km away! The journey will take me across five of Canada’s ten provinces: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.



Oct 9 – Silver and Blue

I jump out of bed before the alarm rings and pack my bag with a few essentials: passport, camera, Lonely Planet guidebook and a few clothes. I don my pullover and jacket as it is the easiest way of carrying them.

The connecting train to Toronto departs from London at 0755. A crisp sunshine greets me as I walk the short distance from the hotel to the station. Passengers are not allowed to enter the platform until the train arrives. I buy a loaf of bread, some cheese and a giant Pepsi. The train’s arrival is announced in both English and French, reminding me of tri-lingual announcements back home. The train rolls in, unseen. The platform doors open as if by magic. Uniformed attendants hover near the doors to usher the passengers into different coaches, depending on their destinations.

My coach is tastefully furnished in green and grey. As there are no seat numbers, I take a window seat to enjoy a good view of the countryside. Orderly little towns with names like Ingersoll, Woodstock, Brantford and Aldershot flash past. We make the 185 km journey in 135 minutes. I estimate the peak speed to be around 140 kmph.

Toronto’s platforms are clean but lifeless: no tea stalls, no loungers and no cows! The famous CN Tower, said to be the world’s highest freestanding structure, dominates the horizon. A gleaming subway takes

me to Platform 1, where Train no.1, The Canadian, is waiting to depart for Vancouver at 1100 hrs. Also known as Silver & Blue, this train consists of stainless steel coaches with dark blue trimmings. Some upper class coaches have observation domes. I make my way to the front of the train to photograph the twin diesel locomotives, also in silver and blue livery, before entering the coach that is going to be my home for the next 72 hours or so! What VIA Rail grandly describes as a “Transcontinental coach” seems remarkably like a Shatabdi chair car!

I nibble on biscuits, bread and cheese as the train crawls out of Toronto. I bite into a 70-cent apple as the urban landscape gives way to trees in blazing colours of autumn: red, orange, yellow and brown. Sunshine streams through the glazed window and it is comfortably warm. I feel relaxed after a hectic morning ... I am just dozing off when an apologetic voice at my elbow asks if I would like a free Coke to “make up for the heat.” I hear that the air conditioning has failed and VIA Rail is handing out cold drinks to “cool down” the passengers! I sip the Coke before sinking into a well-deserved nap...

Waking up an hour later, I look around my fellow passengers: some evidently tourists like me, families with children, a sprinkling of senior citizens. It strikes me that one sees more seniors than children in Canada, just the opposite of what one sees back home in India.

My professional eye notes that we are running on a single line, with quaint wooden telephone poles alongside. The track consists of wooden sleepers held with dog spikes, laid over very little ballast – hence high speeds are out of question. We lose over two hours for crossing a couple of goods trains. Although Canada’s Standard Gauge is smaller than the Broad Gauge back home, the wagons appear to be



The Canadian’ at Toronto

huge. The Canadian, which runs between Toronto and Vancouver three times a week, is the only long-distance passenger train on this route.

It is late in the evening when we reach Sudbury, known for its nickel mines and monotonous industrial landscape. The town’s best-known landmark is a gigantic version of the Canadian 5-cent “nickel” – but the guidebook discloses that the famous Big Nickel is actually made of stainless steel!

I try to locate the equivalent of a Wheeler’s bookstall, but my search is futile – the platform is windswept and deserted. It seems the Indian summer has gone. The few passengers who get down from the train

quickly disappear into waiting cars. The conductor beckons me back to my coach. I slip off my shoes, prop up my inflatable pillow and fold my jacket. Fortunately, I have never found it difficult to sleep in a reclining seat...



Stopping at a wayside station



Wooden telephone pole surrounded by the colours of autumn

Oct 10 – Two New Friends

I wake up to find that we have left Ontario behind and reached the province of Manitoba, which my guidebook calls a rugged, resource-based, lake-filled timberland. From the window beside me, I see a series of lakes and spot a few scattered cottages.

After a quick wash, I order coffee (“double cream and double sugar, please”) and pull out some bread and cheese from my bag. Later, while strolling around the train, I strike up a conversation with a stout, grey-haired gentleman who seems comfortably parked in a vestibule. He is an accountant in Toronto and he’s going to celebrate Thanksgiving at his mother-in-law’s home in Winnipeg. I enquire about his wife – she’s gone ahead by plane, naturally, he replies. But air travel is hardly natural, I remark. He looks surprised – after all, he’s making a 32-hour journey when he could have travelled by air in just 2 hours, at much lesser cost. I ask if this is his longest train journey. He laughs in reply and says that he has covered much longer distances by train in Australia and on the Trans-Siberian in Russia. But in Canada – he shakes his massive head in wonder – this is by far the longest train journey he’s made or ever likely to make. Despite his best efforts over the years, he adds, he could not persuade his wife to accompany him! He finds that I am a good listener and invites me for lunch.

A couple of hours later, I find myself sitting across my new friend at a table in the restaurant car. The décor is tasteful and the menu offers several vegetarian dishes at reasonable prices. My companion orders a salad and a small pork dish. I settle for a bowl of tomato soup and a grilled sandwich, followed by herbal tea. The food is piping hot and tastes delicious after several meals of plain bread and cheese, washed down with tepid Pepsi. My friend asks me about my job as he tucks into a huge plate of salad. Instead, I tell him how much I admire the unspoilt splendour of the countryside outside the window. He looks very pleased and tells me that Canada is blessed with the world’s largest supply of fresh water, including over 300,000 lakes! Most of them are still nameless and one can name a lake by paying a nominal fee.

Returning to my seat after lunch, I open my bag to take out the timetable, only to discover that I’ve packed my well-thumbed “Trains at a Glance” instead of the unfamiliar Canadian one! I resort to

borrowing a VIA Rail timetable from my neighbour across the aisle: a tall young lady with a serene – almost saintly – expression.

Maria is a medical student from Switzerland, visiting Canada from savings out of her pocket money. For some inexplicable reason, she is very curious about my camera. I hesitate to show her my primitive Minolta, until she takes out her battered Yashica, which turns out to be even more of an antique than mine!

Maria says she is getting down at Winnipeg to take the train to Churchill. I enquire if that is a person or a place. She replies that it is small village (named after an ancestor of Winston Churchill) which describes itself as Polar Bear Capital of the World. Churchill has a permanent population of just 1000 or so, she says, but it lies on the path of seasonal migrations of polar bears and boasts special snow vehicles for taking tourists for bear-sighting expeditions! Maria notices my interest and enquires if I would like to come along. I am flattered, but my daydreams are punctured by her gentle voice reading out the small print in her guidebook: daytime temperatures are likely to be a couple of degrees below freezing, with



One of the countless lakes



The author in front of the train

much lower night temperatures! The Swiss medico just shrugs – she had spent her childhood in an unheated cottage in an Alpine village and her backpack is bulging with warm clothing.

Winnipeg is one of Canada’s largest cities, stretching magnificently across the heartland of Manitoba. Its lights are visible from a long way off. We have covered nearly 2000 km from Toronto. As the train rolls into the station, I bid farewell to both my friends: Maria, the intrepid Swiss doctor and the train-loving Canadian accountant whose name I shall never know.

The train is going to halt for an hour and passengers may step out if they wish. I lock my bag and chain it to the seat (just in case!) before jumping off the train.

“The Forks” (named after a fork in River Winnipeg), is located just across the road from the station. With its numerous eateries and fruit stalls, it reminds me of Crawford Market in Mumbai. After stocking up on apples and pears, I buy a little brass key chain embossed with Winnipeg at a stall selling souvenirs and faux aboriginal artefacts. Later, while browsing through a small bookstall, I am tempted to buy a lavishly illustrated history of railways of Canada, but better sense prevails as I glance at my watch to find that my train is to depart in less than five minutes! I sprint back, pausing only a few seconds to admire the vintage “caboose” (brake van) displayed on a pedestal.

A slim teenager with slanting black eyes, high cheekbones and flawless brown skin has boarded the train at Winnipeg – I guess she is an Inuit. She places a magazine, a lipstick and a packet of cigarettes on the seat beside her. This is a “no-smoking” coach and the conductor becomes indignant. She argues for a while, but she repacks her bag and hastily moves to the next coach.

Meanwhile, the seats vacated by Maria and her backpack have been occupied by a young couple. They are accompanied by a little boy, who remains invisible until he begins to chant a rhyme which goes



Via rail ticket receipt



Maria the swiss medico



Souvenir stall at Winnipeg

something like “Mary, Jane, Robert, Andrews, HAROLD,” with a loud and shrill emphasis on the last name, guaranteed to wake the dead – unwelcome background noise for someone trying to sleep upright for the second consecutive night! I try to ignore the chanting and control my growing desire to spank the young rascal...

Oct 11 – Across Plains and Hills

Someone is sneaking away with my bag! I try to jump up from my seat but he gets away because I am entangled with the seat belt...

I have been dreaming and the bag is safe on the seat beside me. I have a dull headache, my mouth tastes of sandpaper and my ankles are swollen. The coach is overheated and stuffy, but all the other passengers are sleeping peacefully. I cannot help looking at my young tormentor – he is fast asleep in his mother’s lap. In the dim lighting, he looks remarkably like my own little son on the other side of the planet. I repent my violent intentions and drift back to sleep in a sentimental haze, dreaming of my wife and son waiting for my return at the airport...

The next morning brings us to the province of Saskatchewan, known for its oil deposits and wheat farming. My guidebook offers a very attractive description of the dull landscape: Seemingly endless skies and uncluttered space of the vast Canadian prairies. It seems the residents of this province actually blame the Rockies for spoiling the view!

A plump stewardess with pink cheeks and golden curls passes through the coach with a tray of VIA Rail souvenirs for sale. I buy a white T-shirt with a large print of The Canadian splashed across the chest, which costs a hefty twenty-three dollars. She thanks me with a big smile when I hand over \$25 and tell her to keep the change.

Meanwhile, we pass the little town of Biggar, known for its fine golf course as well as its slogan: New York is big but this is Biggar!

My guidebook says the train will be crossing the Rockies that evening. Soon, we halt at Wolf Creek Station. I peer out from the door, half-expecting to see Red Riding Hood or her grandma, but the platform is completely deserted and I return to my seat in dismay.

Since the train is three hours late now, we will not reach the Rockies before dark –and I drown my disappointment in a pot of herbal tea in the restaurant car. As dusk falls, a white blur suddenly appears against the windows: it is snowing! The steward - a real life Uncle Tom - tells me with a twinkle in his eye that it's the first snowfall of the season. I reply that it is the first snowfall I've seen in thirty years, since my childhood in Shimla! He cannot imagine a country without snow and wonders aloud if I am pulling his leg!

At 9 PM, we reach the “hill station” of Jasper, one of the largest towns of Alberta. Snow-clad peaks surround the little station and the temperature is below freezing point, but I am eager to stretch my legs



Stewardess in restaurant car



Quaint station at Biggar

after spending the whole day on the train. So I put on my entire stock of woollens, including two pairs of gloves and a blue knitted cap inherited from my grandfather!

I feel that I am stepping into an enormous Christmas card as I cross the frosty road and approach a row of brilliantly lit shops. I peer into a quaint little shop with tinkling wooden chimes. A cheerful old lady, who might have been Santa's twin sister, rises from her chair and welcomes me inside. I would not be surprised to find Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer in her backyard... but there is not much time to explore and the prices seem exorbitant. I buy a tiny T-shirt for my son and return to the warmth of the train.

Two elderly couples, muffled in heavy coats, board the train at Jasper and sit just behind me. Predictably, they grumble about changing times and rising prices, before swapping stories about their children and grandchildren. Soon they are snoozing and competing for the loudest snores! This is my third

consecutive night on the train. I am unable to sleep and blame it squarely on the nocturnal contest of my newest neighbours.

I had been warned that this is a holiday weekend and the train would be crowded. I prowl around the train and count exactly twenty-four passengers in all the chair cars put together – perhaps this is considered a crowd by Canadian standards! I gather a heap of discarded newspapers and magazines and flip through their pages until my eyelids feel heavy...



Snowfall over Rockies



Jasper station surrounded by snowy peaks

Oct 12 – The Brown Paper Napkin

I am jolted awake as the train rolls into Kamloops. A peep from the door shows a dark and forlorn platform. The timetable painted on the wall shows that The Canadian is the only passenger train serving Kamloops – three times a week each way, always in the middle of the night. Ruskin Bond could have written a story or two about this place. I feel it is prudent not to step out and return to the wretched seat...

The last morning of the journey brings me to the glorious landscape of British Columbia, with endless green fields dotted with farmhouses. Bright sunlight pours in through the windows. I order coffee and polish off the last three slices of my Dempster's loaf, bought 4 days earlier. They taste just as fresh as they did on the first day.

An hour or two later, the train is running on a hillside along the Fraser River. The sunlight is too low for



Farmhouse in British Columbia



The author at Vancouver

photography but the clarity of the view is breathtaking – a place after a yogi’s heart. There are snow-covered mountains in the distance and one can see the faint outlines of another train running on the other side of the river.

I occupy myself in comparing distances and speeds on VIA Rail with Indian Railways. Since my pocket diary is full, I jot the figures on an unused brown paper napkin. The longest journey on IR is 3726 km from Jammu Tawi to Kanniya Kumari in 74 hours. In Canada, I note that I am covering 4467 km from Toronto to Vancouver in about the same time. Then I turn over the napkin to record another detail: since I began my journey, good old Indian Railways would have carried more passengers than the entire population of Canada!

The train is passing through the suburbs of Vancouver now. A pompous conductor, who resembles a big bear, ambles through the train in his dark blue uniform, reminding passengers not to leave any luggage behind. I feel a pang at leaving my home of the last four days, but look forward to the twin pleasures of a hot bath and a chance to sleep horizontally!



Paint away your blues

-and reds, greens and yellows!

- Vinita Srivastava ‘91

Covid is not a new topic. And everyone’s either sick of it, or - well - sick of it. Not to narrate one’s own woes in the face of far greater tragedies faced by many, but it was quite compelling to try and share coping strategies.

Never more did a phone seem as much a best friend as a worst enemy. Whatsapp became a work tool par excellence as well a daily harbinger of horrid news. Family calls were reassuring, as distance got conquered by scheduled video calling. The internet stimulated the mind as a wealth of digitised reading, visual archives and content flew about, and was shared greedily. Cooking, baking, washing dishes, quarantine, disinfecting, corona jokes, meditation, song recordings, prayer and caring - this time was a roller coaster for the emotions as much as for the daily routine. We all seem to have coped so far, and if you are reading this, so have you. Congratulations.

Corona and the lockdown taught me to use ink in new ways, and spew forth my creativity through

poetry and painting. Both skills that were rusty since school. It was that or yell myself silly at the kids, who (secret admission) were not going to listen anyways.

Do not underestimate the soothing power of a wet paintbrush on paper. Youtube tutorials by generous artists, and countless facebook groups of watercolour and oil paint enthusiasts helped. Lots of encouragement from friends made from my stint in the Culture ministry & IGNCA egged me on - to “Gesso & begin again” each time a painting went horribly wrong. [Gesso- a whitewash that hides all painted sins] There’s also some poems and writings in Hindi, which are saved up for future SAM editions. One shouldn’t inflict too much pain all at once.

So here’s a selection of my lockdown paintings - all that’s fit to print. If you like them, there’s more on my facebook page - ArtCorona. Stay healthy and safe, everyone!

Kisaan Special

Inspired by a rail fan photo, the locomotive in this painting curves forward through a luminous rural landscape. It is slowing in speed to negotiate the route. Alongside, a “Kisaan” or “Indian farmer” piloting a loaded bullock cart almost races to keep up. A story retold with the pandemic reset of Indian Railways as backdrop.

60cm X 42cm
Watercolour on paper

Vinita Srivastava
October 2020



Tea Stall

Railway services in India are viewed by people in its associated ecosystems in varied ways. What are the changes they see over time, and the feelings that these changes evoke? This view captures the stark unchanged elements and the dynamic train passing by, from a tea stall vendors perspective.

15cm X 10cm
Mixed media- wax pencil, watercolour and metallic ink

Vinita Srivastava
September 2020



The Signwriter

Painted from memory, a scene from a railway repair centre in Lucknow, Northern India. A glowing figure of an anonymous signwriter who paints numerals onto a sunlit red railway carriage which has its windows masked. Many artists, who remain undocumented, have embellished Indian railways princely saloons and heritage coaches. Gradually the rail transport system proliferated in the country, and in its citizens’ conscious memory. The red has now become a two toned blue livery for newer trains.

30cm X 21cm
Watercolour

Vinita Srivastava
October 2020



Welding & Melding

Pictured myself welding a fabrication at the Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala, Northern India. It's painted from memory, and is a self-portrait. Elements of factory apparatus used in handling materials, and a grease smeared workspace, is invoked by the visual composition and a deliberately patchy paint effect.

21cm X 30cm
Watercolour & ink on paper

Vinita Srivastava
October 2020



Always Forward

This is as much a painting as a heartfelt prayer for the Indian Railways. Brushstrokes sparingly spaced to replicate and convey railway wheels that perpetually move the locomotive forward.

20cm X 10cm
Watercolour on smooth paper

Vinita Srivastava
September 2020



Safe Havens

A train rushing through a fiery sunset, towards a tunnel. Unmindful people sitting on the roof of coaches, and water buffaloes that swim away from the land shores. Inspired by a railfan photo. This angry sky and threatened landscape took literally thousands of brushstrokes to put together. Captures the tremulous transition of rail transport in uncertain scenarios.

21cm X 15cm
Oil on paper

Vinita Srivastava
August 2020



Pamban

The glorious bridges of Indian Railways map and tame a rich maritime landscape. Pamban bridge near Rameswaram in southern India, over which trains pass in slow respectful progression, is uniquely gifted with a mesmerising view of the waters.

Pale blue washes with a silvery train that has no visible beginning or end, celebrating this timeless beauty.

21cm X 30cm
Watercolour & Metallic ink

Vinita Srivastava
October 2020



About Vinita

Over two decades ago, Vinita Srivastava (née Kotamraju) began working as an apprentice in Indian Railways. She was trained in Jamalpur in Eastern India, one of the oldest railway workshops from colonial times. She has served in the Government Ministries of Railways, Steel, Heavy Industries and Culture.

During her Chevening fellowship at Oxford University, guided tours of museums and art galleries by Miranda Creswell, an acclaimed artist from the UK, were a transformational experience. These inspired Vinita to adopt painting as a means of self-expression. Pandemic lockdown and the spare time available helped crystallise Vinita's creative efforts around multiple themes. These featured paintings are themed on her lived experience of Indian Railways. She currently works as Executive Director in the Indian Railways' Heritage Directorate in Railway Board, and resides in New Delhi, India.

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CAREER PLANNING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD.

- Vijay Mathur '60

When we joined the Railways in the mid sixties, it was a very different world. We were excited by the jobs awaiting us, and a clearly mapped out career was both visible and credible. Everyone drove a scooter/motorbike, housing was available on arrival at a new posting, and salary, though never lavish, was adequate for a reasonable lifestyle. That was also because life was relatively simple, and expectations were geared accordingly. Even more significantly, we did not feel the need to look for alternate and better job prospects.

How different it is today, with 5 star hotels and malls, expensive schools, and a much higher standard of living. Fortunately, salaries are far better now, and with growth and modernisation of the Railways, I am sure that there many exciting jobs available as well as emerging in the near future. What has changed, however, is the cadre structure. Seeing how deep and widespread this organisational restructuring is going to be, the future predictability and stability of careers could be cause for some worry. In any case, all this is now a 'work in progress', so future career progression is liable to be different, and the organisational ethos will also change.

In parallel with this, interesting economic and career opportunities outside the Railways have exploded, and it is a matter of pride that so many Gymmy boys have opted for them and done exceedingly well. Be it academics(e.g.IIMs), Banking, Consulting, senior Corporate jobs, the IAS/IPS/other Government assignments, and entrepreneurship, you will find a Gymmy boy there, not only in India, but also across the world. Therefore it makes sense to scan the world for opportunities that you think you may be interested in.

Worthwhile opportunities rarely come by waving a flag, so if you are not looking for one, you may miss the ones with the best potential. Apart from academics, where the earlier you opt for further qualifications, the better, it is usually best to gain some work experience, and the Railways will certainly give you that. However, the more senior you become, the more difficult it becomes for you to adapt to a completely new environment, and in any case lateral movement at the upper echelons of any organisation is not common, unless it is within Government or the PSUs. Therefore, timing wise, a move after 10-20 years of service should be good. Quite often, the easiest option is to find

a good deputation. That way you can test the water and not take an undue risk.

An easy and logical first step is to contact our strong old boy network for advice and pointers towards possible openings. This is vital because there are great changes taking place across all the sectors listed above, and an insider's view of the future would be invaluable.

Along with this, one should think about strengthening individual work experiences within the Railways. Postings in CRIS, and the new production units are cases in point, as work experience there would be asset for possible openings elsewhere. My own experience is dated, but I am sure that there are many cutting edge jobs in the Railways today, and these should be on your wish list for desirable postings. Implicit in this is the suggestion that one needs to be very conscious of the need for continually re-skilling and updating one's experience and knowledge.

While saying all this, I must add a word of caution. A job looks very different when looked at from the outside- the inner reality is almost always worse than anticipated, so allow for a 10-15%

discount on your initial expectations. Since this is common, do not forget that you must be prepared to tough it out, because things take time settle down and pan out even when they have been carefully planned.

While it is easy to say 'nothing ventured, nothing gained', if a career decision is taken after due deliberation, and then pursued consistently and carefully, the gains do materialise!

Finally, some philosophical takeaways:

Most of us have a higher opinion of our strengths than is actually the case. Therefore temper your expectations and be reasonably happy to settle for less.

Your career is only a part of your life, and a happy family and good health are blessings that we tend to discount and take for granted. Therefore focus on yourself and your family and take a more holistic view of your life-excessive ambition tends to only end up in frustration and unhappiness!

Remember me when you are famous!!



Early SAM Years

- V. Narayanan '55

A couple of months back a tall, a fully grown Eucalyptus tree, in my daughter's home garden, got uprooted and fell on the compound wall damaging it and landed on the empty plot in the rear. Thankfully nobody was hurt. I'd reach out to prospective tree cutters who were all unanimous that a crane had to be hired to remove the cut sections. Prospects of arrival of a crane sent my memories back by decades to the time when as an apprentice (SCRA) I'd be posted first, in 1956, to the Crane section of Millwright Shop in Jamalpur Railway Workshop, Eastern Railway, Bihar, the starting point of my railway career.

But a decade or so prior to joining IR, as I was travelling in a train towards Kanchipuram from Madras (now Chennai), the engine would run over a head of cattle due to which the train was held up midway. Most passengers would get down to see as to what was happening and were duly appalled by the mangled remains of a buffalo. But I was fascinated with the way the crew would try and remove, with great diligence, the animal body parts from the engine underframe. And as the job was completed the driver would go round the engine to spray oil in several areas. I had decided then that I had

found my calling! I'd have to be associated with the railway steam engines professionally.



Vintage Bench Vise

At the millwright shop, after 3 weeks of chipping and filing a round steel bar of some 3" diameter to produce a hexagon bar, a task which I did not perform very well despite determined efforts of RNG Dastidar (1953), who would try and teach me the correct stance to do the job, and how it'd be just right to chip only a small film of steel at a time. Having just seen a shaper in operation, I'd wonder as to why one'd have to go through this tortuous exercise to produce a hexagonal bar. My exposure earlier to the machine shop (hangar) in IIT/KGP reinforced my views. Understandably my seniors were tight-lipped at that point of time.

After all this was simply my initiation into the rough and tumble of a railway workshop environment! A further challenge to concentrating on chipping that tough steel round was the somewhat wholesome prevailing environment where workers would start to get their lunch warmed and ready for the 11 am siren to sound, even as I was getting ravenously hungry and had to cycle furiously for another 15 minutes or so to get to that rather unappetizing Gymkhana food!

From here I'd reach the Crane Section where the giant 75-ton Cowans Sheldon breakdown steam crane was undergoing POH. While the robust structure was largely sound, the emphasis was to get the springs, wheels, bearings, linkages attended to and restored to required standards.



75-Ton Railway Breakdown Crane

The boiler and the steam engine had to be serviced. Most importantly the wire ropes would have to be tested and certified, a mammoth task indeed. Sergei Paul was the section in charge, and he rapped me on my knuckles, in a manner of speaking, for referring to the wire ropes as cables! He'd explain with great passion as to how this 75-Ton behemoth was so different from its earlier, smaller cousins. Importantly he'd explain the auxiliary weight bearing trucks on either side of the crane main frame without which the axle

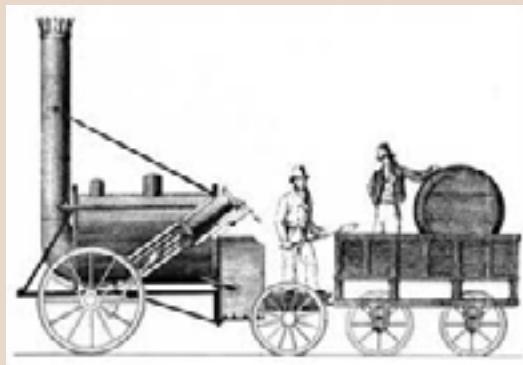
load would be too high for the crane to move on the mainline. He'd explain the mechanism that while sharing the crane weight is also a flexible truck to negotiate curves and turnouts. At the site where the crane had to work these auxiliary trucks would have to be lifted and swung away to make way for the crane to operate. He was indeed passionate about his job!



IR's Prima Donna: WP

And as I'd cycle towards the millwright shop from the main gate, I'd have to go past hissing steam locomotives of which the pride of place was held by WP, the mainline mail and express locomotive. It was known to us that we'd get to the stage where this as well as all other locomotives are assembled after repair to various component parts including the boiler only towards the final stages of our 4-year training.

Years later IR would receive some magnificently built Polish & Austrian WPs that were equipped with roller bearings on all axles. These were all fitted with manganese steel wear resistant axle box guides in the frame to provide high quality geometrically precise and perfect construction. Kanpur steam shed had 4 of these.



Stephenson's Rocket

But the era of steam locomotive as a motive power, heralded by George Stephenson's "The Rocket", over a century earlier, had indeed ended. Incredibly more thermally efficient and powerful electric and diesel locomotives had entered the fray. By the time my career had

concluded with IR steam locomotives had been completely withdrawn from mainline services,

Inexplicably though, world over, likeness of the steam locomotive still symbolises anything to do with the railways such as even in electronic train arrival information boards are toy locomotives plying trains in malls! One'd only hope that this would continue for a long time.



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Manufacturing



Martello Tower Pakur - The First Railway Fort of India

-P.K.Mishra '83



Martello Tower - Pakur

Martello Tower Pakur, the first Railway fort of India, was built in 1856 for the protection of the Railway Officers and Railway bungalows when the latter were rebuilt after the celebrated Santhal insurrection of 1855.

During Santhal insurrection, Railway officials fought pitched battles with insurgents from their bungalows, stations and offices, which were turned into temporary fortresses, providing first line of defence. In Rajmahal, Singhi Dalan, the residence of District Engineer, which was the palace constructed by Raja Man Singh, became the citadel from where Railway engineers and contractors of EIR, led by District Engineer Mr. Vigors would fight a long battle with Santhals.

The Railway Fort Pakur was constructed in the form of a Martello Tower, about thirty feet in height and twenty feet in diameter. It was loop-holed

for musketry with space on the top for one or two light guns. A few Europeans with arms, ammunition, and provisions could hold it for a longtime against a large force, unprovided with artillery, like the Santhals.

Martello towers, the small defensive forts, were built across the British Empire during the 19th century, from the time of the French Revolutionary Wars onwards. Martello towers were inspired by a round fortress, part of a larger Genoese defence system, at Mortella Point in Corsica.

Martello tower, the Railway fort at Pakur was constructed over the terrain, elevated about 200 feet above the plains, on the borders of the jungle close to the Daman-i-koh or "foot of the hills", and it commanded the residences of the Engineers and the Railway Company's officers at Pakur, providing a very extensive and beautiful view from the top of the tower. It currently stands in the south east of Siddhu-Kanhu Park situated in front of D.C.'s residence

The Station of Pakur, about a mile off the Railway on the West side, was one of the first places

plundered and destroyed during the uprising. About 8,000 strong Santhal rebels, armed principally with bows, arrows and battle-axes; and no force to oppose them, had attacked Pakur. The villagers in the plains had fled in consternation in every direction and the rebels carried devastation wherever they went. Many of the villagers who lingered in hopes of saving their property were overtaken in the houses and narrow streets of the town, were brutally murdered. The Ranee's palace or Rajbarry was sacked and plundered of valuables to a large amount, while the whole town was destroyed as far as fire could effect destruction. Ranee was forced to escape to Juggoobundah Roy's house near Dhulian, whom She had made her Dewan.

The Santhal insurrection-

English News Papers of the era had reported that the Santhal rebellion, an extensive and ferocious insurrection, had broken out in the heart of Bengal and the tribes in the Rajmahal hills had suddenly descended by tens of thousands into the plains. To them, the uprising was quite baffling as Santhals had appeared quite satisfied with their condition and they had received the greatest blessings from the British Government. The rebellion would be later called as first war of Indian independence by modern historians.

Arms were issued to Railway engineers as Bengal Government could not provide security to security to EIR in Santhal areas and Railway engineers proved to be first line of resistance

during the insurrection. Railway Trolley-men would become riflemen during the Santhal rebellion.

"The Government of Bengal not being able to frame such a constabulary as can secure the safety of the inhabitants of the Santhal country, they issue arms to the Railway engineers. These arms are placed in the hands of peons, whose appearance, when so encumbered, is certainly not suggestive of an effective force"--The Illustrated London News October 18, 1856



An Engineer's peons being drilled- The Illustrated London News October 18, 1856

The spirited defence by Railway officials was graphically reported in one of despatch:

"The railway officials behaved equally well. One defended his bungalow for weeks with as much success as if it had been a fortification. Another protected an entire station. A third raised a force of fifty men, armed half of them with rifles, and read the savages a lesson, such as they have not yet learned from regular troops. Thus then stands the affair. The railway officers at Ramporehat have been joined by 80 men of the 56th, while Mr. De Bourbel has further protected them by earthen breastworks." — Friend of India, August 9.

The brunt of this uprising had fallen on the railway department, and their property, both public and private, had been destroyed, and their houses delivered up to the flames, not a house had been left standing on their line of road; and the progress of constructing Railways would be considerably retarded by this revolt.

The Collector of Bhagalpur and Mr. Pontet, Superintendent of Daman-i-koh were at the time at Rajmahal, where they took shelter in the old Singi dalan or palace of Shah Shuja, then the house of the Railway Engineer, Mr. Vigors. This was barricaded and fortified, and they and the railway officials held it against the attacks of the rebels until troops arrived. --BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS, SANTAL PARGANAS. L. S. S. O'MALLEY, 1910

Grievances

Construction of Railways in Birbhum and Rajmahal had generated huge demand of labour, which was met by Santhal workforce to a large extent. EIR lines skirted the Santal country for two hundred miles. High embankments, heavy cuttings, many-arched bridges had created a demand for workmen such as had never been known in the history of India.

But, the sudden change in his life style, lack of freedom and oppression created a sense of discontent, which was fuelled by violence of some of the European railway men towards Santhali women. Treatment meted out to Santhal workmen engaged in Railway construction was bordering on slavery. "Friend of India", the newspaper



"The Santhal Insurrection - The 49th Regiment, Native Infantry, burning a Santhal village and recovering plunder," from the Illustrated London News, 1856

had reported the lack of payment to Santhals employed by Railway contractor for their daily labour, various food articles purchased from them and insult to their women.

The insult to women by EIR contractors became an emotive warring cry and during uprising there was widespread killing of Europeans and damage to Railway property.

Santhal insurrection was the first instance, in which the rail had been used for the conveyance of troops in India, and it enabled them to estimate the immense advantage which it conferred on the country in a military point of view.

Defensive work and loss suffered by Railway contractors

Railway contractors were most affected by the Santhal uprising and they faced the brunt of the onslaught, arson and violence.

The Railway works would come to a grinding halt as their offices, bungalows were completely burnt and workmen left the site. EIR and East India Company refused to accept contractors'

claim of compensation and Government advised Railway contractors to arrange their own defence and develop connecting roads to Railway stations from nearby military cantonments so that troops could be quickly deployed during the crisis.

A delegation of Railway contractor M/S Nelson & Co., met lieutenant Governor of Bengal and requested for providing adequate security for restarting the railroad construction.

M/S Nelson was asked to keep up the communication between the several military posts, especially along the line of railway works. He was asked to bridge Nullahs and keep roads fairly passable at correspondingly small

expenses—**Lieutenant Governor’s minutes dated 12th sept 1855.**

So convinced were Messrs. Nelson and Co., the contractor of EIR in the region that there was danger to be apprehended from these rebels, that they had built watch-towers at the houses of all their assistants, so that they might be in a position to defend themselves against attacks of the Santhals.

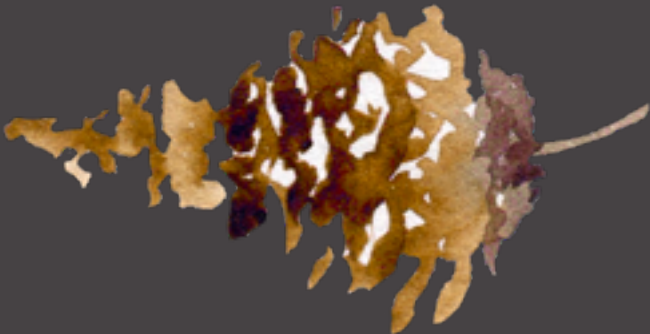
The Martello tower later afforded protection to the Railway Company's officers when the mutinous Companies of the 32nd B. N. I. passed through Pakur in November 1857 during the first war of independence.



Searching for rebel Santhals. Antique print, 1856

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The Demilitarized Zone

Visiting North Korea



- Paras Mehendiratta '2k9

Don't worry!! I'm completely fine and was in full senses when I visited one of the most dangerous borders in the world. Yes, the one between North Korea and South Korea. As promised in last SAM issue, here I'm to tell you about the most thrilling tour of my life yet (Hope it isn't the last!).

So, as soon as it was decided in 2019 that I was getting a chance to visit Seoul, it was obvious that I would visit the border. Now, visiting the Korean Border or popularly known as DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) is a very common tourist activity and many would kill for this experience. But what most people don't know is that DMZ is not the only part of border open to visitors in this 250 km long and 4 km wide border which intersects the 38th parallel. There's another area called 'Panmunjom' or popularly known as JSA (Joint Security Area) which makes for an even more exciting and thrilling adventure. So, sit tight as you are up for a hell of a ride as I take you through my journey.

It was 29th of May in 2019 on which I and my wife took this trip of DMZ+JSA tour organized by Veltra. Mind you, pre-booking a tour is the only way to visit these areas and the JSA is closed

for most part of the year due to security reasons. So now you can decide whether I was lucky or unlucky that JSA tour was opened that day after a very long time.

Our first Stop was Imjingak Park which is home to many monuments related to the Korean War. Originally built with the unification of the people of North and South Korea in mind, this site includes the 'Bell of Peace', a fence of prayer ribbons, a rusted train and the 'Bridge of No Return' where prisoners of war were exchanged. The Bridge is also called the "unification bridge" which was built in 1998 as a symbol of hope of unification.



The Rusted Engine



The bridge of No Return

Second leg of our journey took us to DMZ Theatre and exhibition hall where we watched a video about the history of the Korean War and the infiltration tunnels. We also saw artefacts from war times including letters, weapons and various other objects collected from the DMZ. After this we got a chance to actually go inside "The 3rd Infiltration Tunnel". Discovered in October 1978 after an explosion was heard underneath the border, it is amongst the most infamous infiltration tunnels. The tunnel is believed to have been dug by North Korean forces for invasion. At only 44 kilometers from Seoul, it is the closest tunnel to the capital city. At the time of discovery, the tunnel was already 435 meters inside South Korea. To stop the North Koreans, an interception tunnel was dug which took about four months. Now this intercept tunnel is a tourist spot and is at depth of 73 m below ground. Many people (the writer of this piece is no exception here!) face difficulty in breathing due to high CO2 concentration, so those with pre-existing breathing problems are advised not to go down the tunnel. Till now only 4 tunnels have been discovered and it is believed that there are about 20 more. Even today, South Korean military spends a huge amount of money and resources to keep looking for these tunnels.



Entry to 3rd Infiltration Tunnel

Next, we were taken to "Dora Observatory" from where we could use binoculars to peek into North Korea. We could see the notoriously famous "Propaganda Village" with world's highest flag pole. The story of competition between the two Koreas regarding the height of their respective flag poles which was won by the Northern counterpart with its 160 m high flag pole carrying 270 Kg heavy flag is also famous by the name of "Flagpole War". After this installation South Korea stopped pursuing further. The city of Kaesong and the Kaesong Industrial Region which was built in 2002 as a joint venture between the two countries to foster friendship could also be observed. Hyundai was hired for developing this industrial area. At its peak in 2013, more than 23 companies



Peeking North Korean military post at the Dora Observatory

were employing around 53,000 people in this industrial region. In 2016, the area was closed due to rising tensions between the two countries.

Next, we visited “Dorasan Station” which is the northernmost train station in South Korea, which serves as a terminus for a commuter train line. It lies about 700 meters from the DMZ. Make sure to find the sign in the station which reads “Not the last station from the South, But the first station toward the North.” You can actually buy tickets and enter the station although there will be no train to board.



The Dorasan Station Platform

The tour so far is the standard DMZ tour package on offer. But, the fun part i.e. the JSA tour begins after this. JSA is managed by United Nations command and is a highly restricted area. Not all

nationalities are allowed entry in this area. Indians are lucky in this case!! Before entering the JSA, the UN command (primarily consisting of US soldiers) holds a military briefing explaining the safety protocol. As the name suggests, this is a joint security area; although there is a border but at the same time there is no fence demarking it. So, if by any chance you cross it (except in allowed areas), only god can help you. Funny thing is that none of these details were told to us in advance. This tiny piece of information is given to the visitors just before signing a declaration stating that in event of any hostile enemy act, South Korea or UN command will not be responsible or accountable for safety of visitors even in case of death. While signing this declaration, I thought twice. But then as Harshad Mehta said “Risk hai to Isq Hai”, I went for the risk as “Isq” of my life was with me.

Although strictly reserved for diplomatic meetings and negotiations such as the historic inter-Korean summit of South Korean President Moon Jae In and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last April 2018, JSA allows entry of limited visitors also, depending upon the security situation between the two Koreas. The Freedom House located in JSA, was built in July of 1998 and hosted the summit between the United States and the two Koreas on June 30, 2019. From here you can see the North Korean equivalent, the Phanmun Pavilion or Panmungak where you might spot North Korean soldiers and tourists from the other side.

Now, the question remains, “How does actually

one enter North Korea?”. For that, visitors have to enter the “Military Armistice Commission Conference Room” or popularly known as “blue rooms”. Inside, you can see the demarcation line (MDL) and step over to the North and even take a photograph with JSA soldiers. Although I should warn you that Korean soldiers seldom show any expression or movement, what so ever. In fact, some of them may even be mistaken for mannequins!!! So don’t expect any smiles there!

After going through this thrilling experience, you will be taken to Blue Bridge with the Moon Jae In and Kim Jong Un Signature Stone where both presidents planted a pine tree. At the end you the Memorial of General Jang, killed in action to save



The Blue Houses

a Soviet defector, details about which I leave for you to find.

While enjoying the exciting tour, the missus and I didn’t really realize the magnitude of sensitivity of the border area we visited. It was only after reaching our hotel room that it dawned upon us that in this one day, we might have put our lives in danger numerous times! But in the end, to me it was worth all of that in order to have this one item off my bucket list. The fact that the very next morning this tour was discontinued by the UN indefinitely, due to the mounting tension between the two Koreas, is an altogether separate story!



On the North Korean Side



Don't Worry Be Happy

—
- K Narayan '88

How many times do we end up cribbing about our times, our people, our country, our job and our what not? That the country was a pearl a diamond, a golden bird or whatever in days of yore! Or that those who could have made a difference fumbled big time and spoilt what was in store. And that future could be worse or probably better,. And it is amidst all this that we entirely ignore and miss out the only thing we have control over - the present. As they say:

Past is history
Future is Mystery
Present is what we have – a gift

And yet it is this moment to which we give no lift. We probably think it to be something we own and which can't go away without realising that soon it will be the part of same history which we are missing or cursing and will be replaced by the mystery which we could have unveiled as a better time if we had just grasped the earlier lost moment.

So described herein a possible roadmap for discovering the elusive happiness in the non-elusive present

LIVE OUR DREAMS BUT ONE AT A TIME -

Let us start by living our dreams otherwise we just end up adding to our dreams. And like obesity which is a disease due to accumulation of fat, we can end up with depression on account of accumulation of unfulfilled wishes.

So let us start strumming the guitar or lace up those running shoes or splash those colours on the canvass or simply unlid our pen and write that book. Today is not late for anything while tomorrow is late for everything! And why just hobbies, make that much-dreamt career shift which could not take place for a variety of reasons in times gone by. Of course, our intellect will always make those Plan 'B' for the 'if things go wrong syndrome'. Years of living a life yearning for security would have ensured that.

And as we start living those dreams, we just may realise that our spouse is not a critic, our children don't treat us a relic and our boss ain't that sick. For the happier we are inside we find it permeating outside.

LAUGH TO THE HEARTS CONTENT -

We are all born crying – over that we probably have no control, but what is sad is that thereafter we try to gain control over everything by crying. As children we cry to gain control over parents, as a youth over the heart of our lover, as a spouse either out of self-pity or to emotionally blackmail our partner, as an employee or neighbour to create a nuisance and as a parent to gain some respect.

Now why a para on crying under the sub-head of 'laughter'. Just to underline the importance of the treatment to the cry disease – laughter!

But how does one laugh? Seems a strange but sadly true question in today's context – as we have forgotten to laugh! One way to relearn how to laugh is probably by looking at the street urchins as we wait impatiently at a traffic light. Their laughter is effortless, spontaneous and real. This despite being born bereft of many privileges which we take for granted, facing weather extremities - what to say of other luxuries. Just goes to show that laughter is more about the state of mind and not circumstances.

So let us start laughing by initially making use of each opportunity we get. Lets' laugh watching the favourite cartoon show of our child or grandchild, reading those naughty text messages we get on Whatsapp, as also the "comical" live chat shows.

Life will then become an effortless journey, one in which we may just start enjoying the detention

at the traffic light as we see those gurus of laughter – the street urchins!

APPRECIATION NOT DEPRECIATION -

Depreciation is an accounting concept wherein one starts slowly deducting the value of an asset after procurement and often used ingeniously by human mind to avoid taxes!

Unfortunately in life too we seem to depreciate and deprecate every possession we have. Only that in this case it does not reduce any tax burden but instead burdens and taxes our mind.

Now in accounting principle the antonym of depreciation is appreciation and the only asset which appreciates withtime – is land. Just goes to show the durability of mother earth – doesn't it. So why not start with appreciation or 'praise' of things around. Not flattery or flowery speeches – just quite simple and genuine praise of all the beautiful things. Lets us not consign appreciation of an individual to farewell speeches and obituary references – as they serve little purpose and instead appreciate the here and now. Of course there would be happening worthy of criticism, but we need to accept deep within that the world is full of inadequacies, which if it all we can correct, can only be through example, not by calling the guy next door a sample.

The mantra on the way forward therefore is to be generous in our appreciation and stingy with criticism.

MUSIC - ITS NECTAR FOR THE SOUL -

From time immemorial cultures have believed in singing and dancing. Ancient man realised this early and that's why in all cultures there were some forms of dance and music associated with ceremonies and remembrance of the Supreme resorted to through chants, hymns and carols till contemporary times. And so there can be no doubt that it is a connect to the innermost core of our personality. .

Now music can be enjoyed for two reasons. One is the rhythm, which is not only pleasant to the ears, but governs all our life cycles thereby helping us associate with the core principle of this beautiful life. The other are the lyrics. Just hearing and understanding the depth of the words can actually have the effect of giving us goose-pimples. It will of-course depend on how earnestly we are listening to it. One can associate a romantic number in a smaller sense with one's lover but in a larger sense with the Universal Love sustaining all of us!

So let us get out that radio, or stereo, or MP3 or DVD or Youtube or whatever technology has on offer and soak in those words and tunes for calming us into having more control in our lives.

GAINING GURUS

Guru is a Sanskrit word which as stated earlier stands for the one showing light - the light of knowledge and wisdom to remove the darkness of ignorance. And the beauty about light is that

once it falls on us, we can see everything clearly.

So do we light our life by searching a Guru. Well, many spiritual aspirants do follow this path and rightly so. However sometimes, instead of perceiving the glory of the message being emanated by the wise one, we start glorifying the wise one. On the flip side we get convinced that the master is not master enough and as a part of rejecting him or her, reject the teachings as well.

Krishna, just before his departure from earth on being stopped by his discipleUdhava, consoled him by relating the story of an Avdhuta – spiritual aspirant who had made 24 innocuous things, living beings and events his Guru for better understanding of life and control of mind. List is diverse and includes the five gross elements, sun, moon, a pigeon, python, ocean, moth, elephant, deer, honey gatherer, fork, a prostitute, a girl bangles and a spider to name a few.

These teachings – Udhava Gita was the Lords way of showing that inspiration can be gained from anything for ones own good. So if we cannot gain the ideal universal Guru, we could gain multitude of Gurus from the universe.

ANCIENT SCRIPTURES FOR THE MODERN MIND

All organisms other than us homo-sapiens

have been well served by nature. They don't normally need clothes or houses or movie halls or hospitals. It is only us who cannot tolerate the vagaries of the weather or place or smells or tastes etc. This may be something inborn or the DNA changes as mankind has evolved over thousands of years from a cave man to a cool man using his brains and intelligence to change things around to suit our requirement.

Yet we see that man's gallop to mastery over the surroundings has left many gaps. Nature's fury does get back at us with an unnerving regularity, whether it be in the form of an earthquake, a tsunami, devastating floods, droughts, cyclones or just a small but really truant virus! Safe to say we can't think of ourselves as rulers of our habitat.

The biggest failing of humanity though has been on the internal front. Despite being technologically far superior to our ancestors, people resorting to anti-depressants or going on an un-intimidated

spree of violence or ending their lives are more heard of than ever before – thereby exposing man's inadequacies in understanding his own nature.

It is to mitigate these pitfalls that ancient scriptures have been indicating to mankind how to gain control. Theteachings are laced with fascinating stories and narratives only to make them palatable for the uninitiated. Unfortunately the stories are paid more attention to making sects sometimes colludeor collide for ownership over God. The same true God which scriptures tirelessly postulate as being the very essence of existence.

So let us resolve to master our own mind in addition to whatever we master outside using religion for its true objective of falling back to our natural happystate.

This indeed is the sincere message of the Ancient Scriptures for the Modern Mind!



Two Management Styles

- H.N.Gupta '56

In 1974, I was selected as Confidant of British industry scholar. After six months training in manufacture and testing of diesel engines in UK, I returned to India and in July 1975, was posted in CLW as 'punishment'. In June 75, emergency had been imposed in India. In West Bengal, CPI(M) was in power the emergency had resulted in a reduction of the infamous excesses against the managers and the owners of the industry for which the communist party had become famous for. Emergency lasted for two years and the COMMUNIST PARTY was back in the business of harassing and intimidating managements. CLW was no exception. I spent full five years in CLW, first three as DyCPO and remaining two as DyCME (ELEC LOCO FABRICATION) with about 3000 workers reporting to me.

Unfortunately I started developing asthma and was hospitalised for 10 days as the attack was very severe. Doctors advised me to shift to a place where the air pollution was much less. But my request for a transfer out of CLW was not accepted even at the highest level in Rly Board. Luckily, a deputation to India Govt Mint

was offered to me which I accepted with alacrity despite knowing that the Labour problems and the working environment in the Mint in Kolkatta would be as bad as in CLW. But the post of GM of the Mint had an earmarked residence adjacent to the Mint.

On assuming charge, I found that all the officers were a very discouraged lot. The mint had a long tradition of overtime working. The OT hours had been curtailed and the production of coins and medals had plummeted to a very low level. Within two months of my taking over, a Dy.Secy. of ministry of finance (m.o.f) visited the Mint. He met, one by one the office bearers of the Congress Union. I and my officers were asked to stay away. After the meetings, I asked him as to what the matter was all about. After some hesitation, he said that the congress had complained to Delhi that I had left leanings. He had come to enquire about the veracity of the charge. Fortunately one or two members of the congress union mentioned that my dealings were totally apolitical. Although the matter rested there, the departing remark of the official was that I was riding a tiger. Such an incident had never happened in my Rly career and left me

considerably perplexed. Why had I come from CLW with the tag of being a left sympathiser? There could be only one explanation.

Soon after my taking over as CPO, one day G.M came into my chamber and asked me to write a letter to the Distt Magistrate recommending the arrest of one of my staff who was a member of the Staff Council. The person belonged to the CPI(M) union. During Emergency, such things had become common practice. But I refused to accept G.M's order. He was furious and went away to the administration building. My office had the A/C running and had a flush door and was almost sound proof. So that the news was leaked out in the administration building. Perhaps GM may have told one of his cronies that the new DyCPO was a very arrogant fellow who didn't follow his direct orders. Since I had shielded a CPI(M) leader I may have acquired a reputation for being a left sympathiser. This reputation did help me greatly in CLW, as I was the only officer who could enter and exit the office chamber of any officer under gherao and carry refreshments etc to him and keep in touch with him.

As anticipated, I soon came into conflict with both mint unions and particularly with the dominant communist union. The president of this union was Shri Somnath Chatterji who later became the speaker of Lok Sabha. The VP was Shri Dipen who was the convener of all the coordination committees of Kolkata. He could bring whole Kolkata to a standstill, if he so wanted. I realised that to win a fight with this union, I must know how much help I could get from civil police. I called up

Shri Ved Mehta, Sr.SP of the Port Distt. He told me that even if the Mint was in dire straits, no help could be forthcoming from police. Ved Mehta was an upright IPS officer who was subsequently ambushed, tortured and killed along with his body guard while conducting a raid in Kidderpur dock area.

The above gives a fair account of the environment against which we were going to perform. And perform we did and very successfully. When I left the Mint after five years, the production of coins and medals had increased by seven times. How it was achieved is an interesting story but this is not the place to tell it. But the important thing is that the MOF kept on supporting the Mint management fully. It inspired and appreciated our efforts, without which success would not have been achieved. Let me now describe some instances to illustrate the management style of MOF.

My deputation was for three years. But once they were satisfied with the progress in the Mint, this period was extended to four years and again to five years. During the fourth year, I received a personal invite to attend the International Mint Directors conference to be held in Denmark in June, 1984. At first I just filed the letter. Then on a second thought, I wrote a letter to the Secy. MOF stating that it was a great honour to receive an invitation when India was not even a member of this body. From my experience in the railways, I knew that no response was expected. But within a week's time, minister's sanction in principle was conveyed to me. Even my subsequent

request that I may be allowed to stay in the same hotel as other delegates were staying in and to allow additional F.E. for my wife to accompany me (delegates normally are accompanied by companions) was accepted.

Absence of red tape is also illustrated by another incident. My staff car had, over the years, become old and shabby. I asked my Chief Accts Officer to write a letter to MOF asking for sanction of a new ambassador car. After about three weeks, I asked my CAO to send the relevant file to me so that I may write a D.O. letter to the jt secretary to chase the matter in the ministry

After a few minutes, my CAO rang me up and told me that there was no need to write a letter to MOF, as the sanction had been received in today's dak. Is such a thing possible in railways?

As the Mint's performance improved, Minister ordered introduction of a night shift in Kolkata mint. In the parliament, MP and opposition parties were criticising Govt for shortage of coins for bus, tram and train fares. I was asked to make a proposal for introducing the night shift in Kolkata mint. I sent a proposal asking for 474 new posts including posts of Sr Supervisors and officers together with extra road transport. Within two weeks, I was asked to visit MOF and discuss the proposal with the integrates finance of the finance ministry. I held the discussion with the head of the integrated finance (an addl Secy level officer). He did not

call any officer below the rank of Dy. Secy to help with the discussion. (Unlike railways, when UDC and Asst. would be called)

When the sanction for the posts etc was recd, it was recd as per my proposal without any reduction whatsoever.

The mention of parliament reminds me of another incident. After Hope Cooks affair Sikkim had become part of India. Later a two rupee coin was put up in circulation. This coin had a map of India etched on one face of the coin. Some MPs felt that Sikkim had been omitted. I had as GM of the Mint had approved the design of the coin. I was asked to explain. I called for the file and fortunately, I had directed that approval for the map may be obtained from the Surveyor General of India. My neck and the reputation of the Mint had been saved.

Another time, the then Home Secretary reported that The president of India had commented adversely on the finish of Padma medals during the investiture ceremony. What we discovered was that the blame was being unnecessarily shifted to the Mint. The home ministry was ordering more medals than the actual awards and had a buffer stock, with some medals in the stock being several years old. They had become tarnished and should have been repolished before the award ceremony. MOF accepted our version and let the home ministry have it.

Once the MOF developed Faith in me, they sent me to S. Korea to negotiate a contact with Hyundai

for supply of some coin blanks. I also visited U.K. and many other countries on official work. Climax came when I was asked to visit Canada in early June 85. I declined to go. The jt secretary of MOF asked me to explain the reason on telephone. I told him that my extended deputation was ending in a month and I did not like the idea of my contract with Canadian government being termed unsuitable because I would not be there to defend it. Few days later, he again spoke to me and said that the ACC of the cabinet had as a very special case extended my deputation by three months (beyond five years limit) and that perhaps I had no objection to go to Canada now.

When I compare the treatment given by railways to its officers, there is a gulf of difference. I will give only one example, because you all are already familiar with the railways management style of working. In 1974, there was a total strike of railway and postal dept workers. I was then working in RDSO. On a Sunday morning, I had returned back from a month long tour accompanying a visiting French Railways Engineer to ER, SER and CLW Etc. I soon received a call from my Ex. Director not

to unpack my bags as in the afternoon I have to start on another journey. Where to for how long, he would not disclose. I was to wait for the car and to see him when instructions would be given. On meeting him (there were two more officers called) we were told that we had been selected for a very important task. We were driven by road to DLW rest house. The rooms were open but there was no staff visible. In the early morning, we were driven to the Airport and boarded a BSF Dakota plane. We still had no idea of our destination. Finally, in the evening, we landed on a grassy air strip at Malda in West Bengal. At DLW we had been joined by 3 DLW officers. Our job was to run 3 goods trains from Malda to Newjalpaigudi (a distance of 233 km) one day And bring 3 goods trains from NJP to Malda next day. There were no SMs or ASMs or cabin men on duty. But we somehow drove the trains without any mishap for 4 weeks. Gradually the strike fizzled out and we were told to go back. But this time, no arrangements were made for our return. In fact we were not even given a letter that beyond our line of duty, we had driven trains in the face of all odds.



The Berlin Connection...

—
- Shakti Ghosal’ 74

It started as most things do. With a gentle nudge. This is what I received from Mayank of the venerable SAM editorial board recently.

Duly nudged, I donned my somewhat jaded thinking cap and set to the task at hand. Something that now seemed easier to have committed to earlier than doing something about. Foe what does a guy who left the services as a greenhorn over three and a half decades back write about, that would resonate?

The thinking cap, which in the meantime had been doing its own thing, nudged back. ‘Hey fella! Why not pen something about the last time you encountered a SAM in his hideout?’ Now, ‘hideout’ was not the kind of word I would have liked to be bandied about, but I let it pass. Putting it down to the jaded-ness of the contraption I had sought the help of.

Be as it may, the hideout stuff did bring in a train of thoughts.

1984 turned out to be an important year in my life. Interesting how this coincided with the

dystopian and dysfunctional imagery created by Goerge Orwell about the year. This was also the year when I formally bid adieu to the Indian Railways Service (was this a dysfunctional act I have often wondered) . Apart from being the year of Operation Blue Star and the assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi, events which had a bearing on my life, but that would be another tale.

Be as it may, 1984 was also the year when I stayed with Rakesh Misra of the 1972 batch fame, for close to two weeks. Rakesh, at that point in time, was the proud occupant of a ground floor flat in Beryl House, a vintage building with high ceilings and old worldly charm, situated on a tree lined avenue near Colaba in Bombay. That was also the time when Rakesh’s elder son Mayank, looking forward to celebrate his one year birthday, liked to enact the role of *enfant terrible*’ to perfection by hanging from my then fairly luxuriant locks at every opportunity. Those lovely days remain in my memory.

Decades passed as they are wont to do and so did the hair locks. But the memories were back with a simple mail titled, “Hola Shaktida” from

Berlin. This, coupled with a work assignment to Germany for a week, enthused me to lug my lazy bones across the seas to that wintry land.

So it was that I packed my bags with a major objective of giving my Jamalpur Senior , Rakesh Misra, one of my patented nasty surprises by foisting my grinning visage on his doorsteps. My flight to Berlin was sustained by the so very pleasing prospects of my close encounter with this great pal of mine after a two decade hiatus and the even more welcome prospects of doffing a few single malts (or other equivalent fluids) with Auld Lang Syne crooning in the background.

Getting out of Berlin airport, I set about searching for Rakesh by first looking at the nearest lampposts on the half chance that he might have climbed one of them and forgotten to pull it after himself. Then looked around in the *Potsdamer Platz Arkaden*, one of the premier Berlin malls, specially in the dark corners. No luck there also. But scarcely had I reached my hotel on *Schweizerhof Budapest Strabe 25* when the German *Fräulein* at the front desk, pushing a lion emblem embossed Government of India card under my startled eyes, whispered that an officious looking bloke from the Indian embassy was on the look-out for me. Fearing that the authorities that be had finally caught up with my past, I near panicked and was seriously debating whether I should hoof it to the hills when I read the name on the card, “Rakesh Misra, Railways Advisor”.....

With the usual preliminaries of hugs and shrieks

of, “Ooh! Partner, you look so great and have scarcely changed..... after all these years!!” over, we set forth into that wonderful autumn morn, the trees busily shedding their cover , the leaves danced all around us as they fell to the ground in a golden confusion. Misraji mused, “Why is it that these leaves look their most beautiful when they are dying?” Was this quintessential Rakesh Misra or the latent philosopher brought out by his Germanic sojourn, I was left wondering.

Remember that shocker of the lion emblazoned Railways advisory visiting card of the previous evening. Now that had been but a precursor to Rakesh’s abode which was a beautifully appointed duplex within the premises of the Indian embassy. One thus needed to cross some real high technology gates and gun toting guards to reach the luncheon appointment.

The embassy complex happened to be in an outstanding location of the city. In front was the *Tiergarten*, the largest and most famous parkland of the city. Built by the Prussian emperors Fredrich I and Fredrich II a few hundred years back, it gave one both a Baroque feel as also an English garden environment. As one looked at the stark and leafless trees standing like sentinels in the parkland, one could well imagine stories of those hunting sprees by the Electors of Brandenburg, ,of shootings and murders, of the Reichstag fire of 1933, of the devastation by air raids in the forties. This island in Humanity’s stream did seem to symbolise nature’s permanence through Mankind’s follies.

What turned out to be of much greater interest was a non-descript old building block in the rear, visible from Rakesh's apartment.

Bendlerblock, as this building is named, happened to be enormous historical significance. In July 1944, this building became the focal point of German military resistance to the Nazi regime. The "Valkyrie" operation, as it came to be known, was a plan for a coup d'etat against Hitler, hatched by senior military officers, when it became quite clear that Germany was not going to win the war. The plan led to bombing of Hitler's eastern headquarters, the "Wolf's lair" as it was called, in East Prussia. Unfortunately for the conspirators, Hitler survived the day and members of the uprising were executed by a firing squad in the courtyard of Bendlerblock.

While the Valkyrie plot was well known and in fact formed the basis for the 2008 Tom Cruise starrer movie of the same name, what was little known but more interesting was the fact that famed field marshal Rommel, the "desert fox", lent support to the plot since he felt he had to "come to the rescue of Germany."

Bendlerblock surely was about the whisperings of History gone astray.

As we yapped, the years and decades peeled away, the mothballed memories were dusted and brought to the fore. We talked of all under the sun. Of cabbages and kings. Of those halcyon days spent together in Itarsi. Of Rakesh, as AME Running schedules, striving to push out all those stubborn WDM2s out of the shed. Of me poring over component failures without the ghost of an idea of what to do. Of (Late) Mukesh Sahai Mathur's musical renditions, arguably inspired by batchmate Rajeev Vishnoi. Reminscing once again about Mayank's endeavours to "hang from my hair locks". All in all, a wonderful time was spent together. Not to mention of the piping hot and superb lunch that followed.

But as they say, all good things must come to an end. And so the time came to bid adieu as I needed to return back to my hotel for the evening proceedings which consisted of an industry Roadshow. As I was jumping into the cab interiors, Rakesh wondered aloud whether the Roadshow I was headed for was some kind of a peekshow on Berlin roads. I left him standing there, amidst the falling, swirling golden leaves, wondering some more.



Shangri La

—
- Arun K Khosla '76

Happiness, that's what Gymkhana smells like

Funny heartbreak time when we exited its portals, where we led

An idyllic existence

The freedom to be, just be, 'coz becoming wasn't even on the horizon

Moulding and shaping young sensibilities, who

Adapting and adopting and making do, with

Hills, Water Works, The Ganges, The Workshop and The School whizzing by, spent

The most magical years, full, very, very full

Of this and that

Of footer and hockey and all the exotic games

Of bonding over books, music, laughter, spoof, food and drink

And were merry as can be

For real, it was

Our very own Shangri La

Snow Peaks of Switzerland

- Smt Jayanthi Mallya w/o Gajanan Mallya '79

It was almost fifteen years back that I had read the book, 'Conquering Everest', a book on an expedition to Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tensing Norgay, but it is still fresh in my memory. It was an interesting book wherein the detailed description of their adventures and travails to reach the summit was written and it had literally mesmerized me.

This book kindled interest in me about mountains and expeditions. I was fascinated by snow and snow-clad mountains. The spark ignited was still burning inside me and was waiting for the opportune time to flare up. I never let go the opportunity of reading the books on topic of my interest, whenever I came across one, but couldn't quench my thirst for more.

Years passed by and my desire to visit the snow clad mountains was left unfulfilled. Though in between, we had gone to visit Shimla and Darjeeling, the sight of Mount Everest and snow peaks of Kanchenjunga from a distance had succeeded only in increasing my desire to have a closer look and experience the vicinity of snow.

I never expected my dream would become reality so soon. It was in the month of July 2019 that

we made up our mind to take a break and go for a short holiday without elaborate pre-planning. After a lot of web-search and consultations with friends, we booked tickets for a ten day Europe tour, organized by travel company 'Thomas Cook'.

This was our first ever trip abroad. So we had no inclination of what it was going to be and how good the places we were going to visit would be. Since our tour was starting from Paris, France we flew down to Paris from Hyderabad, where we are presently posted, by 'Etihad Airways' via Abu Dhabi. Our next ten days of tour was by road in an Air-conditioned coach, and we were witness to one of the most scenic journeys through out.

On the fourth day of our Europe Tour we reached Switzerland, the paradise on earth and the dream destination of tourists. The visit to Mount



Jungfraubahn was an optional tour in the itinerary on extra payment. We were in two minds as the extra payment was substantial.

Finally we decided to go, since it was once in a lifetime visit for us to this beautiful country and felt that we shouldn't regret later for what we might have missed. The next day we travelled to the city of Interlaken by road from where we have to take a train to Jungfraubahn. We reached the intermediate point Grindelwald Grund by train, after a journey of about an hour from the foothill and from there again took a 'rack and pinion train' to reach Jungfraubahn, Europe's highest railway station situated at a height of 3454 metres---a world of eternal Ice and Snow.

The train journey from Interlaken to Jungfraubahn was beautiful and scenic. The train with wooden body, large windows and wooden seats was maintained neat and clean and gave an impression of a new train. The wooden body train is rare to see in our country these days. Overall we had a fantastic journey.

Jungfraubahn, also known as 'Top of Europe' has an average temperature of -7.9 degree centigrade. The train services were started in the year 1912 that is sixteen years after the project had commenced. It has the highest altitude post box in Switzerland, highest 'Lindt' chocolate shop in Europe and the highest watch shop in the world.

The tour of Jungfraubahn started as soon as we reach the station terminal by train. En route we



visited the 'Ice Palace' which covers an area of 1000 square meters, with countless niches and passage ways. The temperature is maintained at -3 degree Celsius. Crystal like sculptures of Eagles, Penguins and Amphorae transform the grotto into shimmering work of art. The floor of Ice Palace was very slippery. With slow and careful steps we could finish the round.

When we finally reached the plateau, the breath taking sight was amazing and beyond words. It was the first time experience of snow for me and my hubby. We were very careful while walking over the snow, lest we injure ourselves by accidental fall otherwise. The whole terrain covered with snow, and the pure white sky above was enchanting. It was like 'Heaven on Earth'. I felt like I was in a dream world and couldn't believe myself.

The next day, a visit to 'Mount Titlis' was planned in our tour, which is another beautiful snow peak of Switzerland. The cable car ride was a beautiful experience. Watching the snow covered mountain

ranges all around and the lush green area below was enthralling.

After getting down from the first cable car, we had to switch over to another rotating cable car ----'Rotair', to the top of Mount Titlis at 3020 meters. The cable car ride was a new experience and we enjoyed thoroughly. The cable cars were maintained neat and clean and we were surprised to see each and every cable car was shining like a new one.

When we reached the top of Mount Titlis, we were exalted to see the scenic beauty, the snow capped mountains everywhere. It seemed purely 'Heaven on Earth'. I feel, the freshness and

beauty in the surrounding, purity and quietude in the air, transforms one to be one with oneself.

Both 'Jungfraubahn' and 'Mount Titlis' are having a marvelous infrastructure, which is unmatched. The availability of souvenir shops, restaurants and neat and clean washrooms at such a height is a wonder and laudable.

Their ability to provide and maintain the beautiful infrastructure to perfection is beyond my imagination and words.

I can only say, Switzerland is a wonderful place, providing opportunities for memorable journeys and experience par words.



In Praise of "Yayavar-ism": The Waterfronts across India

- Sanjeev Kishore' 81 and Vandana Srivastava

It was in December, 2018, we had just moved to Bengaluru. Professor Saheb called from Alipurduar, to convey best wishes for the New Year. He nonchalantly discussed the plummeting temperatures in Delhi, when I informed him about being in Bangalore. There was a long stunned silence, followed by, "Sir, Aap to Yayavar ho Gaye hain. Two transfers of 2000 Kms in six months". For a man who had spent his entire life in one place, we were nothing short of a Yayavar, a nomad. There were other similar interactions:

Some empathetic guy from Agarwal packers said, "Sir, abhi to Guwahati se aaye the, phir chale!"

A Lucknow university junior said, "Ma'am, you are so lucky to have lived all over the country, you have had such a rich life... look at me, I have only lived in Lucknow. How boring!

That got us thinking that yes, indeed our journey has been so rich!

Water bodies have always defined Human civilizations. Who can forget the Sunday afternoons spent near the water works or further above the hills along with batch-mates. The journey that started from the water works of

Jamalpur has now spanned almost the entire country. From Kanjli wetlands in Kapurthala to Kaveri Bank in Sri-rangapatnam, the journey can be best described through the water bodies.



Water Works at Jamalpur in mid-Eighties



Sun sets on the Uttar-vahini Ganga at Varanasi. Sunsets at Varanasi have spiritually calmed innumerable souls since time immemorial.

The life-giving Mighty Ganges flows through the northern plains. A mesmerizing view of the river can be enjoyed from the Ramnagar Fort, located on the eastern bank of the Ganga. In

1988, Hussainpur was a vast area of barren land which was being tamed into a beautiful Railway township. At one end of the township was a proposed lake. The abstract estimate of RCF proposed a lake twice the size of the one that was finally constructed.

How can one forget walking on the lake floor when it was being prepared for filling up the water for the first time?! The beautiful pathway around the lake was our regular and cherished trail for the morning walks and for feeding the numerous fishes and ducks. Hussainpur, Kapurthala was our haven in those days of a troubled Punjab. Yet, some lazy afternoons were spent with family and friends in Kanjli, a nearby wetland. For the young officers and their families, it was perhaps the only picnic spot -a small water-body with a reasonably maintained park with swings. Quite a few impromptu picnics happened at Kanjli forming part of the treasured memories of the children playing with their plastic bats and balls.

“What is it that Bombay has and Delhi doesn’t?”
 “The Sea”, of course! From the parched yet spacious north-western state of Punjab, we had moved to the bustling, over crowded and wet city of Mumbai. The Sunday evening strolls at Marine Drive and the extra-large cheese sandwiches and strawberry shakes on the Worli sea-face are still missed. We had a view of the sea from our 11th floor flat in Nirmal Park. Even from such a distance one could easily see the waves at Haji Ali beyond the Mahalaxmi Racecourse on one side and the placid sea of the harbour on the

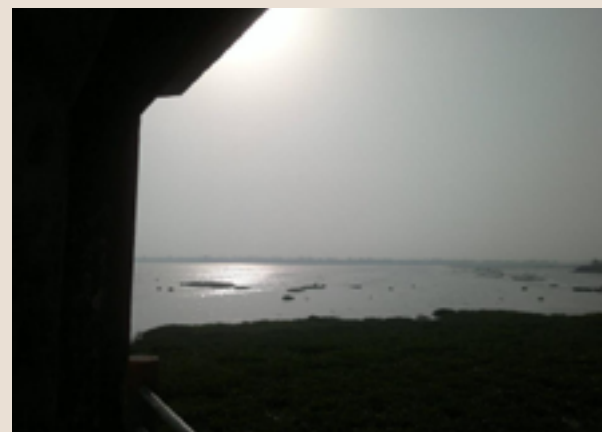
other. The lure of the beautiful sea took us on ferry rides and a couple of trips along the coastline south of Mumbai. The clear waters of Murud Janjira and the wide continental shelf of Alibaug were inviting and alluring.

Sultanpur bird century near Gurgaon, had a beautiful lake but one could hardly find a water body in the Sariska wildlife sanctuary. Of course, a few kilometres away was the Siliserh lake, a vast water body surrounded by hills of Rajasthan.



Siliserh Lake, Rajasthan

A short drive from the railway colony at Gorakhpur was the Ramgarh Tal, a huge lake spreading across approximately 700 hectares. Somewhere between 1986/87 and 2012-2013, the Ramgarh Tal was developed as a beautiful waterfront.



Ramgarh Tal, Gorakhpur

The terai region of Gorakhpur is famous for its fog. Night inspections during winters involved foot-

plating in dense fog when barely anything was visible. One such inspection from Gorakhpur on a northbound train in the dense fog brought me to the Gandak Bridge in the morning, providing a visual treat of a winter sun struggling hard to shine.



On the banks of river Gandak: Early morning

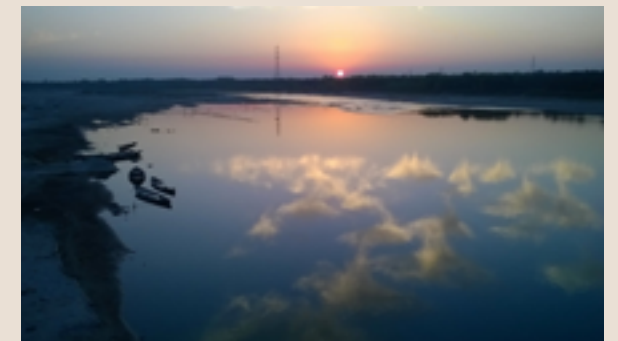
More than 100 tributaries of the Brahmaputra invite you to spend time on the banks of this complex network of water bodies. The Torsa, Neora, Kaljani, Murti, Rydak, Barak and Sankosh are just some of the rivers that divide the region into culturally different areas. The many rivulets and streams flowing down the foothills of the Himalayas criss-cross the region, from the duars of North Bengal to Assam and beyond to Shillong in Meghalaya and Pasighat in Arunachal.



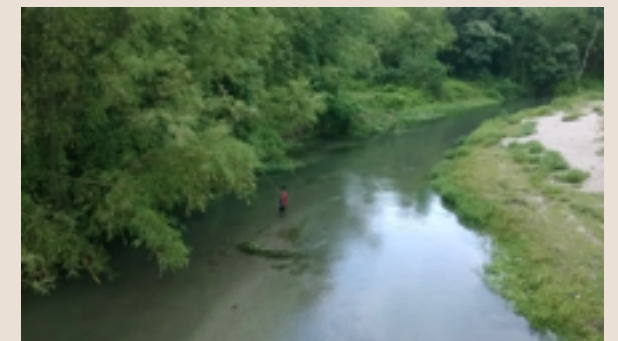
The Teesta from the iconic Coronation Bridge: The north east part of India is known for its flora and fauna. Moving eastwards from Siliguri, the first mighty river that is encountered is the Teesta. Unlike the rivers of the northern plain which flow into the Ganges, the Teesta flows in to the Brahmaputra.



The mighty Torsa during the monsoons: Northern Duars



Reflections of another kind near Kokrajhar in West Assam: Sunset from a railway bridge



Early morning scene at the river Dodai, 10 minute walk from the DRM Bungalow at Alipurduar



From the new railway bridge on the river Neora in North Bengal



Boats appear to float in the air on the clear waters of Dawki River, West Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya



Barapani - Umiam Lake On the way to Shillong
Karnataka is a nature lover's delight with the Western Ghats, waterfalls, rivers, hills and forests. There are innumerable Kere (Lakes) in and around Bengaluru. Yelahanka itself is surrounded by many lakes – Hebbal, Jakkur, Allalasandra and Yelahanka, all being developed as beautiful water-fronts.



A view from Anjneya Hill at Hampi: Hampi, the capital of the Vijayanagar Kingdom has a hilly terrain formed by granite boulders on the banks of the Tungabhadra.



Mydala Lake behind the Mandargiri Hill, 60km from Bangalore, has a beautifully carved temple, shaped like a fan made of peacock feathers, and a massive statue of Lord Mahavir. A climb up the hillock reveals the serene and blue waters of the Mydala Lake



And quiet flows the Kaveri around the island of Srirangapatnam, the capital city of Tipu Sultan from where he fought the famous battles.



On a riverine island of very fine white sand in the mighty Brahmaputra

**Copyright of the pictures rests with authors.*

The waters flow and, Civilizations come and go.
The flow symbolises the passage of time.

The flow of the rivers embody the spirit of
Gurudev's 1905 song

“Jodi Tor Dak Shune Keu Na Ase Tobe Ekla Cholo Re”, (“If no one responds to your call, then go your own way alone”)!

One keeps yearning for some anchoring but there comes a time when one realises that there is very little else to do except to leave a few marks on the banks of the rivers and move on.

“If no-one shines a light on the path, If the dark night brings thunder and storm at the door – then let the lightning ignite the light in you alone to shine on the path, If no-one heeds to your call – then walk alone – Tobe ekla cholo ekla cholo re”

Yayavar-ism, at its best!!!!

WITH BEST
COMPLIMENTS FROM

Canon

Club Day Cake Cutting

- Subadra Narayanan w/o V Narayanan '55

V. Narayanan, a 1955 batch SAM and my husband, was very happy that he was posted as Chief Mechanical Engineer, South Eastern Railway, Garden Reach, Kolkata in what would be his concluding and most challenging assignment in Indian Railways. Yet another reason he was happy was that he'd be able to visit his cherished Alma Mater, Jamalpur Gymkhana many a time. I was happy for him too in this regard.

I'd accompany him for 3 Club Days in 1993, 1994 & 1995. Fatima and Masihuzzaman too attended 1993 Club Day. Fatima, as the wife of the senior most serving mechanical officer, was entrusted with the task of cutting the cake that year.

During Club Day 1994 it was my turn to cut the cake as the wife of the senior most serving officer. I was indeed looking forward to this privilege. I had chosen a good sari and appropriate accessories to put my best foot forward as it were for this event. With so many young and enthusiastic SAMs and many bright young ladies around me the cake cutting event went off very well, to the great joy of all those

present. The cameras used those days were not digital ones which would have enabled one to view what has been captured there and then. Only a week or so later the photographs would reach Garden Reach. The photos were indeed good, appreciated by many who had seen them. However, unlike my husband who freezes when he poses for photographs, I do smile cheerfully. In this regard the photographs turned out to be a damp squib as I had not smiled at all!

Come 1995 Club Day I had determined to make amends for this and was hoping that the privilege of cutting the cake turns out to be mine. It was indeed so. In addition to the attire and matching accessories, I had rehearsed thoroughly the smiling exercise. And as the cameras were clicking, I'd put on the most cheerful countenance as I went about cutting the cake. I was buoyed with the presence of a whole lot of young bright folks around me at this time. Back in Calcutta, I'd beseech my husband to reach out to those in Jamalpur to hasten the dispatch of the photos. He'd say that as his superannuation is on March 31, 1995, he is busy trying to get his final

settlement sorted out and cannot be following up for getting photos from Jamalpur. I'd respond saying that having made final withdrawals from PF for the wedding of both our daughters the balance is not likely to be very much and his time could indeed be better spent to try and get the photos!

In what appeared to be an eternity, the photographs arrived after some time. This time it was an even greater disappointment as the photographs showed only the cake, knife and my hand! The well-rehearsed smile part was missing.

This is clearly a case where "Man proposes, God disposes"!

This is only a small disappointment. The 3 Club Day visits were memorable and joyous occasions, mingling and interacting with a whole lot of bright young folks. They were fun filled days with several events scheduled for the day with variety entertainment, fun and games not to leave out gourmet food. Those days are etched in my memory.



Extracted from SAM Autumn 1994

The Golden Jubilee Batch

1971



N L Madhusudan, Batch Senior

Recognising the 'Golden Jubilee Batch' is not a very old tradition. The concept was spawned during the 1989 Club Day when we had a number of Pakistani Sams with us. L R Gosain and A H Khan (from Pakistan), both '40, came up with the idea and it was followed up by Vinod K Vij '62, the then Director. It was decided that the following year, all batches prior to and up to the '40 batch would be given special invitations and looked after specifically once they were at Jamalpur. Thus, the 1990 batch had a 'Golden Jubilee Batch' for the first time and the tradition has been followed ever since.

This year's Golden Jubilee Batch is '71. The golden boys include the following:

1. Navalur Lakshminarayanan Madhusudan
2. Jyoti Kumar
3. Girish Kumar Arya
4. Sumit Sinha
5. Ajay Kumar Verma
6. Arunendra Kumar
7. Surendra Kumar Sharma
8. Sharat Seth
9. Ghan Shyam Swaroop
10. Pramod Kumar Sharma

The brevity in the names of Jyoti Kumar, Sumit Sinha and Sharat Seth made up for the name of their batch-senior.

Unfortunately, the number of this year's golden boys has been reduced to seven, with the untimely passing away of Jyoti Kumar, Girish Kumar Arya and Surendra Kumar Sharma.

1971

Batch photograph



Front row: Left to right

P.C. Gajbhiye 73, Phool Singh 72, P.K. Sharma 71, A. Khare 72, S.K. Sharma 71, N.L. Madhusudan 71, Sharat Seth 71, A.K. Verma 71, Ghan Shyam Swaroop 71, S. Sinha 71, Arunendra Kumar 71, Jyoti Kumar 71, K.K. Atal 72, R. Chandra 72, K.P. Rao 72, Rajiv Misra 74, S.K. Kala 74.

Missing in pic is G.K. Arya 71.



L to R - Arunendra Kumar '71, A K Verma, Rajiv Chandra '72, Rakesh Misra '72



A K Verma '71



Sharat Seth '71

As I remember...

- Arunendra Kumar '71

What is Jamalpur?

When I got a call for Jamalpur, no one in our family had known where this place is and what was it known for. In order to find more about it my father, who was posted at Dhampur, visited the nearest railway divisional office at Moradabad. The meeting with DS Moradabad had enthused him. After returning he narrated the virtues of SCRA and Jamalpur to us and it was a pleasure to see the gleam in his eyes. We were also informed that there is no direct train from Dhampur to Jamalpur. Amritsar Howrah Mail should be de-boarded at Kiul, to take a connecting passenger train to Jamalpur. We were not used to Railway Time Table, moreover the Time Table for other railways were not easily available. The only recourse was to use the Railway Bradshaw, only available at book stalls of selected railway stations. Anyway it did not matter much as I had no idea as to how to make any sense of the time table.

The first journey to Jamalpur

When the journey to Jamalpur was actually undertaken I got down at Kiul in the middle of the night and went to the first class waiting room as I was told that there was a waiting room for



first class passengers available free of cost. It is here I had the first interaction with the special class railway apprentices of 1968 batch who also landed there from an incoming train from Jamalpur. There was great thrill in them to see that few firsties were on their way to report to Jamalpur. A long introductory letter was written by one of the apprentices requesting the hostel management to take good care of us. I considered it as a valuable possession and may give an edge in hostel privileges, perhaps. On reaching the hostel

I realised what does this letter really meant. The word CARE presented itself with a new meaning.

Gymkhana or IRIM&EE

Gymkhana is perhaps one of the few places which is remembered more than IRIM&EE, the Institute which gave us the Engineering certification. No one hears so much of the word IRIM&EE. It is either Gymkhana or Jamalpur or at best SCRA. Such is the appeal of this hostel. The nearest one can hear is MUIR hostel of Allahabad University, also called Amaranatha Jha Hostel, primarily because of the toppers being the residents. This is a topsy turvy situation. The Universities generally add glamour to the degree but the memories in our case are those of Gymkhana, and not of IRIM&EE and somehow they cannot be erased. The four year stay at Gymkhana has etched real deep in our mental psyche. Yes, we do remember a few of the Professors.

No takers for posting in IRIM&EE

As we got on to our railway jobs it was felt by everyone that no one wanted a posting at the Institute- IRIM&EE. It was not so much about the Institute but the place, Jamalpur which was a big dampener. Though every apprentice who passed out of this place remembered it and wanted to be a part of Club Day at Jamalpur. But it was a strict NO to posting. The reasons are not far too seek. There is hardly any school. In the only convent school, there is no guarantee of admission even though CWM is part of the Management board. The Railway Club is fairly active but there is

nothing in the city to charm the residents. We hardly visited the town of Jamalpur in our four years of stay. I consider this shortcoming as the failure of the officers who have passed out from this place. No investment of thought was made to make Jamalpur posting lucrative. When I became CRB I tried to deal with this problem and offered three incentives. A bungalow peon post was created for every JA grade officer post in the Institute. The option to retain the house at the previous place of posting was brought in. Third was a reasonable assurance that an officer posted in IRIM&EE would be sent for training abroad. It did provide some relief but still could not compare with the glamour of Metros. In any case the basic issue of schooling could not be addressed. A good school or Kota type Engineering/Medical coaching was not likely to work out. The infirmities remained. The only way left was to relocate IRIM&EE. Lucknow was chosen as the new venue, some efforts were made but time was short for me.

The dazzle of SCRA

I am of the view that SCRA selection was the greatest blackmail of an aspiring career. The choice is thrust too early in one's life. There are no two opinions that SCRA was the toughest examination conducted by the UPSC in the country. The successful candidates varied from 10 to 15 only. My batch had ten, and there were two medical rejections. Such rigorous was the entrance. At the same time it was difficult to ignore the lure of a guaranteed Class ONE job of Government of India accompanied with free

education, lifelong free medical care etc. Any one who had cleared SCRA would have found easily his/her name in the selection list of any other competitive examination in the country. But SCRA pours water on all such dreams. The parents pressure on their son/daughter to continue in the excellent job is an added factor. There have been individual attempts to branch out later into Civil services or IIM's or Universities abroad but it has been rare as the chosen path does not give ample leeway to try somewhere else. Most of us feel that a bird in hand is better than two in the bush and stick to Railways and try and make a career.

I owe it to Gymkhana

All said and done Gymkhana, Jamalpur gave me more than what I deserved. I had never played

sports or games of any kind. This exposure, though initially forced, changed my outlook. There were certain attributes which stand out in the boys from Jamalpur. As each one of us in the batch were the best in the country and were to compete against one another, the attitude of cut throat competition engrossed our mind set and it remained as a part of our mental psyche later in our career too. It had serious ramifications. Another visible feature was the organising capability. I have seen so many DRM's looking for Jamalpur officers for running the divisional Officers Clubs or managing railway functions as it insured them from failures. The feeling was that he is a Jamalpur boy - he will do it. It is a great recognition.

Those were the glorious years and envy of so many who could not make it to SCRA.



Hub of all Activities

- Shobha Sharma, better half of Late S K Sharma '71

While turning over the pages of my life, I think of the year 1979 when I came in the life of Surendra (S K Sharma '71). That year, Surendra was posted as AME at Alipurduar, West Bengal. I was absolutely new to the railway family and didn't know anything about railway life or culture. However, I soon realized that within the broad railway life, there was an area that dominated all others. For Surendra, the hub of all activities was Jamalpur and he more often than not talked about his time spent there than any other subject.

From then till I was finally able to travel to Jamalpur, I was very curious and wanted to visit the place that dominated Surendra's thinking. We planned a number of times but somehow it never materialized.

Finally, on the 14th of February 2012, my daughter and I had the honour of stepping onto Jamalpur's soil for the very first time. It was a really nice experience to be there on a Club Day. Surendra showed us his room as well as that of his best friend, Arunendra. I was overwhelmed by the way the youngsters treated us: with love, affection and respect. The entire day's proceedings are etched in my memory.

How can I forget to mention the cycle riksha race won by Handa (Sanjiv Handa '69). This was against Surendra.

The hospitality lavished on us during our stay is memorable. The cultural programme was wonderful and performed entirely by the apprentices as well as visiting Sams.



On Joining Jamalpur...

- Sumit Sinha '71

My joining Jamalpur was entirely due to fortuitous circumstances. I was chugging along peacefully and uneventfully, pursuing my BSc Physics (Hons) in St. Joseph's College, Bengaluru (then Bangalore), under the National Science Talent Scholarship scheme. Prior to this, I had done my Senior Cambridge in 1969 from St. Joseph's Boys High School, Bengaluru, qualified for IIT Chennai in 1970, paid the first instalment and did not join (!!), much to the astonishment and horror of my school classmates and school faculty and because of foolishly pursuing impractical notions of "being a scientist", just because I had got a National scholarship. On an average, 98% of every school leaving batch in PCM stream would qualify for the holy grail, the IITs as a stepping stone for USA. (Incidentally, all my school classmates who went to IIT continue to stay in USA even today). Traditionally, we used to retain contact for years with the school faculty but they refused to meet me or talk to the nut-case (yours truly) for violating the unwritten Commandment of not joining IIT.

Be that it may, one of our family friends, Mr Haldar suggested to my father that I should apply for SCRA. Mr Haldar used to talk fondly of his mentor, Mr. S. C. Misra ('39 batch) and how he had completely changed his life. Mr Haldar



was an ex-Apprentice Mechanic from Jamalpur at the time when Mr Misra was posted in JMP. Apparently, Mr Haldar's sporting prowess caught Mr Misra's fancy; he was encouraged to look beyond Railways as a career. Mrs Misra taught him German. Years later, when Mr Haldar resigned from Railways and joined MICO (Bosch) plant in Bangalore, his knowledge of German made him the automatic choice for advanced training in Bosch, Germany. Thereafter, he rose rapidly in the MICO (Bosch) hierarchy. Mr Haldar continued to periodically call on Mr S.C. Misra even after his retirement and settling down in Dehra Dun.

So, here I was, cajoled to sit for an exam nobody had heard of in the South. I had not heard about Jamalpur. My father's reference point was that it was near Bhagalpur. That I understood because we had relatives there. The biggest plus point as far as my parents were concerned was direct entry into Railways in a Premier Department. There were only 8 candidates from Bangalore, 25 from Chennai as per my batchmate, NL Madhusudan. That's it, in the whole of South India in 1971. As I was giving the written exam in a cavernous room in Bangalore's iconic Vidhana Soudha, the invigilator innocently asked me what this SCRA exam was about. His impression was that this exam which led to direct recruitment in Railway service was ostensibly for engine drivers and mechanics! Never mind that UPSC would not conduct such exams for engine drivers et al; thus, was the level of ignorance in good ole Bangalore for SCRA scheme.

Eventually, I was called for the UPSC interview in 1971 and qualified. As I was travelling to New Delhi in the GT Express, I passed innumerable Military Specials, many with tanks and artillery guns loaded on wagons, shrouded in canvas, all moving towards the north as part of a massive military mobilization before the 1971 war. UPSC had given second class railway passes to appear for the interview. These were the old second class coaches with cushioned seats when IR had first class, second class and third class coaches. [Later in more egalitarian times, IR abolished the cushioned-seat second class, had only first and third-class coaches and after a public outcry, renamed the third class as second class. It was

very simple: one vertical stripe was painted over; in many coaches, it was so poorly done that you could still faintly see the third vertical stripe that had been painted over]. On my return journey from New Delhi, I was occupying the lower berth. The upper berth passenger was extremely placid and polite; he would descend only to sit on the edge of the lower berth for breakfast, lunch and dinner and then promptly go back to the upper berth. We barely exchanged a dozen words in the two-day journey in GT Express to Chennai, where he got down and I caught a connecting train to Bangalore. Much later, after I joined Gymkhana, I was formally introduced to my khaki clad batchmates who had joined before me. Actually, introduced was a misnomer. They were moving around like, how do I put it, "zombies", "automatons" or somewhere "in-between"? BTW, I rapidly joined their ranks. One of them was looking "vaguely familiar". It turned out to be our Batch Senior, N. L. Madhusudan, who had shared the ride in GT Express in the upper berth and had barely spoken to me other than greetings for time of day!

Two other things come to my mind before I left Bangalore for Jamalpur. Mr Haldar came round to see me and announced that I should meet Mr Mahadevan before I leave. Mr U. Mahadevan was ex Principal, IRIMEE and had settled down in a beautiful bungalow in Bangalore. He and his wife were very gracious and courteous to me and my parents. As we got up to leave, he told me casually that there would be a "little bit of physical activity" and I should take it sportingly. Mr Haldar had a knowing grin on

his face; my father merely shrugged, having been through medical college and the Armed Forces Medical Services induction. Funnily enough, that calmed me down instantaneously as I mentally compared notes with some of my school classmates' anecdotes who had joined IIT Kharagpur (Madras was very mild). Another was a neatly typed letter received from "Mr Stewart, Chief Hostel Warden, Jamalpur Gymkhana" that suggested I should bring some snacks and packed foodstuff sufficient for the first couple of days to tide over the logistics of settling down. I had a hearty laugh. Yes, I did pack some stuff. My father insisted that I acknowledge "Mr. Stewart's" letter giving my JMP ETA arrival particulars to him.

As usual, the official letter asking me to join forthwith barely left any time. I saw a First Class Pass for the first time in my life and carefully read all the instructions. There were no direct trains for the journey which would consume two nights, three days from Bangalore to Jamalpur. I was on the waiting list. My father wrote a post card addressed to the Station Superintendent, Madras Central, requesting for reservation on the onward Madras-Howrah Mail, with a self-addressed return post card attached to it that could be detached and sent for a reply. Such quaint practices have disappeared completely now. To our pleasant surprise, the Station Supdt. Mr. Rosario wrote back on that reply-paid postcard in green ink with a calligraphic style, saying I should meet him in his office in Chennai Station after arrival by Brindavan Express. He was waiting for me, smartly attired in uniform, his peak

cap resting on the table. After an excellent cup of coffee, congratulating me effusively for joining the crème-la-crème service in IR and addressing me as "Sir" a couple of times, he escorted me to the train, whispered to the TTE standing in front of the coach. I was promptly taken to a lower berth and asked to relax and settle down. ***Suddenly I felt that it was a good service I was joining.***

In Kolkata, I switched to the Upper India Express at Sealdah. One of our relatives in Bhagalpur had been forewarned about my journey. He met me at Bhagalpur station and insisted that he accompanies me to Jamalpur, much to my discomfiture (didn't want him around in front of my seniors). At the JMP station, two seniors were scanning the passengers and identified me instantly due to the ubiquitous drawing board and T-square which was part of my luggage. They kept their distance when they saw me "guarded" by an elderly relative. They overtook us on the road overbridge, looking back and smiling with anticipation; you know the kind of look that a hungry man gives when he is eyeing some delectable food about to be served on a platter. Later on, I discovered that they were Kamal Shivpuri and H.C. Joshi, both '69 batch. The reception committee were waiting for us in the Gymkhana front porch. When they found that my relative would be catching a return train shortly, with extraordinary finesses, they put him at ease, assured him that it was one big happy family, "just like home", he should not worry about me and they bid him a very courteous farewell and plonked him in the same rickshaw. Barely had the rickshaw rounded the garden and exited from

the front gate, there was a collective whoop and I was "formally welcomed" into Gymkhana. I was whisked away, bag and baggage, by a bunch of seniors to the room belonging to J.P. Singh ('70 batch) and told I will be doubling with him. (At that time, the whole of '70 batch were away and joined in a few days later). Along the corridor, I met Mr. P. Bahadur ('66 batch), spruced up and debonair. I was told that he is the respected "Mr Stewart" who will shortly come around to my room to inspect the foodstuff that I had brought. Mr Bahadur barely repressed a smile as we passed him.

Our batch missed the Club Day '72 celebrations by a whisker. Some of our seniors would console us privately that Gymkhana life is very good once the "initiation" phase in first month was over; if we had seen the bonhomie and camaraderie displayed by seniors in Club Day, we would have understood, etc. etc. '67 batch were waiting for posting orders and were bored out of their wits. So, they took more than a healthy interest in our welfare, even though, they were the passing-out batch. Yet, when we saw them off at the JMP station to report to their respective Zonal Headquarters, their stern visage would disappear, they shook hands with us and there was genuine warmth in their voices as they looked forward to see us later on in service. First inkling to us firsties: life is not too bad after all.

Another defining moment during our first month in Gymkhana was Holi celebrations. The seniors had unanimously declared a moratorium on all activities involving firsties during the period of Holi. This cease-and-desist order lasted for just 24 hours, but what a respite. The senior batches went out of their way to make us relax and act normal. Everybody was routinely dunked into the lily pond, there was a riot of colours and we were made to feel part of the crowd. After dinner, the entire Gymkhana crowd marched to the reservoir in the hills, singing songs along the way. We stayed late into the night, on top of the hills near the reservoir, as each batch showcased their talents in singing and mimicry. (Late) Kamal Mathur, '68 batch was easily the star singer. We firsties were actively encouraged to join in the "Antarakshi"; quite a disaster actually: bad idea; you cannot switch on-and-off for 24 hours only to act normal, period. But it was a glorious and fitting finale to a very memorable and unforgettable Holi. We felt immensely refreshed and looked forward with relish to the rest of our stay in Gymkhana.

As William James once pithily said, "Is life worth living? It all depends upon the liver".

Any regrets in joining Jamalpur? NEVER.



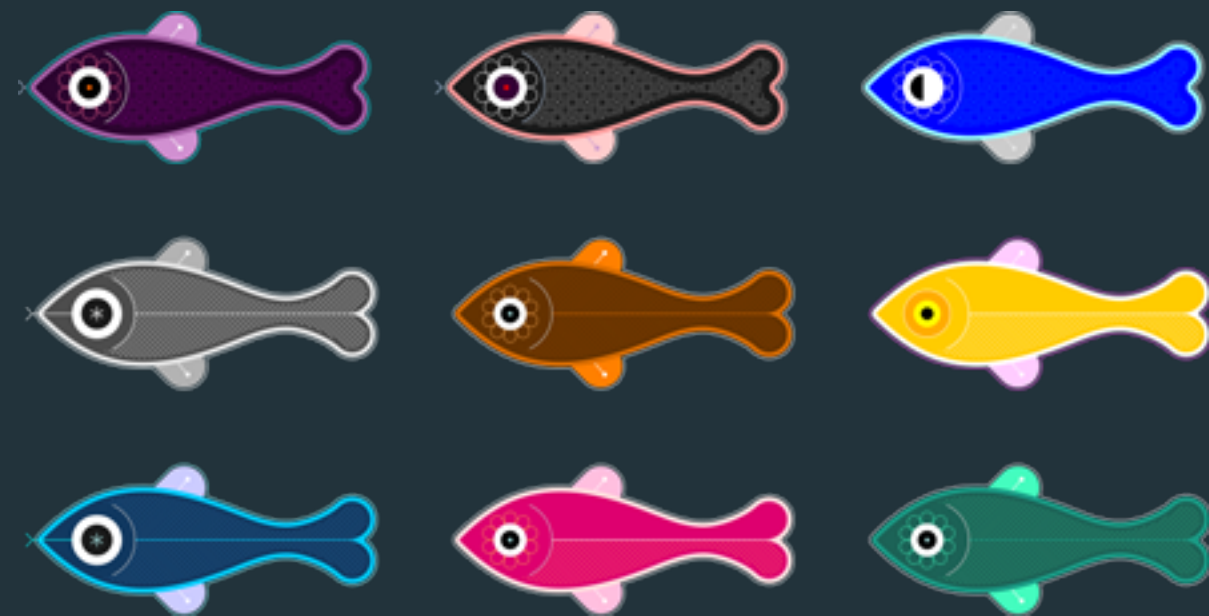
Snippet From Sumit Sinha '71

Writer's Block...overcome with a bowl of fish curry?

"Oi! Psssst!". That was S.N.Chakravarty (SNC, '68) as he summoned me sometime during my second month in Gymkhana. "Have you heard about SAM Magazine? No? Well, I am Editor SAM and you have to contribute an article for the forthcoming issue".

Now when the Batch Senior of the Senior-most Batch tells you something, as a firstie, you just bob your head and agree wholeheartedly. I promptly put it at the back of my mind as a to-do item to be done at leisure when time permits. Ah, time... It was at a premium. We had unrestrained spare time in the evenings during the first shop session. We were discovering the joys of the sports field. I had played football and hockey in school and was enjoying myself. We were given a formal introduction into the nuances of billiards by N. S. Kasturi Rangan, '68 batch. After 10.30 pm, after the Seniors had left, when we had unrestricted access to the Club room, quality time was spent in perfecting more esoteric aspects of billiards starting with nursery cannons, screw shots, imparting spins to the ball by striking it off-centre and the ultimate: trying to make the ball move in a curve around another ball before hitting the object ball. Article for SAM magazine? What was that?

A week later, I bumped into SNC; rather, he bumped into me and asked, "Where's the article?". I mumbled something about working on it and fled. I was in a blue funk as I could not think of ANYTHING to write about. The next day, I was told, 48 hours... I was in panic mode. Gone were my billiards sessions as I racked my brains for a suitable topic. No go. On the second day, in the games field, he looked at me enquiringly and I told him, I'll give it tonight". SNC was pleasantly surprised. "Really?" he asked with



a touch of disbelief perhaps. "Tell you what; join me at our dinner table tonight. We are having fish". I nodded miserably and rushed to my room after the games to write the accursed article.

Now, fish and Bengalis are inextricably linked. I don't know why; something like the word-association games that are inflicted on unsuspecting blokes when they least expect it. When I joined, some of the Seniors screamed at me, "God help us. Another Bengali!! Now he will be wanting his fish". I was puzzled. I mean, what's the big deal? There were so many other interesting things to be eaten. There were just three Bengalis in JMP, all in the Senior most '68 batch when I joined; one from Agra, another from West Bengal and one from Nepal. Howzatt? I was the fourth when I joined in 1972. The demand for fish was so low that if you wanted fish, special arrangements had to be made. The '68 batch fish eaters sat on the same table and would order fish periodically. To be invited to share fish with them was considered a signal honour. I could not even enjoy the dish properly as I was thinking of the half-finished article. I promised to hand over the article after dinner and bolted to my room shortly. There, I hurriedly finished what I was writing. In those days, it was hand-written laboriously in foolscap size paper. I do not remember what tripe I wrote. Finally, at about 10.30 pm, I knocked on SNC's door and handed it in.

He made me come in and sit. He read the article, smiled and said, "Good. Thanks".

I felt liberated. I seriously think that the fish curry had helped.

Sporting SAM

As part of the Editorial Team of SAM, I used to browse through the earlier editions of the SAM magazine. I came across descriptions of Inter-Batch Sports competitions including Track and Field events.

It was disheartening. Our batch was a small batch. Seven of us joined in one lot. That's it. Others joined in dribs and drabs. Sharat Seth joined our batch a few months later. This was followed after a gap by Ghanshyam Swaroop and Pramod Kumar Sharma. We could not even field a full team to play hockey, football or cricket. It had consequences when we participated in the Inter-Batch tournaments.

In our first year, the sports field was deserted because the senior batches were preparing for the CEI exams. Only, the enthusiastic Kamal Deep Mainrai, '70 batch, kept a watchful eye over us to see that we reported to the sports field in time, properly attired. It was hockey time. We would desultorily knock the ball around, utterly bored. Then Mainrai got the brainwave of playing half-field hockey, six-a-side. The maths failed because the quorum of 12 players fell short. On very few occasions, there were a total of 12 players on the field, thanks to some seniors who came to stretch their legs. Mainrai would occasionally break into a trot and exhort us to do at least one round of the field before dispersing.

Yet, there were very good hockey players in the whole of Gymkhana. Hockey was the Gymkhana forte. Maybe, other JMP teams did not get a chance to play hockey as extensively as Gymkhanites did. It was my everlasting regret that we did not get an opportunity to participate in hockey tournaments elsewhere in Eastern Railway. Years later, when we were doing our Foundation Course at the LBSNAA Academy at Mussoorie, we rediscovered the joy of playing hockey. Sharat Seth, Arunendra Kumar and myself were in the Academy hockey team. Bolstered by other probationers from the Central Engineering Services, some of whom had played in IIT hockey teams, we gave a good account of ourselves against the local teams in Mussoorie.

In Cricket, Gymkhana was undoubtedly the best team. We occasionally played matches with the Apprentice Mechanic Team and a combined team fielded by the Central Institute. We won comfortably. The highlight of the “cricket season” was an invitation to play cricket with the ITC team at their Basdeopur Club, Munger. The ITC colony was an oasis of peace and tranquility with well-manicured lawns and neatly trimmed hedges which could compete easily in ambience with upscale tea estates anywhere in India. More to the point, ITC had a fabulous club and the lavish repast after the cricket match was something to look forward to. The ITC officers were excellent hosts and their behaviour was impeccable in spite of losing to the Gymkhana team in front of their families. The journey up and down from JMP to Munger was in a dilapidated, possibly Second World War surplus Bedford truck with cushioned benches. The PTBs deliberately gave us the worst possible truck in the TPT section, something which did not jell with the “JMP Corporate Image” in Basdeopur Club. Matters did not help when sometimes the truck would refuse to start. After repeated cranking, it would then give a tremendous backfire that sounded like a gunshot with thick black smoke spewing from the exhaust; worse was when we had to push it to give a kick start (even after it was parked on a downslope). Not good when you have had a hearty meal with embellishments and doing all this hard work in front of the ITC families.

In tennis, badminton and squash, Gymkhana had no competition in Jamalpur.

That brings us to billiards and snooker. For the first-year batch, among the indoor games, this was particularly addictive as we were playing it for the first time in our lives. We had read about the exploits of Wilson Jones, the World Champion. Michael Ferreira was world class and had already started making waves. Here was an opportunity to play the same game which had put India on the world billiards and snooker map. More importantly, in the Gymkhana billiards and snooker tournaments, the first-year batch got equal opportunity as the senior most batch to compete, literally on a level playing field. Fortunately, TV had not yet made an appearance wherein we could have watched top notch players and their skills. Cocooned in JMP, we were blissfully ignorant of the standards of billiards and snooker achieved elsewhere in India. (World champions Geet Sethi and Pankaj Advani appeared much later on the scene and the TV broadcasts of their matches were superb). Then possibly in 1973 or 1974, JMP hosted the Bihar State Billiards and Snooker Championship Tournament, played in the Central Institute (CI). There we saw the game raised to a spectacularly different level as we gaped at the skills of the participants. Mind you, Bihar was nowhere near the top in all-India rankings, but it was an object lesson in how far you had to go to become a true champion. Particularly in snooker, the speed and accuracy at which the potting was done (as compared to in Gymkhana). There was an extended Sinha family based out of Patna and Jamshedpur who were participating. The combination of brothers, uncles and nephews totally dominated the tournament with their superb skills, especially in snooker. One of the other disgruntled participant muttered, “Why not; they have several billiards tables in their houses”. Note the plural in billiards tables. THAT was big. In the finals, we had gone early to get good vantage points. One of the senior batches cycled leisurely to the CI to be told, it was all over. The frames had wound up rapidly and the winner decided before the seniors got a chance to witness the Finals!!

Lessons learnt by us: indoor games such as billiards and snooker should be played as a recreational leisurely pastime only. Nothing more, nothing less.

No wonder, there was such an emphasis on bridge.

Mechanical Recreation Club football team in Jamalpur.

The Mechanical Recreation (or Mech Rec) Club team stood head and shoulders above all other football teams. Of course, it helped that they were the mainstay of the Jamalpur Football Team which participated in Eastern Railway’s Inter-Divisional Football Tournaments. It was probably in 1973 or 1974 that the ER Championship tournament was hosted by Jamalpur. The Mech Rec players literally towered over the slim, lightly built footballers from Howrah & Sealdah Divisions, Liluah and Kanchrapara Workshops. Egged on by a partisan home crowd, the visiting teams were pummeled into submission with robust tackling and powerful kicks which won over nimble foot-play. More often than not, the referees were busy looking the other way. JMP won the Tournament.

The Mech Rec players were the local heroes. The kids, 10-14 year old upwards, from the railway colonies and outhouses would play many games simultaneously on the Golf Course. Playing bare-footed, they had admirable agility and footwork. Their ultimate ambition was to emulate their Mech Rec heroes, get selected in the team and thus get gainful employment in JMP workshop as khalasis. Sadly, that was their ultimate aspiration. Makes you think. If these less-privileged kids had got opportunities as the kids from humble backgrounds get today, with football scholarships, proper football kits, nutritious food and coaching in various Football Academies, JMP may have produced National Level footballers.

Jamalpur Sports Association (JSA) Football Tournament, 1972

Football was our nemesis in the JSA tournaments. It was an accepted fact of life that other teams played better and the glory days of Gymkhana football were over. I got inducted in the first year itself in the Gymkhana team. In the first match, I don’t remember against which team, we drew 1-1 and patted ourselves on our backs. The next match was against Mech Rec team. Now Mech Rec had an unwritten code, strictly followed, that they would not beat Gymkhana by more than 6-0. The rest of time, they would be putting in some “warm-up” practice for subsequent matches. Something happened. The gods smiled on us. They beat us only 3-1. Rajiv Chandra, ’69 scored the goal against Mech Rec. We were euphoric. Maybe, they had not fielded their best players on that day, maybe, they indulged in too much match practice, but towards the end of the match, they went all out but could not increase the margin. ***It created a sensation.*** The crowds had started to filter in to see this match where the Gymkhana “sahibs” were playing better than expected.

Our next match was against Bihar Military Police (BMP) team. The stadium was packed. This was the very first time that BMP had participated in the JSA Football Tournament. Older, superbly fit, not aware of unwritten codes of going easy on the Gymkhana Team, they pulverized us 15-0. Towards the end of the match, our legs had become rubbery and we were praying for the final whistle. We glanced towards the stands and found Mr. Kailash Nath (’40 batch), IRIMEE Principal sitting stoically and watching the slaughter. Our AP(PT), Mr A. K. P. Sinha (’62 batch) was sitting next to him and looking distinctly uncomfortable. Later on, the AP(PT) told us that he had specifically invited him to watch the match after hearing about our spirited performance against Mech Rec team. But hats off to Mr Kailash Nath for maintaining a stiff upper lip. As we walked off the field disconsolately, he shook hands with each and every player.

In the evening while we were still licking our wounds, in walked our AP(PT) in the Gymkhana Club room to share the bad news. “Boys”, he announced, “Mr Kailash Nath has read the riot act. Never before had he seen such an insipid and listless display of football etc etc”. Apparently, we were physically out of shape and not serious about playing etc etc. This applied not only to the football team but to the WHOLE

of Gymkhana. Then he dropped the bombshell. “From tomorrow, EVERYBODY, all Seniors included, would have to report in sports dress at 0500 hrs on the sports field for calisthenics”. There was a collective gasp of disbelief. Some seniors said, “But hang on sir, we did not play. Why should we be penalized?” The AP(PT) said, “I will be there. So will the Principal”. There was a plaintive cry of distress. “But sir, why at 0500 hrs?”. The AP(PT) replied drily that some batches have shop sessions and this will give them ample time to wash and change before reporting for card-punching in the workshop booth.

Our batch was indifferent to the whole brouhaha. In any case, we were used to early morning routine because of the ongoing shop session.

Now some of the early 1960s batches that have done cross-country runs in JMP under the supervision of Mr S. C. Misra may say, “So what’s new?”. But yes, it did create a sensation.

The next morning was quite interesting. Both the Principal and AP(PT) were there right on time. For the Principal, that was not a problem. He simply strolled across from the back gate of his house on to the sports field. [Some of the fencing had disappeared earlier; cattle had unrestricted access to the field when nobody was playing]. There was a grim silence when the session ended. This routine continued for a few days and then miraculously stopped. The AP(PT) walked in one day with a broad smile and said, “It is over. I have personally assured the Principal that I will see to it that the boys are engaged in vigorous physical activity. He need not take the trouble of coming himself. He has graciously agreed”.

All’s well that ends well.

More fishy tales.

Coming back to fish and why Bengalis alone (wrongly) are associated with it, I honestly don’t know. Tongue-in-cheek statements by venerable SAMs that the Bengalis consider fish to be actually vegetarian does not help. BTW, there ARE Bengalis in large numbers who are strict vegetarians. The people from Kerala, Andhra, Lakshadweep, even landlocked Tripura etc. who are huge fish eaters and the folk from the coastal villages from Gujarat onwards all the way around the Indian peninsula to the East would strongly object too to this association of fish with Bengalis only.

Then there were the well-meaning elderly relatives of mine in Patna and Bhagalpur who would commiserate with me and say, “Bechara, does not even get to eat fish in Jamalpur. What kind of a hostel is this?”. I did not mind at all but my explanations fell on deaf ears.

Well, the ’68 batch passed out. After that I was the only resident Bengali till A Ghosh (RIP), ’73 batch and Shakti Ghoshal, ’74 batch joined later. I don’t know about their dietary preferences. The fish must have heaved a sigh of relief. The Gymkhana Mess certainly did. You can’t have special cooking arrangements for a miniscule group. But my batchmate, (late) Jyoti Kumar also loved fish. His father was posted in the Bihar Health Services at Kajra, on the Jamalpur-Kiul Section. Jyoti would occasionally disappear for the weekend to his home at Kajra. On his return, he would invariably bring foodstuff and sometimes, a tiffin carrier with tasty fish dishes that he would share with me.

He was certainly not a Bengali but he still loved his fish and ate it too.

QED.

Snippet from Ghanshyam Swaroop ‘71

Going down the sweet memory lane, right at its beginning, I recollect something which made me indebted to ‘dada’ D.Ray ‘64, who was then posted as AWM at JMP shops.

PK (P K Sharma ’71) and I had joined after a gap of almost six months (the first mid-term exams were already over!). PK was from the Delhi College of Engineering; he would have no problem with Engineering Drawing. But it wasn’t so for me and my drawing was a major problem. One day, I heard dada D Ray came to me and asked, “What are you doing for the drawing?”

Since I had no answer, I and was summoned by him to the quadrangle after finishing that Saturday’s lunch. And there was dada, basking in the winter Sun and waiting for me with a handful of drawing sheets, pencils, eraser and a transparent sheet to teach me the rudimentaries of drawing. The transparent sheet fixed in my mind and made clear the difference between the first angle and the third angle!).

This is a ‘memory of gratitude’, which is going to stay with me forever!



The One and Only Binaca Geetmala

—
- S. Manikutty ‘64

21.12.1932.
Binaca Geetmala.

What is the connection between the two?

The link is Ameen Sayani, the fabulous presenter of the one and only radio show, Binaca Geetmala. That date is his date of birth. I was inspired to write this piece after I received a WhatsApp forward today on him. Greetings, and our best wishes for a long and healthy life, Ameenji!

Binaca Geetmala may not ring a bell in the younger generation, almost certainly the Millennials. But for a whole lot of us, it brings us vivid memories of a bygone age, when radio ruled the skies, memories of our days in Gymkhana and beyond. It was probably the most popular radio programme ever, with listenership estimated between 900,000 and 2 million. Come Wednesday, a whole section of India (including in the South) would stop everything else and tune in to the Radio Ceylon and at 8 PM sharp, would

come the voice that made us focus on this great voice:

“Ji haan bhaiyon aur beheno. Main aapka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon aur aap sun rahe hai Binaca Geetmala.”

The print does not capture even a tiny fraction of the magic of that voice, so mellifluous, so captivating. Then he would announce the tenth song on the list, and the suspense was on. (It featured the ten most popular songs, ranked from the last to the top). In fact, most of the time, he addressed as beheno and bhaiyo, giving a special touch.

This programme was started in 1952, as an adaptation of Binaca Hit Parade, a presentation of Western songs. This was the Hindi version, and in the initial years, there were no rankings of songs as such; they were just chosen at random (Wikipedia says so). But listeners were asked to choose their best songs, and in 1952, the two top songs thus chosen were: Yeh Zindagi Usi

Ki Hai (Anarkali) and Tu Ganga ke mauj mein Jamuna ka tara hoon (Baiju Bawara). In 1953, they started ranking the songs before broadcast.. The suspense was the on.

Why was this programme on Hindi film songs in Radio Ceylon and not in All India Radio? That was because in the fifties, AIR had donned a puritan outfit, and had banned all film songs on this sacred medium (some readers may know that harmonium was also banned, being not Indian enough). But people wanted to listen to film songs, and Radio Ceylon filled that vacuum. In our young age, we used to listen to Tamil songs from 5 PM and that was the only way we could listen to them. Frankly, we in the South did not listen to Hindi songs. So I had missed Binaca Geetmala.

It was when I came to JMP that my interest in Hindi film songs was kindled, not totally unrelated to the need to do something in the lounge sessions in the early months there. My Guruji was Sri Murlidhar Kakkar, who introduced me to this wonderful world, and come 8 PM on Wednesdays, our fear of seniors evaporated, and we could enjoy, truly enjoy together. Even if a senior wanted us to their rooms (instantly), we could say, Sorry, after 9 PM, we are now listening to the Binaca Geetmala. It was considered a valid excuse. That day, half of Gymkhana would turn up for dinner only after 9 PM, all uplifted by the past one hour’s experience of listening to Ameen Sayani. I also got introduced to many Hindi films and singers and could listen to many other songs in other channels, notably Vividh Bharti, provided you had a radio. But this was not a given, for in Gymkhana, in our

time, radio was a prized possession, available with only a few, and needless to say, everybody was on friendly terms with the owners. Kakkarji was of course the most avid and serious listener, diligently noted every song and their ranking in a little diary he kept. (I am sure he keeps it even now). D N Mathur of our batch was another avid listener, and so was I, though may not be in the class of Kakkarji.

It may be amazing to know that Ameen Sayani was rejected in his first audition when Radio Ceylon was planning the launch of this programme, on the grounds that his pronunciation was not OK). By the way, did you know that Lata Mangeshkar was also rejected in her first audition since it was thought that her voice was a problem (!!!!), too high pitched for films, compared to the half nasal voices of Shamshad Begum and Suraiya, the reigning queens of the time. Sayani had to work to correct his pronunciation before he was OKed and taken in. But once taken in, there was no looking back. He entertained the listeners not only with playing back the songs but also with music trivia, read song dedications, letters from listeners and some heart warming stories

From the start of the programme in 1952, till it was closed in 1994, Ameen Sayani was the voice of Binaca Geetmala. It was a half hour programme at first, but due to the wild popularity it commended, it was extended to one hour. It was popular not only in India, but also in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and other Asian countries, and perhaps the popularity

was as much due to Ameen Sayani himself as the show content itself. After the start with the bhaiyo and beheno (or the other way round), Ameenji would announce the tenth song, which would be played. Then onwards to the ninth, eighth and so on (Ameen called them paidan, or steps in a staircase, and the suspense would build up. Each song was a celebration but was also a statement that that was not the top song that week. Eventually, it would come to the announcement of the top song, and Ameen Sayani would be at his best... building suspense, and making the dramatic announcement with a flourish. The first song to top the list was in 1953, and the song was Yeh Zindagi usi ki hai from Anarkali, sung by Lataji, followed next year by Jaaye to Jaaye Kahaan from the film Taxi Driver sung by Talaat. In our times, we remember the top hits, Baharon Phool Barsao from the film Suraj (1966), and Savan ka maheena from Milan (1966).



The programme continued with Radio Ceylon till 1988, with different names: since Binaca became Cibaca (for those who don't know, Binaca was a toothpaste company, and it was taken over by Ciba Geigy, when it became Cibaca, and the Geetmala became Cibaca Sangeetmala, then Cibaca Geetmala, and Colgate Cibaca Geetmala after Cibaca was taken over by Colgate. But most of us remembered it only as Binaca Geetmala. Vividh Bharati ran it from 1989 till 1994, and it was closed down. (Binaca brand toothpaste itself is now extinct). But by then, most of us had developed other interests and priorities, and did not even miss it. But not the memories of those Geetmala days in Gymkhana...

Ameen Sayani's voice is now there on Youtube. Those in the younger generation, please listen to that once. You will not fail to be captivated.

And cheers for many more years of happy and healthy life, Ameenji.

Vignettes from The Past

- Rahul Tyagi '89

In this, the third edition of Vignettes from The Past, I share some enduring memories of our experiences at IRIM&EE. I don't recall anyone being ardently fond of school, but over time those memories have come to complement the overall Jamalpur experience. And somehow, nearly 30 years later, remembrances of IRIM&EE evoke the same nostalgia as those of Gymkhana.

A Bed for Dozes

The theatre style construction of IRIM&EE classrooms presented a unique and persistent problem. The perpetually sleep deprived firstees, who had mastered the art of sleeping with their bodies in fantastic contortions, now faced the prospect of easy discovery by their hawk-eyed instructors. One needed a minimum of three juxtaposed chairs to assume any degree of recline necessary for a shuteye. But that meant exposing the backrests of three chairs making them look unoccupied and raising suspicion. A willing batchmate, or two, had to perch themselves on the edges of these chairs, to conceal their somnolent friend. It was thus possible to take turns and sleep undetected while the instructors droned on. The indomitable batch spirit always prevailed!

The Morning Ritual

During semesters, the two school-going batches were expected to assemble in the IRIM&EE

auditorium for prayer. At 7:30 AM sharp, between five and seven enterprising SCAs would march up to the stage and without any cue, sing aloud Vande Matram followed by the National Anthem. The ritual lasted less than two minutes but presented a valuable window of opportunity to the latecomers to slink in unnoticed and merge with the choir while faculty members faced away from them. The operation had to be perfectly timed, carried out swiftly, and with utmost stealth. Only one or two SCAs could benefit from the surreptitious maneuver. A larger discrepancy between the number that went up the stage and the number that came down was sure to arouse suspicion. The loudest and most spirited singer among the faculty was our Thermodynamics professor, with a special affinity for the number 36. The reasons for the association remain unknown to this day, but his farewell message was announced in a contemporary issue of SAM and appropriately appeared on page 36!

The Bonda-Man

During school semesters, one always looked forward to the 15-minute morning recess after three hours of mind-numbing instruction. A hawker would show up with aloo-bondas in a handwoven basket. The bondas were small, spicy, a wee bit tangy perhaps, and filled with unpeeled, boiled and mashed potatoes. He sold them for a ridiculously low price of 20 or 40 paise apiece and they were almost always gone in less than a minute. We frequently implored him to bring more and even suggested hiking the price to a more respectable 50 paise. For some reason he never did – maybe he didn’t have the capital to buy more potatoes or did not understand the concepts of demand and supply. Or perhaps, was driven by more altruistic motives. But quite fittingly, no one asked for change. He was always paid in whole round rupees. And then, one day, quite suddenly, the bonda man stopped coming. One had to trek to the Jhalmuri corner behind the Diesel wing for a mid-morning snack.

You’ve got mail – Email!

The Unix based Horizon-Nexus system in the IRIM&EE computer center had two (or three?) networked terminals and a server. Only the very top computer geeks ventured anywhere near it. The rest of us, lesser mortals, meandered aimlessly, barefoot and lost in the spacious facility. There were a few PCs too – 8086 machines that several of us could operate. During one “computer class” our tall, slim as a reed, slightly stooped, computer science

instructor waxed eloquent about “systems”, while one esteemed batchmate rushed back and forth between the Unix terminals, striking the keyboards with great purpose and vigor on each excursion. I watched the circus in awe and offered to help.

“Sure”, he said, sounding a bit uncertain.

Then he reeled off a list of instructions. Dutifully, I wrote everything down. It took me several minutes type out the sequence of commands interspersed with carriage returns. In short order, I heard a yelp, more like a Eureka!

“I got the email! Yess! It worked.” He had just managed to send an email from one terminal to another!

Compe-Vanda

No, that is not a word you will find in any standard dictionary. Perhaps, only our contemporary batches will even recognize that phrase. But I will share with you the events that led to its coining.

Before the advent of PowerPoint, term papers were presented on hand-drawn transparencies on a projector in either the production lab or the IRIM&EE auditorium. The auditorium was preferred because its darkened interiors allowed the audience to be somewhat inconspicuous while the speaker dealt with the harsh spotlight of the projector. At the end of each presentation, the presenter fielded a few easy questions from her/his batchmates, most of which were planted in advance, and some hard ones from the Senior

Prof (PT). All this while the audience (batchmates), would pluck and pick at the padded hand rests of the auditorium seats, either due to boredom, or due to nervousness, if it was their turn to present next. There was never any malevolence in the act, not even mischief. It was innocent and compulsive, perhaps a trifle competitive, I must admit, because later inspection and analysis showed that proximate chairs bore similar extent of damage. The term papers of two batches – more than 50 – took several days to complete. In

this time most chairs had been sampled and a few were considerably shorn of their padding. No one knows how the misdeed came to light, but when it did, our Senior Prof (PT) was understandably livid! We were appropriately branded vandals and our abominable actions – **Competitive Vandalism!** Or Compe-Vanda for short.

Vignettes from the past will continue in the next issue of SAM.

WITH BEST
COMPLIMENTS FROM
A M T - R S A J V

A Lovely Day

- Smt Jayanthi Mallya
W/O Gajanan Mallya '79

It was the dawn of a new day
Thunder showers pouring down all day
Washing away murk n dirt on the way
Giving way to a fresh and lovely day.
Morning though damp and cloudy
Nonetheless making it peaceful and calmy
Cool breeze filling in me energy
Drizzle bringing in freshness and beauty.
As I am walking down the path
Scent laden air bracing me fast.
Swaying of Neem making me dream
Taking me down the memory lane
White sky looking beautiful above and
Green carpet spreading below
Making the place look pretty and glow
Colourful flowers blooming in their best
Fluttering beauties hovering round in quest
Tiny squirrels many on the prawl
Appear like they are on the stroll
Vying though for my attention
With their unusual commotion
Chirping birds and quirking parrots
Filling music to my ears
Roses and Sunflowers, Marigolds and Holly hocks
Spreading color and scent in the air
Squirrels and Butterflies, Parrots and Koels
Making me feel happy and cheers
Yes, Beauty at its Best
What more can I ask than
Is this 'Heaven or Earth'??



Close encounters with Khaki

- V. Anand '62

My friend would say, “Avoid Khaki Coats, White Coats and Black Coats”

He meant: “Stay as far away as possible from Policemen, Doctors and Lawyers.”

Unfortunately, I have had close encounters with all three. Let me recount one of my early brushes with the police.

On a winter Sunday in Chennai in 1969, sated with a Bombay Style Thaali Meal at Dasaprakash Hotel, I was whizzing down Poonamallee High Road (There are no low roads in Chennai. There is a Konnur High Road, Tiruvottiyur High Road, Choolamedu High Road, Nungambakkam High Road and so on ad infinitum) in my sister’s brand-new Vespa Scooter. In the year 1969 a Vespa Scooter was a much sought-after vehicle, with a waiting list of eight years. The waiting period could be whittled down if you could get it in the Government Quota. My sister had won this scooter in a short story writing competition

I recollected that the Vespa Manual stated the scooter was capable of a maximum speed of 83 kilometers per hour. I decided to test the scooter. I was running splendidly at about 75 km/hour when an Enfield Bullet thundered past me. I was all set for a race, but was sorely disappointed when I found that the bullet was being driven by a Police Inspector with a constable on the pillion.

The Inspector waved me to stop. I pulled up along the pavement with the police Bullet parked ahead.

The police inspector is described top to toe hereunder

A peaked hat adorned the head. The eyes were shaded by what were called, in those days, ” Mercury “ Sunglasses-the type where you see your own reflection and the wearer’s eyes are not visible. Lower down in the dark visage was a mustache. The upper garment was a spotless white shirt with a regulation cross belt and lanyard. The spindly legs were encased in regulation boat shaped khaki half pants-the type so heavily starched that one has to step into them after separating the legs and sides. The legs Knee downwards the legs were covered in woollen khaki puttees and the feet were ensconced in Pathan Style Sandals.

“CONGRATULATION SAAR! YOU ARE THE FIRST PERSON TO BE CAUGHT BY OUR NEW JAPANESE RADAR!”

I put on my most ingratiating smile and said, “Tamil theriyathu” (don’t know Tamil)

The inspector, whose name, I noticed, was Oliver Gnanolivu said

“I told you in English. You are the first person to be caught by our new Japanese Radar. “He added “You were going at 80 kilometers per hour. Show me your DL (Driving Licence)” From his expression (albeit somewhat shaded by the “Mercury” glasses) I gathered he did not mean this as a compliment to my driving skill or the performance of the scooter.

Thereupon he extracted a copying pencil from his puttees, and having duly tested its sharpness with his tongue, he proceeded to write out a ticket (Challan). He kept writing and when he finished, he tore off the paper and handed it to me after obtaining my signature certifying my receipt.

The challan stated the following charges.

Rash and dangerous driving. Exceeding the speed limit. Blowing the horn in a no horn zone Cutting the yellow centre line of the road and so on. The inspector seemed to have included everything in the Indian Penal Code except Rape and Arson

“Come to the Sixth Presidency Magistrate’s court

tomorrow at 11 o clock” he said

“I don’t know where it is,” I said.

“Come to the G7 Police Station. This constable will guide you”

Next day I went to the police station and gave a lift to the constable. We arrived at the Magistrates Courts. The courts were crowded and the noise was deafening. We managed to get into the court room. In due course the Magistrate arrived.

This Magistrate was assigned to hear all road traffic offences, but due to a clerical error the first case for the day was one or immoral traffic. Though the magistrate was a little taken aback when a whole gaggle of women was herded into the dock, he duly consigned them to Judicial Custody and thereafter heard the “real” traffic offences. Case after case was presented and the Magistrate passed instant orders. It went something like this:

“Muniyandi, Son of Mayandi aged 37 years and resident of Pulianthope High Road was apprehended at or about 1100 hours on 23rd December 1969 driving Truck Number MDY 7864 with number plate not illuminated” Guilty. Fined Rupees Ten.

Beats me how an unlit number plate is an offence in broad daylight.

I noticed that the Magistrate had a graded system of fines. The cheapest offence was cutting the

yellow line and costliest was driving without a licence. The magistrate really threw the book at an offender who had multiple violations and fined him an aggregate of 150 Rupees.

In a daze I heard “Anand, son of M.N.Venkateswaran resident of 223 Pananthope Colony, driving scooter number MYM3969 cutting the yellow line. Guilty Fined Rs 10. Before I could remonstrate the Magistrate had passed orders on two more cases.

The court constable nudged me. “Saar, here is the challan. Go and pay ten rupees at the cash counter.” I paid and duly collected my receipt. The constable suggested that we have a non-carbonated soft drink called “Kali

Mark Trio” The soft drinks set me back by eighty paise.

When I related all this to my colleague, he said “Don’t even breathe a word of it near your boss. You have been arraigned in a Court of Law, convicted for a criminal offence and punished. Your Khadoos boss will have you removed from service” For quite some time I was living in fear till Shri V. Narayanan (1955batch) assured me that minor traffic offences did not count.

Life was much simpler in Lucknow. My scooter mechanic in Alambagh, Shri Makhija had insured me against minor traffic offences for a consideration of Rs 10 at Holi and another Rs 10 at Diwali.

WITH BEST
COMPLIMENTS FROM

ADYARAJ
DEVELOPERS

Vivat! Vivat Virtualis Mundi!

- S. Manikutty ’64

If the title sounds Greek or Latin to you, it is simply because it is Latin. Thanks to the wonders of the Google Translator, I could produce this title, inspired by Robert Bolt’s interesting play, Vivat! Vivat Regina! based on the lives of Queen Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots. The title of this article means, Long Live the Virtual World!

Our ancient scriptures tell us that the world is an illusion, Maya, a rope mistaken for a snake, as Sankara Acharya explained it once. Whether the world is a Maya or not, it seems it is getting converted rapidly into one, virtual reality, where the virtual is real, and the real, the virtual. Soon we may be a part of a Matrix where we are nothing but what has been programmed by someone and embedded in ourselves.

Invasion by the forces of the virtual world start early in one’s life, it seems, especially after March 2020. Deliveries are still real and so are children (thus far) but we can no longer see the whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school, as Shakespeare described him. Instead we see virtual schools doing virtual interviews for admission (into the LKG or pre LKG) to give

them virtual education. Instead of doing silent mischiefs to the fellow next to him at school, behind the back of the stern school teacher with the stick on his hand, ready to use it at the slightest provocation, we see the children harmlessly sitting in front of a computer, bored and restless, trying to learn. Lest you forget, these are five and six year old tots, expected to sit in front of an image motionlessly. If it is a torture for the children, imagine what it is for a mom (or, sometimes, dad also) to get the child to sit staring a screen for hours even when they are doing their own work, kitchen, household, office, whatever. Soon, thanks to the demands of this world of maya, they all graduate into the supermoms category, juggling cooking, washing vessels, cutting vegetable, cooking, AND attending that office virtual meeting (if they belong to that category called “working women”, as if other women do not work!). Truly a generation of supermoms are being produced (pardon me for what may appear to be a gender bias; actually, it would surely the moms who have to take the brunt of this new order, though some superdads may also be on the pipeline).

If this is the situation with one child, imagine

what happens if one has two, or more children. One needs also to take upon themselves not only attending to each of them separately, but also carry out further duties of adjudication, conflict resolution and getting each to do at least some work. The virtual world tests not only the leadership capabilities but also those of jurisprudence of the parents. Many hitherto unsuspected talents of parents emerge and are put forth to full use, but at times are still found sadly insufficient due to what may be called the interaction effects between the petitions of the children. Of course, when, in the meanwhile, the boss is calling for an urgent (virtual) meeting.

The invasion by the virtual world is real and is across all age groups. I have had the pleasure of teaching PGPs at IIMA and at IIMB this year, through this virtual medium, this invention of the devil, called Zoom. I have not met the students at all, except over Zoom, and they (being in the second year) have not met one another after the end of their first year. The first years have not yet seen the campuses, and probably will not till they come to the second year (hopefully, hoping the pandemic would have called off its own invasion by then). Despite my apprehensions, I must say that the Zoom teaching turned out to be much less problematic than I thought it to be; we could carry on conversations pretty much nicely, and the facilities of raising hands, turning on the mute and turning off the video (which meant they could register their attendance and then go off or do something they like to do better, and claiming poor internet connection) made life less difficult. The most students can do in a regular class is

to doze off, but here they can safely retire to bed and hope they are not cold called. The same must be happening to IITs also. I suppose if SCRA scheme would have continued, a new batch “arriving” without arriving and subjected to virtual initiation would have been on the cards! Alas, that interesting possibility has been laid to rest, and now all we can have are virtual club days where everyone shows the food cooked at home to the group and has it (and quietly retires to bed). I suppose there will be found an ingenious way to cut the Club Day Cake virtually!

On the job (in Railways), I wonder how people are managing this virtuality. Since we are not running virtual trains, we need real drivers, station masters and so on, but how the office is being managed is more than I can imagine. How are those formidable symbols of bureaucracy, namely the files, managed? Who puts their sublime signatures in those sacred pages? How do the decisions get preserved for posterity? I can imagine meetings after meetings being held on Zoom and being dutifully recorded, and these meetings may be taking a greater toll on people than the good old real ones, without even having the benefits of those most welcome features of meetings, namely tea, biscuits and samosas (and if the meeting is sufficiently important, cashew nuts!). But one must brace for these meetings, or the task of WFH, and just when you may virtually be warming up in these meetings, classes, or whatsoever, comes the bulava: “Árre, barthan sab saaf ho gaye?” And you have to stop whatever you are doing and go to the sink to attend to this important matter. As soon as you have accomplished this swatch

mission, and sit down in front of the computer with a steely determination, the young one suddenly remembers that drum you got for her on her last birthday and has a go at it, demonstrating her potential to become the next Sivamani. And the youngest one wants to sit on your lap and play with the computer and watch the proceedings of your virtual meeting. Or both of them decide to recommence the last war they had the previous day and get going from where they left off, calling for your mediation skills at the highest level. And the boss is on the line, with that Hey-what-happened-to-that-note shout.

It is relentless, with no chances for a tea break and you start wondering when on earth the old normal is going to return.

But this invasion, like all invasions have plus points of this also, of course. Even the British colonization might have had some good effects, though Shashi Tharoor may disagree. Earlier, getting “ready” for the office was a big event, both for the office goer and the spouse: what with selecting shirt to be worn, which tie would match with it, polishing the shoes, and then realizing that the selected socks has its pair gone out for a walk. All this excitement is no more. But in this new world, one does not have to commute to the office, certainly not as much as one needed to before. One does not need to care so much for one’s personal appearance, why, one can even wear a suit and tie with bathroom chappals! Blessings there are, if only you take a little time off and count them.

Despite all the anxieties for the unknown, I have

managed to finish teaching my courses without stirring out of my house, avoiding all those weekly commutes from Bangalore to Ahmedabad and the drives to IIMB in the infamous Bangalore traffic. Life is reduced to its bare essentials: you can finish your breakfast 15 mins before the class is to begin, and you can sign off as soon as the class is over: you can thus just spend enough time as required for a class, or a meeting, no more. A brave new world, indeed.

The New Normal

When is the old normal likely to stage a comeback, may be the thought in the minds of many of us? The thing is, perhaps it is not going to. Today’s normal may not be the new normal, but a new new normal is probably likely. Offices are being surrendered and, depending on the nature of the industry, many employees are destined to WFH for ever. Companies such as TCS and Infosys have already identified how many such jobs can be done for home, and even if one needs to come to the office for a meeting or something, they can always share a room. Definitely so much office space is not required, and having tasted the savings, companies are likely to persist in them.

Universities have discovered that it is really not essential to have all those facilities such as class rooms, hostels, office rooms and so on at the scale they all thought were essential; one could have a fraction of them. Hybrid classes are most likely to be the norm, with parts of the courses conducted in campus and part, on line. Professors and managers need to adapt to new

ways of teaching/ working and seeing what works and what doesn't.

Shopping has already gone on line in a big way, thanks to the lockdown and the reduction of face to face interactions. Digital payments have shot up, and many more items are being bought on line. People have discovered how convenient all this is and are not likely to go back fully to the old model of taking an afternoon off to buy a pair of shoes.

Even music has undergone a major change. Numerous are the music classes held on line. I was watching the BBC programme, Worklife India, on the theme on how musicians are

adapting themselves to the new demands of being on line, and coordinating among themselves to perform as a band. They even have set up their own studios with high quality sound equipment. There may still be nothing to substitute for a live music performance played on stage, but virtual shows are also perhaps here to stay.

But all these speculations merit a different full article devoted to the future of virtuality in a real world. But it does seem now, that virtuality is here to be with us for quite some time, and we can all shout, Vivat! Vivat Virtualis Mundi!

In any case, we have not much of a choice.

Days in Juhu

- Rituraj N Verma '84

We slept right after breakfast, Nivedita and I, because there was nothing better to do than watch youtube videos. No work at all. Not in Mumbai either. The headlines said that the global slowdown was kicking in China too now, so that meant every body was getting more philosophical and introspective and had less real work than ever before. Thanks to the Internet. After this dip, everyone is going to be oh so much smarter, and every government would know how to deal with restlessness in these modern times.

My sarcastic laughter in my sleep must have woken her up. We keep up most nights to smoke Manali pot and compare notes. Harvard. Mumbai. Sex with ex-lovers. We have been in this zone for ten days now. I went out a week ago for an hour to grab brochures from take out restaurants in Juhu and pick visiting cards of grocers, fruit sellers, pharmacists and since I came back we have just been talking. We have not stopped. We break only for baths, food, and sex. Oh yes, there is plenty of that, but its more than just naked white and brown bodies on Sholapuri bedsheets. We are now in each other's minds doing what philosophers and writers do best when they are so intimate with each other - mind fucks.

So we enter that zone between dream and reality and it's just a journey of conflicted minds keeping body and soul together.

"Man, I would have married you if had been less American," Nivedita mumbles. "Or more driven."

I open an eye. She is out there somewhere, but the room seems to be spinning. I close my eyes and curse my vertigo.

"No woman marries an adventurer," I reply. She is awake now and lighting up. If we ever get busted, we would get twelve lifetimes in prison considering the quantities we smoke. In the end, we are no different from Sadhus, so I guess we are better off here than in the US. She is my samadhi and I can see that makes for a good Indian symbol, even as I see the ash fall on the bed sheet and burn a hole.

"What are you looking for?" she asks me, her eyes dead center, deeply goring into my soul. I yawn back. She gets the message.

"I just wish I could complete things," I reply back and cover my bare chest with my book we have

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NBQ (NEW BONGAIGON) NFR

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PANELS AND INSTRUMENTS BY VERTEX
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been reading to each other. It's my first book and she wants to know why I chose every character the way I did. Sometimes we read her PhD thesis and she asks me if what she thinks is convincing enough. I always have the question why. It gets her thinking about how trifling all research can be.

Sentences that start with "In the USA" or "In India" are banned in the conversation. Truth has to be universal and all pervasive, otherwise its jingoism under a stoical garb. Euphemisms like "In general" are not accepted either.

She ponders before she speaks. I brood too often for her comfort and I find her really moody at times, happy one moment and deeply introspective the other. But I guess that is the weed.

"How do you think we would come out of this? Happier or scarred?" Nivedita exhales finally.

She is already thinking of leaving. That questions tells me the bliss won't last. Too much of it makes women lose themselves in half way houses to insanity. Exit options already.

"Neither. Just go with it," I say and touch her soft hair. She caresses my hand gently away.

"You will never amount to anything," she tells me. I already know that.

"Is there work in the US?" I ask her. It is a good riddle. Great comeback. She nods her no.

"It is destiny isn't it?" Nivedita asks. Another yawn from me. She picks up these hints really well.

A doorbell rings. Our only link with physical world outside. An intruder in our little heaven. It's Rashmi, the maid who cooks our meals. Nivedita hurriedly puts on pyjamas. Mine.

I grab some crumpled clothes from the corner. Shorts. A T-shirt. Then I hobble to the door.

Rashmi walks in with her usual hurried attitude. Something is wrong, I notice. She has a hand towel to her face. Rashmi quietly slinks into the kitchen. I follow her softly. I tell her to make us some coffee.

She nods, puts the towel down, and reveals the red bruise on her face. I shrink back in horror at its size. I can't seem to utter a word. I rush back to the bedroom. Nivedita is not there. She has gone to the bathroom.

When she comes out, I tell her about the mark on Rashmi's face.

"Don't get involved, Harvard. It's none of your business," she yawns. It's her turn to be sarcastic.

"In the USA," I start and stop, my arms reach my waist. She looks at me, turns her head to a slight angle. I exhale and straighten up.

"How long have you been in India, Man?" she asks me. Man is a good name for me. Equates me

with my gender. "They will think you are her lover," she adds.

"Eight years in December," I reply. Ten actually, but same difference. I ignore her suggestion.

"You just came here for a Christmas break and stayed on?" Nivedita asks.

"Yes, because of the great feeling," I say as Rashmi walks in with the coffee cups. Nivedita avoids looking at Rashmi's face. Instead, her eyes have become glassy as she stares at the floor. The word 'feeling' hangs in the air. My arms are now crossed.

"What good did this feeling do you?" Nivedita asks, sipping her coffee. She knows what I do here with teaching the slum children and the various NGOs I am associated with.

"It made me who I am," I reply, unblinking.

"That is too spiritual for me," she replies equally sure.

"So what are we going to do?" I ask her.

"Nothing. Do nothing at all. Ju'st go with it," she shrugs and shakes her head.

"Not possible. She works for me," I say, getting ready to take a stand.

Nivedita seems distracted. She walks around the room picking up things. She is avoiding making

eye contact. I don't move.

"I'll talk to her," she blurts out. "I'll find out what happened."

"I am going to the police station with her. Are you coming?" I reply.

Something in her eyes tells me that she pities me. I get pity all the time. I hate that. Give me courage any day. Then her eyes well up.

"It's just not very smart to do that," she says.

"Next, you will think I am a hippy" I reply. I turn to go to the kitchen.

"You don't even know if it's an accident," Nivedita responds. But she knows that is not true because of the way Rashmi is hiding her face. I walk into the kitchen. Something tells me that Rashmi knows what's coming.

Rashmi confirms it's her husband's drunken doing. I ask her to come to the police station. She refuses, tells me her husband will kill her if she goes to the cops. I tell her that she could stay with an NGO for battered women, along with her kids. I call up my friend Asha in the NGO who promises to handle it all. She is there in half an hour and takes charge. We first go to Rashmi's slum and pick up her two kids and their belongings. Then we go to the cops. Her husband is brought in and locked up. Asha thanks me profusely on behalf of all women in India. She takes Rashmi to the home for battered women. The next day, Rashmi leaves

for her mother's village along with her two children.

I return to my little house on Juhu beach. Nivedita is gone, with a little note as a memory, taped to my bathroom mirror.

"You are a good soul, Man. I just don't have the same feeling. Take care."

She's smart enough to get out before the thaw reaches her heart. I read the note and look into the mirror. Bearded Jesus smiles back at me.

I see her point of view. I look at myself in the mirror. It's a great feeling.

A few months go by. Her relationship status on


Facebook goes from ‘In a relationship’ to “committed” to “married.” He’s a handsome investment banker in London. A hedge fund. The kind that created this global mess in the first place.

She has pictures of wealth on Facebook.
An uptown apartment in London. Wedding cakes
and pastries, and expensive solitaires.

She drops me a message. "Doing good?"
I don't respond to that kind of thing. She should know better.

Then suddenly she has pictures of a baby on FB.
It's too soon I think. I quickly do the math.


And I smile. She calls him Boy.



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Those were the days...

- V Anand '62

We had running hot water...

I understand that after the last batch of SAMs-the 2015 batch-left Jamalpur, Gymkhana is being turned into a hostel for trainee officers. I heard the rooms will have attached bathrooms and may even be air-conditioned. No doubt there will be geysers for providing running hot water. Yes, we also had running hot water in our days. There was a coal fire on the Eastern side with a 200 litre discarded oil barrel of water over it. This facility was available only in winter which was specified as the period from Diwali up to Holi – never mind what the day -to day weather condition was.

One stood on the verandah outside one's room and yelled "ALEEMUDDIN!". Aleem Uddin... Aleem Uddin. the walls would echo till Aleem Uddin came *running* with a bucket of boiling hot water in each hand.

The Princi (late) Shri S.C.Misra scoffed at the idea of apprentices bathing in hot water. He wanted us to lead Spartan lives, bathing in “Shudh Gangaa Jal” twice a day. He also looked askance at the apprentices walking around bare bodied with

towels tied around their waist. (One apprentice of 1963 batch would be sporting only a vest-banyan- which had been stretched by the washerman and was thus long enough to cover his-I mean the apprentice's nether parts)

Misra ji assigned the task of fabricating barrels with scrap sheet metal to Shri R.L.Gupta 1961 batch. The idea was to manufacture geysers. RLG succeeded in this venture. The heating elements were obtained gratis. So, we had proper running hot water -but only in the lower Eastern lobby bathrooms.

We had a poultry farm...

Sarvashri Navneet Singh and Ravi Bharadwaj of 1961 were tasked to start a poultry farm. They succeeded admirably. In the process they also learnt that hens lay eggs without any help from the rooster. Navneet was a firm believer in monogamy and wanted to bring equal numbers of hens and roosters from the Kukkut Vriddhi Evam Anusandhaan Kendra in Sabaur about 30 km away from Jamalpur. He had to be convinced that only one or two roosters were required to service the hens.

The peak outturn from the poultry farm, which was situated on the Eastern side, reached 30 per diem. Soon after Misraji left, the birds started shedding feathers and it was assumed that they may die of some lethal disease. In due course there was a gala dinner with roast chicken. Asghar, the cook, undertook the task of slaughtering the chickens with gusto. He dispatched each of them with an expert flick of a razor blade. My room was in the Eastern lobby and I was witness to the revolting sight of the chickens' death throes.

The Great Tee Shirt Debate...

Two momentous judgments were pronounced by the President of the Club. One was to endorse the Joint General Secretary's ban T-Shirts being worn in the club. Tempers flared when this ban was imposed There were the non-sporting types like me who wanted the ban. There were the sporting types who felt that a spot of billiards was the done thing after playing strenuous games. Gymkhana was divided. A special meeting of the club was convened. "Do you want sweat dripping on the billiard table?" thundered one speaker. Shri P.S Aher (1961) wanted to know the definition of a Tee shirt. To illustrate, he was clad in a specially stitched shirt which had half sleeves and ended at the waist where it was held with an elastic band.

Misraji ended the debate with his irrefutable logic.

"Aap log I. Mech.E pareekshaa ki tayyari kar

rahen hain. Tee shirt pahen ke kaise ho sakta hai?"

Subsequently three burly members of 1961 batch were designated as "Dress Marshals" Their main target was a member of 1962 batch who was ejected from the club on a spurious charge that he was wearing bathroom slippers.

Memorable fisticuffs...

The General Secretary used to record his annual report as well the minutes of the meetings in long hand. This leather-bound register was in the custody of the General Secretary. The affairs of Gymkhana were chronicled in meticulous detail, the G.Sec. laboriously writing it out in his best cursive writing. I found that the most beautiful handwriting was that of Shri L.K.Sinha.. Both Shri Romesh Sethi and his younger brother I.M.Sethi had the most beautiful handwriting, but neither was G.Sec.

The record for 1964 reads "...Two members of the Club, after exchanging mutual pleasantries about their ancestries, decided to settle scores on the tennis court by indulging in fisticuffs. The fracas ended when one of the members bit the other..."

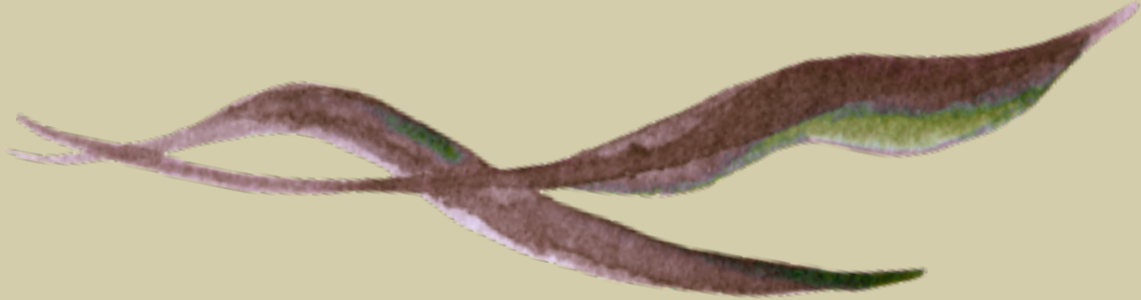
However, the clash of two Titans -one of the 1962 batch and the other of 1961 went un recorded. Their arguments started in the dining hall and continued on the verandah. Soon they got physical It looked like a classic fight scene from a Bollywood movie. Churchill said, "'We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing

grounds, **we shall fight** in the fields and in the streets, **we shall fight** in the hills..."

Likewise, the two fought in the lobby, they fought on the stairs, they fought on the landing. I intervened and earned a bloody nose. The


fight finally stopped when the G.Sec, Shri S.C.Sengupta came out of his room on the first floor and rained a couple of blows on the combatants.

More in the next (Autumn 2021) issue.





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The silent, slithery nemesis

- Aastha Sneha '2k9

The image I have of my early childhood is a series of bright sun-filled afternoons spent frolicking in the expanses of colonial sarkari bungalows. Those relics of the past, with creaking doors, wooden rafts in the ceiling, French windows and Venetian blinds gave ample space to a toddler to play around in. But as I was growing up, I became conscious of a constant presence, no matter where we lived. You never knew which window you opened, or which door you leaned against that might have made you encounter it. You lay on the bed, a kid imagining stories of princesses and dragons, and there was a real life monster peeking at you from the ceiling. As the day ended and evening set in, you felt more of its kind emerge. You closed the toilet door, and there it was. You opened the wardrobe door to take out your night clothes, and there was another. This continued well into my Gymkhana days, with the old, colonial setting of the building apt for its presence. How I dreaded opening the door to Room No.20 after a long day, or worse, a prolonged absence of weeks!

No, no, I am not talking about bhoot-pret-ghost stuff. Encountering one would have probably made for a more dramatic and less scary story. But the truth here was scarier than fiction. I am

talking about the one that has kept me awake at nights, the one which makes me look over my shoulder every time I enter a new place alone, my arch nemesis. It is said that your enemy derives a part of its strength from the name you use to describe it (Potterheads may relate it to He Who Must Not Be Named). The house lizard, or the gecko, or the chhipkali - call it by any name and it is as despicable as ever.

The bungalows have grown to be less colonial and have more chalta-hai desiness in them, but they have not been able to evict their one perennial occupant. For afsar may come and afsar may go, but chhipkali goes on forever. The problem doesn't lie in old buildings. Their cold steely gaze has followed me from house to house, even to modern apartments with neat geometric designs. From pale white to rotting yellow, from pukish green to deathly black, they have an entire spectrum to themselves. There is wide variety in size too. There are big fat scaly ones and tiny smooth thin ones. Curvy, skinny, petite, large – size inclusiveness and body positivity perhaps stems from them.

There is a certain grace about a snake, its slithering motion conveys beauty, strength, fear.

It is a part of folklore, and is as much a hero as a villain. But stick spindly legs at awkward angles into it, give it a twisted tail, weird bulging eyes, and a furtive motion, and you get its ugly cousin. Given a genealogy which boasts of awe-inspiring names like the T-Rex, it comes as a surprise that the lizard is able to invoke such disgust.

I have vivid memory of a lizard or two lurking around the bulb and tubelight, trying to get hold of insects. It always managed to catch one too big for its mouth. The creature struggled, while literally being in the jaws of death, as its Grim Reaper slowly gulped it down. All this while a fascinated and disgusted 8-year-old had dinner at the table below. The rainy season was one big rave party for the chhipkalis, and I had learned to tread carefully. While the phenomenon of hibernation made winter myfavourite season, the danger was never completely gone. You could simply be taking out old newspapers for the kabadi-wala on a misty cold morning, and there you touch something cold and slimy. What followed was a prolonged screaming session which brought up the temperature of the house.

It had been a habit for me to call out to one of my parents to check the back of the bathroom door and other nooks and crannies before I went in to do my business. As I have grown up, I now keep a husband for the duty, although I am not sure if he is as fearless as he pretends to be. I have probably seen a look of desperation in his eyes, and detected a note of nervousness in

his laugh, as he goes about chhipkali-checking. I think our companionship would reach its pinnacle the day he stops acting like a superman and confesses to the shared fear.

Nowadays the lizard seems to have taken a liking to the floor. It is probably bitten by the wanderlust bug (Aha! Bitten by a bug!), and roams around on horizontal spaces. I have to watch my step inside my own house. There it is, keeping an eye, ever watchful of my movements. It knows that I have seen past its perfect camouflage, yet its gaze doesn't waver. It seems to be waiting for the perfect moment to fall on my head or slither up my legs. I have tried every trick in the book, even giving in to the logic-be-damned theory of peacock feathers acting as a deterrent to the reptile. I ended up making my house resemble the set of a Native America- inspired movie. "Pffftt", the slithery slimeball seemed to snigger at my stupidity as it slipped down the stalk of thick plumage.

Like my Aadhar card photo, never-ending deductions column on the payslip, and rising numbers on the weighing scale, I have come to accept the presence of lizards as a sad but inevitable part of life. The one behind the bed 'tuck-tucks' in approval.



Fight worth taking

—
- Vinamra Mishra '98

[Challa (in hindi) means a ring. Challa or challebaazi in hindi poetry means a unique style of poem-writing where every next line starts with the last word of its preceding line. Written around the end of the year 2000 during my college-days, this challebaazi in English, depicts internal duels of a perfect soldier. Interestingly, the duel pertains more to heart than to sinews.]

They knew him.

He was a great soldier.

A **soldier** who had learnt only to win.

Win even the fiercest of battles.

Battles against relentless enemies.

Enemies who knew about him.

That **he** was a great soldier.

Another battle beckoned him.

Beckoning that demanded steely armour.

Armour though was perfect but for his heart.

Heart which said that the battle was lost.

Loss was the voice of even his mind.

Mind which had never failed him.

He who was a great soldier, decided to fight on.

Fight he did with all his valour.

Valour which brought him on the verge of victory.

Victory he knew shall come at someone's loss.

But **loss** was the voice of his mind.

Mind which had never failed him.

He lost the battle, knowingly.

Knowledge that told him he had never lost.

He **lost** the battle not to fight again.

He knew no other **fight** would be worth taking!!

2020 Musings: A year to forget... or remember?

—
- S.K.Luthra '75

Club Day time last year was a dismal time for our community.

(That was without even accounting for the Covid pandemic, which was to come a little later.)

It had become increasingly clear that new batches would not be joining at Gymkhana.

For the first time in decades, not only was there no representation of SAMs, but also anyone from the IRSME, in the Railway Board. There was also the prospect that this situation could continue indefinitely.

Further, during a large part of the year, there was a period when even the two Additional Member posts remained vacant, and the senior most officer overseeing the Mechanical department in the Board was a SAG level officer.

Thankfully, the Additional Members were back in place in the latter half of the year.

Clearly, the forces which had worked together to scuttle further induction of SCAs were also

successfully trying to keep us away from any decision making positions.

Not that this gave any perverse satisfaction, but the reality is that the Frankensteins who planned the deep damage, have, inevitably, turned upon themselves. The future of all recruitments, not just of SCRAs, appears to have gone into the realm of deep uncertainty – perhaps an expected outcome, when you go for serious change with a negative mind-set; with a desire to just end something, without having a better plan in hand.

The re-organisation of the Railway Board – **which has resulted in the unimaginable situation of there not being a Mechanical or a Civil representative on it for the first time ever** – has also remained inconclusive. There is still no clarity about the method and criterion of induction into the Board.

The so-called IRMS (IR Management Service) has also not crystallised, more than a year since the announcement. One hears that the big-bang may finally whimper out into just a “management

pool”, something which has been talked about for years.

One kept hoping that, someone would, sooner or later, question the wisdom of these unprepared change-makers, and destroyers, and show them their place!

Thankfully, as we go into 2021, the situation has suddenly changed.

In the closing hours of the black year that 2020 was, came the surprise and bright news of Suneet Sharma’s (’78) appointment as CRB, now re-christened as CEO. Although the gap between Lohani’s (’75) exit to Suneet’s entry into the exalted corner chamber on the 2nd floor of Rail Bhawan was only exactly two years, it seemed an eternity, what with the continuous flow of negative information flowing against us.

Suneet will have his hands full, with so much confusion to clear and damage to be undone.

The expected one year tenure available to him will be too short for all that may be expected from him, but at least we enter 2021 with hope and a lesson we ought to have always remembered:

You cannot keep a good thing down, for long !

The COVID crisis threw up many challenges - and some heroes too.

At a time of total inactivity, some IR workshops and production units led from the front with a

wartime-like effort in arranging PPE production, sanitizer production, ventilator development, and modifications to passenger coaches to serve as Covid isolation wards. Not all their efforts finally resulted in being used or fully recognised, but the spirit behind it was laudable and well appreciated.

A small footnote: a SAM was invariably the force behind every such effort.

The Covid crisis changed the world in many ways - some things may change irretrievably.

Amongst them could be rail travel. Both mainline railway and metro systems remained shut for long periods of time. While they are back in service, passenger ridership is not even a fraction. This is not so for other passenger transport modes – air and car.

Will we ever regain the passenger traffic levels of pre-Covid days? There are serious doubts.

Even if overall travel resumes to old levels (doubtful), public transport will perhaps be the least preferred mode from the hygiene point of view.

We may have to prepare for a huge scaling down of our passenger rail services for a long time, if not permanently. I wonder if this has yet sunk in with IR management?

Within all this gloom, the greatest silver lining has been the re-birth of this magazine based out of Delhi.

A Bigger, Grander SAM magazine, version2 could not have been born.

As Yagnik wrote in his President’s letter in the Autumn 2020 issue, “... the centre of gravity for SAM publication has now shifted northwards.....,” and concluded by saying “.....we are surely headed for better times.”

Kudos to the guys who have made this possible, and to the spirit of Gymkhana.

Surely the Jamalpur Association will also have its re-birth in a more solid avatar very soon, and will continue to guide and support its members, and the organisations these loyal men & women of Jamalpur serve, with their strong value system – amongst them, principally, the Indian Railways.

I am tempted to recall the concluding lines from my article in the Club Day 2019 issue with the title “The Magnificent Men & Women of Jamalpur”:

Even as we continue to try reviving fresh induction of SCAs, let’s also plan for life after this event, and continue contributing our bit of decency, gentlemanliness, commitment, and dutifulness to society in general.

Let Jamalpur Association continue, let Club Days’ continue, let this magazine continue, and let this tribe continue to guide its remaining young batches with our age-old values.

Let the spirit of Jamalpur, and of Gymkhana continue.

Let us now focus on these actions rather than feel defeated.

We did our bit, and gracefully too. That should be our satisfaction.

Here’s hoping a 2021 better than 2020. That is not saying much actually.

Bye. Stay safe, and keep up the hope!



F O M O

- V S Mathur '87

Look at this: <https://goo.gl/maps/5Ax2DN8CDkfL9Af47>



Doesn't seem like much, indistinguishable from other bits of Google Maps.

BUT..... it's the perfect suicide spot.

Traffic is heavy, fast, and chaotic. If the signal at the 100 Feet Road intersection to the east is green, everyone heading west into the city is putting in that last burst of 60 kmph speed before they have to slow down for the city traffic. Visibility is excellent – they can see till the next traffic signal clearly, there is no tree or greenery in the roadway, and there are no hidden entrances or exits into the road.

Each platoon charges ahead, and noisily resents any attempts to reduce speed, indulging in

brinkmanship to egg each other onwards, faster and faster, holding formation like a gelatin block of cars/ buses/ trucks – vehicles in aspic.

The long-distance bus drivers are starting to relax, their hyper vigilant, highly charged focus on the road ahead is beginning to dissipate. Their next stop is the last one. The open road is behind them, now traffic is becoming more controlled. Cows and tractors which can seriously damage the bus have been replaced by 2-wheelers flexing their puny wrist muscles for the accelerator and brake and indulging in acts of dare-devilry, risking themselves, and not the buses. The auto-wallahs will continue with their sudden stops to negotiate potholes in the middle of the road, but you can see the emerging traffic pattern from a distance.

Heavy loaded concrete trucks, enablers of the continuous construction that is our city, are also trundling down the road, unable to slow down or stop. Like huge grinders, they pass close to the central barrier, ready to churn muscles to pulp.

The road is divided with a 2 foot high barrier, 4 inches across, so jaywalkers have to jump up, teeter on top, looking over the cars and into the buses, and then you can jump down. Bad timing

will maroon you - with traffic from both sides, you cannot escape. You can easily lose your balance while being buffeted by the wakes of passing cars. There is plausible deniability, so life insurance payout is not at risk. No financial impact on family, if you have planned ahead.

At 4 in the afternoon, the tarmac reflects just the right shade of glare to make drivers doubt their vision, so they need to cross check what they think they see. Add the chill silence of a winter's day, and the driver's consciousness contracts inwards. This slows the reaction time, and keeps the speed high for just that extra millisecond that can spell the difference between life and limb for the suicide.

Identification of remains is also not a problem – the official ID is on the lanyard with you, anyway you are just crossing the road from the office, headed for a snack break. Colleagues are always smoking on the roadside outside the gate, and can watch you Go. It is also highly likely that you will see someone from the office coming back across the road, in the reverse direction, sated and ready for another round of wrangling with their computers in search of that ephemeral success that is IT project delivery. This is not a place with a mega IT park, so your company is probably the only one occupying the building named after the pretty dude.

There is a Police Station right next door, so official oversight is also within sight and within reach. Matters can be rafa-dafa-ed quickly.

I have worked in the same office location twice, once for a short stint of 3 months, and later for close to 2 years. Both times I have been fascinated with the comprehensiveness of design and ease of use promised to those interested in self-annihilation. Looks like the devil himself has been refining this location as a gateway to the underworld. I have crossed that road almost daily, in varying traffic conditions, including 'peak suicide abetment'.

And I have wondered...

-Would it play out as easily and smoothly as it appears at first glance?

-What could go wrong? What would surely go right?

-Is the planning solid enough?

-What if I just lean forward..... Now!

..... **VROOM**! A bus goes by...

Now?

VRRR **OOM!** And a truck.

I have looked fleetingly into the eyes of the bus drivers and seen the shock of recognition when they suddenly realise what could happen in the very next instant. Their consciousness, which the winter sun had allowed to relax and laze like a cat, brutally pulled to the forefront. Nervously checking the rear-view mirrors to gauge if

emergency braking was even possible without triggering a pile-up. The indecision of whether to blow the horn, scaring the jaywalker off balance, or keep silent and hope for the best. And finally understanding that the blame for any incident would fall solely onto their shoulders, impacting job, family, and inviting legal hassles. How's that for living through the 'Trolley problem' in 5 short seconds?

How about **Now?** **KLATA-KLATA**

-KLATA! The last of the Tempos struggles past...!

The Scientific method requires you to hypothesise, test, and then formalise your theory. As a "technology demonstrator", I have often wanted to feint into the path of a Wheelie showoff. If you take a risk and still stay safe, then you are an underachiever, after all. Your "risk instantiation" success rate is low. Wheelie riders on the public streets should be rewarded with the result they are toying with. We should tilt the balance in favour of success for all humans, regardless of their objectives!

I imagine him turning the handles left and right in panic, but of course the front wheel is in the air. It would be interesting to see if his soul would continue upwards in the direction pointed by the scooter, and into the hereafter, while the body and the vehicle spin themselves into the junkyard behind the police station. The Pillion-rider 'torpedo' catapulted into the air to High-five the driver's departing soul, before landing on the ground and exploding like a dum-dum bullet.

...
...
...

But I didn't actually lean forward into the bus, or scare the Wheelie rider. I did have nightmares about it, however.

The horror of a nightmare is always its non-linearity, urgency, and completeness. You may have been dreaming studiously about puppies on grass, lambs gambolling, '*Some Sunday mornin'*.....

Then your subconsciousness calls a change of scene, and you're stuck. No longer in control, first you struggle to realise that the narrative of the movie you were watching has been replaced, and the storyline is no longer the same. Then you wonder at the change. As you try to understand it in its entirety, you find that key factors from your dream have changed - to your detriment. Pushed against your will, you try to reason with your subconscious, but there is no changing the situation. The whole erratic and illogical scenario is built to hang together, glibly agitating you. You can't escape the bind you find yourself in, till you wake up in a cold sweat.

And that's how this story ends.



हे कृशि के कर्णधार

हे कृशि के कर्णधार, तुमको मेरा आभार प्रकट,
जीवन का आधार तुम्ही, भूखे उदरों के हो केवट,

धरा धधकती गर्मी से, जेठ सूर्य की देख किरण,
देह प्याम अपनी करके, भूख-प्यास का किया मरण,

भादों की काली अंधियारी, मेघों के बीच छुपा अम्बर,
उत्कर्ष की अंतर अभिलाशा, राहों पर लहराते विशधर,

रुह काँप जाती है जब, माह पूस के पाले में,
मधुर गीत गाते रहते, चंदा के प्येत उजाले में,

तकिया खेतों की मेढ बनी, गमछे से अपना सिर ढक कर,
आराम के क्षण परिश्रम मध्य, उबड़-खाबड़ भू का बिस्तर,

सुख की गहरी निद्रा में, तुम नहीं बदलते हो करवट,
हे कृशि के कर्णधार, तुमको मेरा आभार प्रकट।

हल से धरती का चीर उदर, बीजों को बोते इसके अंदर,
निज गर्भ से धरती माता फिर, देती नन्हा सा इक अंकुर,

उर्वरक, दवा, पानी से सींच, अंकुर पर आता है यौवन,
बिछ जाती चादर हरी-भरी, प्रफुल्लित हो जाता है मन,

पुष्प पल्लवित होते ही, खुषबू समेट लेती है पवन,
मधु के वाहक आ जाते है, मधुमक्खी दिखती सुमन-सुमन,

षनै: षनै: झड़ सुमन गए, दिखती है फिर सुन्दर बाली,
क्षीर भरा बाली का उर, झुक जाती है डाली-डाली,

दानों की दस्तक होते ही, हो जाती बाली अति सुन्दर,
खग- मृग सब लालायित हो, झुंडों में आते खेतों पर,
पाला, ओला, अरु आँधी, हमला करते बनकर दुष्मन,
भाग्य भरोसे छोड़ आप, बस प्रभु का करते हो वन्दन,

बनकर तुम रक्षक दिन-रात्रि, कर देते हो सबकुछ अर्पण,
हे कृशि के कर्णधार, तुमको मेरा आभार प्रकट।

चोटी का पसीना एड़ी पर, तब आता है घर में खाना,
कर्जे को चुकाऊँगा अब से, खुष होता सोच के अन्जाना,

बच्चों की फीस चुकाऊँगा, मुन्ने को ड्रेस दिलाऊँगा,
मुन्ना की मम्मी को कुण्डल, और सुन्दर साड़ी लाऊँगा,

सुन्दर-सा वर ढूँगा मैं, बेटी का ब्याह रचाऊँगा,
छप्पर को हटवाकर के, घर पर छत ढलवाऊँगा,

बुद्ध मियाँ से बनते प्लान, फूटती हाँडी फिर लात मार,
आयी फिर फौज दलालों की, ले गई फसल पूरी उधार,

कौड़ी-कौड़ी हो गयी रकम, हाँथ न आई इक पाई,
खून के आँसू रोते हैं फिर, कैसे हो इसकी भरपाई,

भौचक्के खड़े बीच बाजार, चहुँ दिसि दिखते बस आखेटक,
हे कृशि के कर्णधार, तुमको मेरा आभार प्रकट।

सच्चे तुम्ही जती हो, सच्चे तुम्ही यती हो,
सच्चे समाज सेवक हो, सच्चे प्रजापति हो,

सच्चे हो महादानी, सच्चे धरम रति हो,
जीवों के अन्नदाता, अद्भुत धनपति हो,

हे भूपति वसुन्धरा के, हिस्से में तुम्हारे फूस की हट,
हे कृशि के कर्णधार, तुमको मेरा आभार प्रकट।।

- Poonam Kumari Saha '2k13

The saga of '92 batch



The class of '92 in its infancy. The gentlemen, wannabe 'faankis', the studs and the successful fankis (not in picture)! This pic reminds me of the movie- Chak de India, where the team is getting formed. Once this team got its feet in place, there was no stopping during the stint in Jamalpur or beyond...



A glimpse after a trip to the local Chhat Puja Mela, 1995, in Jamalpur suburbs. Such occasions gave those small moments of happiness and cheer which somewhere went missing in the life beyond Jamalpur

...through the pictures



This photo still sets the pulse racing. Goa, 1995, from the technical tour. NGO (some institute) was a stop-over for a few minutes (for a few folks), before we landed on the beaches. For once, we all felt so 'free'!



Here we were, at Calcutta, attending a course at Jadavpur University, in our 2nd year, I guess. The memories of the trip were much beyond the university premises— the batch staying at Deepak's home, the fun at the Telecom guest house (courtesy Suyash Narain) where we got the taste of unlimited calls for the first time :) and the trip to Nicco Park



Soccer matches have a long story....and there are multiple versions to it:).

Here's the '92 batch in its first year, who defeated the veterans '89 batch in the run up to the finals (two of their players wanted to quickly score a few goals so that they could catch the then 'Super express'- the match ended 0-4 in favor of '92). Amit: In the match against '89 I was the goalkeeper and remember Deepak telling me something after which i protected the Goal like it was my family!

While '90 beat us in the final on a dry pitch when dribbling was easier, we did beat '90 in the pool stage match which was played like a mudfest under the rains... but I guess it was good enough for the firsttees to reach the final and beat the star studded hot favourites '89 on the way.

In our second year, we bulldozed past '90 and in the fourth year, we crushed '94 in what was a three batch year. We did not win in our third year, not sure who did- perhaps '91



Au revoir '92...Amongst the last few pics before we departed from Gymkhana.

Question - Who are the two missing persons from this pic? Bimal Topno, Alok Priyadarshi...not sure why... any guesses?

The serenity of the Jamalpur, the grandeur of Gymkhana and the camaraderie of the beings who've stayed in this immortal place are few of the most cherished moments in the life of a Gymkhanite.



Building my muscle

- Deepak Sapra '92

Mayank asked me for an article for Sam club day 2021 in November 2020. Ever the diligent and well planned editor , he wanted to give adequate time to his contributors.	behalf of our batch ? What do you want - prose or poetry ? No response (3) Ok, let me see. Poor Mayank continued his follow up diligently . Fortunately, one of us (Shivendra) found a few pictures of our batch tech tour and we sent them to Mayank. Without any captions and identification. It needed more follow up.
He also asked me to get an article from my batchmates as our batch is the silver jubilee batch this year.	
He followed up half a dozen times after that , almost once every fortnight.	
My answer was one of the following - Yes, sure, Definitely , absolutely.	
He also asked me to get contributions from my batchmates , after all they are a part of the silver jubilee batch .	The ask for articles continued , so did the standardised responses.
I followed up with my batchmates , the very day that I was asked to solicit contributions.	Until today, when somewhere , in some hidden part of my mind space , a voice reminded me - you have made a promise to Mayank.
The answers I got were a combination of -	Gosh ... hell broke loose. Can't break a promise.
Me ? What can I write ?	I Whatsapped Mayank (sorry , Mayank , I did not migrate to Signal) asking if the Sam issue was done.
Can I outsource this to my spouse (also from the 92 batch) ?	
Can you tell me what to write on ? Why don't you write something and cover it on	Saturday early morning it goes into its final version, said he.

And thus, today, Friday late night, as I recollect the multiple requests that Mayank had been making, the multiple follow ups that he had been doing , I feel ashamed at my procrastination.	a stationary train Was a rare occurrence, an experience I scarcely got.
Let me do something , now.... a voice tells me. Can I stay above water ?	Over time, I internalised this. I started considering boarding a stationary train a waste of time.
Brain freeze. Nothing comes to mind.	every single occasion, the heartbeats would go up , the pulse would race, the batchmate who would drop me to the station would come under pressure, the rickshaw puller would pedal harder.
Except the story of my own delay.	Not once, however , did I miss a train.
This was also my story at Jamalpur. Not doing things on time. Letting things to come to the last moment.	And I have no intention of missing the deadline for the 2021 Sam article as well.
Be it reaching IRIMEE on time for classes , or the workshop to punch my card, or the sports field , or catching a train , it was always a state of peace and relaxation till no buffers were available.	So here it is, ladies and gentlemen.
For Catching the Super express (3072 Dn Jamalpur Howrah Express) , (a train I travelled on 26 times in my first year) , departure time 1830 from Jamalpur , I would be roaming around and chatting in Gymkhana till 1815.	The story of my muscle.
Then , something would tell me , dude , get going.	A muscle that I built from my Jamalpur days - the muscle of operating at the last nano second. A muscle that is coming to the fore again, today.
A flurry of activity , and I would exit Gymkhana gates around 1821 .	In These days of Gym (nasiums) and exercise centres, It is to the building of this muscle , the nanosecond muscle , a muscle that I started building in Gym (khana) that I wish to dedicate this article.
Most of the time , I would be boarding a moving train as it was rolling off the platform. To board	Hope you haven't been bored too much and liked the story of my muscle buildin

Wander-abstinence

—
- Aastha Sneha '2k9

I have waited quite a while before coming out to speak in the squeaky, mousy voice of a timid Disney character (think Piglet). It's easy to shoot me down, more so since the year-end travel time (pandemics notwithstanding!) is upon us. It is one of the biggest trends among us millennials, and I refuse to toe the line hence, bound to be the traveler's pariah. For, you see, I am the embodiment of the anti-traveler, with an ironic twist of fate.

Yes, we exist. There is a tribe of us who do not want to leave the lazy comforts of home, who revel in the JOMO (Joy of Missing Out) of not having 'discovered oneself while being lost'. Lounging in pajamas at home snug in the razai on a winter evening, or sipping on ice tea on hot May mornings, marvelling at the lyrics of 'Dildhoondhta hai fir wohi fursat ke raat din' – could it BE any better?!

It's just that we don't speak about it. Or do not have 'Gram-worthy sunset shots. Or do not bother sharing. We are all too familiar with the gasps of shock, the disappearing-into-hairline raised eyebrows, and the high-pitched exclamations when one informs one is immune to hodophilia. No, the hills are not calling out to me and I need no Vitamin Sea.

"The world is a book and those who do not travel have only read one page". Well, that makes me a very reluctant college degree holder. I have huffed and puffed and fretted, but have travelled extensively. So much so, that husband and I had a tough time finding a honeymoon destination in the country, any place which neither of us had been to. That we cancelled the entire trip eventually shouldn't have come as a surprise to us. Finding excuses to avoid travelling is one of our favourite couple things to do!

Enthusiastic parents who used to decide on the next trip while being on one, ensured I have pictures at almost every historic monument in the country. Later, the National Transporter, being my employer, tried to ensure I use its extensive networks to criss-cross the length and breadth of the country, literally. In the course of the malady called 'on the job training' and subsequent work, I have been to almost every place worth seeing in the country, and even those not worth seeing. The work has also taken me abroad, and I have been dragged along by DSLR-wielding colleagues on walking trails and treks in Europe, when I would have loved to sit in a quaint brew pub munching on the local dessert or sipping on craft beer. The husband has it worse. His job as a cop has made him venture out in all sorts of weather, at every

odd hour of the day or night, in terrains which were never meant to be trod upon.

On a lazy weekend, after endless scrolling through our social media feeds showing beautiful people in beautiful locations, we would get up, dust the crumbs off our sweatshirts, and decide to tick locations off the long-forgotten bucket list. Umm, yes, we are going to do it this time! We are going to create memories (Instagram stories), soak up the sun (get botchy tan lines), feel the salty sea wind (spend hours detangling the sticky hair), trek up the misty hills (keep looking for a bush to pee behind), explore cuisines (end up eating at McDonalds), get drenched in the rain (ok I am done here).

I look at him expectantly, hoping he would come up with a good reason to cancel. He has an equally desperate look in his eyes. With nervous laughs and pleading eyes, we try to sound cheery and pumped up. There is a moment of regretful silence. "Do we have the dough to afford the Exotic Location?", then one of us

quips. Errm, no we don't, what with the assortment of nuts we get as salary. And so, one by one, each option gets struck off the list for reasons ranging from too less time in hand, to i-don't-have-beach-body-yet, to political instability in the country. We end up creating our #FollowMeTo at the nearby bakery.

At times when we have ended up disappointing each other with no good excuse, , we trudge along to the airport, drag our feet to the hotel, kick ourselves in the shins and walk to the must-sees. After some meh and some pfft and some huh, we begin to enjoy ourselves. We return with promises to do this more frequently, though deep down we know better. Over the course of marriage, I have come to realise that a silent disregard for travelling is one of the glues keeping us together in a peripatetic lifestyle!

Needless to say, the pandemic's corollary benefit of 'no travel' being the in-thing has had me silently rejoice in all my home-confined glory!



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A Short History of the Four Magnificent Years at Jamalpur

—
- Arun K Khosla '76

What stood apart: The hierarchy and the virtuous, rarefied world of the Sahibs, with the crème de la crème sprawling Gymkhana campus as the centres piece and encompassing the Golf Course, the Water Works and of course the Hills, the Bungalows enroute providing the perfect backdrop.

The town: A few markedly different, contrasting worlds coexisted in the quaint town. The worlds of the Sahibs, the Workshop Bhadrlok and the Natives stood apart and aloof - that of the Sahibs, majestic and grand, the Bhadrlok, largely exclusive and decent and the world of Natives crowded and populated with the generations of the Workshop Artisans and Clerical Staff and their descendants, a mofussil town of open drains & narrow lanes – the Anand Marga sect founded by a Railway Workshop employee Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar notably originated here. Yet another world existed close by at Mungher. The three worlds existed neatly apart from each other and intermingled rarely except perhaps at Jamalpur Railway Station or enroute at the Foot Over Bridge and at the two Cinema Halls- National Institute and Avantika. An invisible force of habit (or was it the still enduring State capacity

of the British Raj as Pratap Bhanu Mehta might conjecture today) maintained not only distinct identity of each world in an orderly manner but also ensured a decent if not excellent job of maintaining the civic infrastructure of the world of Sahibs.

Each man an island unto himself: The boys entering the world of Gymkhana, armed with a princely stipend & a deferential community all around at Workshop, School and the Township, transformed quickly into men, each an island unto himself, able to easily appropriate the lofty status conferred by all and sundry and glide along in life with flair and a little bit of grandstanding. There was no Cut-Throat Competition (CTC), mere survival instincts at their best and adaptation.

And what I relished and miss the most: The punch perhaps invented by Shakti Ghoshal (1974) with Old Monk, Lime Cordial and Rose Syrup as the key ingredients and served very liberally, the excitement of bringing out SAM issues, tackling the printer's devil, helping put together S Cube (SAM Sunday Special), the breakthrough weekly wallpaper which SAM Ed Board – Shakti Ghoshal and MG Raghuraman (1974) brought out to the

delight of one and all in the late seventies and which was met head on by the super creative and highly popular hindi tabloid Dhoom Dhadaka by a few hindi litterateurs of 1975 batch, prominent among them perhaps DK Singh, BC Bhattacharya, S Mani, SB Malik & SK Pathak, for more than a few exciting weeks, the football matches where once the Moonlight Club of Jamalpur Workshop beat the moonlights out of us poor Gymmies with a 11-0 victory margin at our very own home grounds – I still recall vividly how we ran for our lives up, down and across the field but perhaps never even once won possession of the ball, much less shoot. Ashwani Lohani (1975) would reign supreme at Billiards and delighted everyone with his wondrous stroke play while in hockey, the fine stick work of SK Sood (1973) and later TP Singh (1977) stood out. Most of us dutifully plodded along in all games, most of all in Football, Hockey, Squash, Table Tennis and Billiards and excelled at none. I did strike Gold for at least 2 or 3 years at Cycling in the annual JSA Meets. There was trekking to be done; there were great books to be read and all kinds of good music to be heard. The Films Club did a great job of keeping us grooving with Shammi Kapoor while wooing the leading ladies of Kashmir Ki Kali, Junglee, An Evening in Paris and a few more rollicking entertainers. I miss the Club Days too, the ones during our years at Jamalpur – I remember Mr. HVM Stewart (1927) visited one year and gave us all copies of the famed poem "IF" by Rudyard Kipling - and the so well organised Diamond Jubilee Club Day 1987 which I attended in the august company of

Harpreet Singh & Abnash (1975) and Ashok Gupta & Deepali (1976).

Arrival and the initial months: BK Agrawal and I arrived in Jamalpur by Vikramshila Express and reached Gymkhana on the afternoon of 14th April 1977. Ashok Gupta had joined a week earlier and we made a threesome of the 1976 batch, Nalinaksha Bhattacharya, Naresh Jawa and Rajendra Singh would join later. In order to check ragging which had caused enough trouble to some seniors in the yester years and safeguard the young firsttees from some of the hardened seniors who perhaps had been subjected to severe ragging in their time, each first year entrant was assigned to a fourth year (1973 batch) Gymkhanite. (Late) Angshumali Ghosh was my Godfather and I stayed with him for about a month. During this period, we firsttees were under intense watch and not allowed to keep any money to preclude any likelihood of escape or unwanted communication with the outside world. Our arrival was welcomed by the worthy seniors and such conditioning or disciplining, both physical and metaphysical, as would be worthy of a hallowed institution which served as the first home of the blue blooded officer trainees followed; the physical part comprised rounds and sit-ups while the metaphysical focused on practising and articulating loud and clear, but without too much emotion or thought the choicest invective for bringing out the best among the men the boys would command in the real life in a Railway Officer's job post Gymkhana (the afterlife). Pity some of us including yours truly with their less than bourgeois background could

not fathom the noble intentions of worthy seniors and it did take some complaining and some counselling from the Hostel Superintendent and perhaps Asstt. Professor Practical Training (HPS Pannu, 1967) to come to terms with what would be the essential armoury, vocabulary and intonations of an effective Class I Officer to the GOI to help prepare better for the life beyond. Our Club Entry and Lounge Sessions followed in quick succession, powered by a robust rendition of a newly minted batch anthem penned ably perhaps by I think Prem Chandra (1973) and AK Singh (1975) with the most appropriate adaptation of the hit song from the Amol Palekar Zarina Wahab starrer Chitchor, a Rajshri Productions film (1976) produced by Tarachand Barjatya.

With intense activity – both physical and mental –going on all the while in the hostel, Gymkhana, and not the Technical School or the Workshop – which came far lower in the pecking order, and its easy camaraderie came to define us, who we were and what we would become. Little wonder that for all SAMs, old & young, only Gymkhana qualifies for the Alma Mater title.

Of little men with big egos: The idyllic world of Gymkhana and its inmates was normally left to its devices but the world had its villains and little men with big egos who manned key faculty positions at the School, in spite of their mostly App Mech background, and who would try every once in a while to bring the stars to dust, drawing sadistic pleasure in such pursuits. To our collective consternation, they did draw

blood occasionally and when they did, they went to the town with their smirks. On hindsight, the continuing focus of the Gymkhana Seniors on form (values/mores/traditions) and not the substance (world class faculty/academic/technical excellence/new technologies), batch after batch, had caused matters to come to this pass. And this, over a period of time, aided perhaps by some other factors, sapped and ultimately put to sword the raison d'être of the institution.

Au Revoir:

Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Cheerio, here I go, on my way
 Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Not a tear, but a cheer, make it gay
 Give me a smile I can keep all the while
 In my heart while I'm away
 Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye...
 Goodbye everybody, I'll do my best for ye

It was hard, indeed very hard letting go of that easy, cosy, cocooned world. While we made the customary CBF promises to all junior batches during the farewell speeches, we honestly did not know what we were getting into and I think the School and the Workshop did not either. And so perhaps most Gymkhanites are somewhat unsettled, always yearning, dreaming, journeying or trying to find their centres.

The life beyond and what has stayed a part of us: Love for good literature, sports, movies, friends and good times. Shall we call it the spirit of Jamalpur!

Final(Iy) Adieu 2020



- Shivangi Chopra' 2k14

Another lap comes to an end,
 With each rotation fanning major revolutions,
 Here's another lap with many events to blend !

Seems like yesterday when this year began
 With schedules, and work, and travel plans
 With caste, gender, race biases still intact
 Oblivious of what really matters, to be exact!

It's strange looking at how it started and how it ends,
 Are we better evolved? Are we willing to transcend?
 Have we realized about what should one be concerned?
 Or even a pandemic was not enough for man to learn?

Some happy, some sad, some worn and redrawn
 But all with hopes for the inception of a new dawn...
 With hopes for strolls and travel without fear
 Here's to welcoming a new year!

Time will go on and memories will fade,
 Lessons learned strengthened and resolutions made...

Here comes a final Adieu !
 And I wish this time could be kept at bay ;
 But the more it goes,
 The more it's gone,
 The more it takes away.....

When the World Lost Forever the Touch of Love

- Kakoli Ghoshal w/o S R Ghoshal '81

On a fateful day in March 2020 in the blink of an eye, shutters fell between me and the world outside. Abruptly and painfully from a bustling world teeming with happy and cheerful faces, I like millions around me, was pushed behind a cruel and ominous manmade façade. Exiled and alienated, I sat behind the Great Barrier of my imposing thick door “socially distanced”, sanitized and isolated in a lonely Bubble! Suddenly I saw the emergence of a new world order, where a shaken humanity seems to have lost forever “The Touch of Love”.

Touch..... the Universal expression of love both amongst humans and animals alike. Be it the ferocious lioness caressing her cubs or the cutest of mammals fondling their young one or the touch of the mother's hand on the child's forehead or the gentle pat of encouragement by a teacher..... it is this Touch of Love which constantly reinforces the bond of love and affection. It is this touch of care, of concern, the touch which conveys that I am with you in your moments of joy and sorrow alike which suddenly seemed to belong to an alien era gone by !!

The warm and tight embrace with which I had held a bereaved mother who has lost her only son, a hug with which I would console a young

wife recently widowed, the intensity with which I would put my arms around a friend to whom I was bidding a fond farewell, was suddenly snatched away from me overnight ruthlessly and cruelly .

Similarly, the tight hug of delight with which I would greet a friend who had travelled across the globe to meet me, the congratulatory clasp of the hand heralding glad tidings all seems now to belong to the realm of the past. In mourning as in celebrations, in grief as in joy, the human touch was the fulcrum on which all human emotions revolved. One gentle touch conveying so much more that perhaps millions of “sanitized” words can ever do.

As every new dawn brought somber tidings of the death of near and dear ones, and the macabre dance of Death continued, I sat helplessly tormented, behind closed doors, turning away my face almost inhumanly at those most critical moments when my presence would have perhaps bought some succor and solace to the grieving.

Alongside this contactless insular world, there has emerged a new work ethos which goes by the name of “Work From Home”. Like the ominous hydra which initially came in the garb of a boon, this WFH is gradually taking away

whatever remained of the human interactions. With companies after companies adopting Work From Home as their permanent policy, the sense of isolation and loneliness is complete and final. The daily chatter and humdrum of the office environment, the back slapping camaraderie of the workplace, its easy bonhomie is lost forever. As the world continues to become more and more inwards, the dining tables are getting converted into work stations and homes are getting occupied by Androids....

And as the society inexorably moves towards this new norm, the Android tragically is no longer merely an Operating System ...

Today as I sit bewildered and dazed grappling with this new world order, threatened by an invisible almost invincible enemy, Rabindranath Tagore's impassioned plea for a world order, not broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls seems ironical. As country after country shuts their international airports, as more and more borders are sealed, human beings are gradually being pushed behind closed doors the regression seems irrevocable. The much touted 21st Century

concept of Global Village is dead and ironically the only mantra for our survival..!

As the days converge endlessly into one another and an eerie silence prevails, I longingly wait for my calling bell to chime again when I will open the doors of my house to my loving family and friends...when the joyous sounds of music, laughter and chatter will once again echo from every nook and corner of my home.

But wait....

.....will my steps falter when you stretch your hands my friend, to greet me with a warm handshake?will I quake in fear when you come forward to embrace me lovingly ?

..... will I ever heal enough to be capable of holding close to my heart a new born

or

..... will the wound inflicted on my psyche by the invisible enemy by now would have scarred my soul so much, that I have lost mankind's greatest and most emphatic expression of love “The Human Touch” forever

Only Time will tell.....



Re-Living the Sixties

- Sarabjit Arjan Singh '61

Mayank suggested that I write something for SAM. I pondered what it could be. I was curious to understand if the aspirations of today's youth were very different from the aspirations of my generation which, happened to be the first generation that grew up in independent India. We could not but be participants in the on going endeavour to bring forth a new nation. Our career progression choices were basically trade-offs between opportunities and advancement prospects brought forth by the new institutions being established and how much we wanted to be part of this nation building effort by remaining within the country or seeking greener pastures abroad – usually the USA. The approach was to do an MBA or a PhD from an elite institution like HBS or an Ivy League university and look for a well paying job to make your millions. Those who stayed behind had to be content with much less money.

The impression Mayank gave me was that the motivations of today's youth were not very different. They were centred on building a better life for themselves taking advantage of myriad opportunities that had opened up in today's India both within and outside the railways. The Indian alternative to the US for an MBA were IIMs. They didn't give much thought about nation building

per se. Fair enough. I think we had very similar motivations.

I joined Jamalpur in 1962 and Pt Nehru was the PM who strode the landscape like a colossus. Other leaders who brought forth independence at great personal sacrifices were around and dedicated to building the new India so movingly captured in Pt Nehru's tryst with destiny speech. We were all idealist believing in what can best be called, a Nehruian consensus: self-sufficiency through import substitution, socialistic pattern of society where the commanding heights of the economy would be in public control and unity in diversity. These underlying principles underpinned all economic, bureaucratic and political decision-making.

This thinking led to building a consensus favouring long-term economic growth over current consumption. The industrial policy initiated in 1956 stressed capital goods as a leading sector and the state as the leading actor. The strategy was self-reliance. The emphasis on heavy industry came to be increasingly based on the notion that these industries were strategic and that India must be self-reliant.

The policy opened up vast opportunities for mechanical engineers. The aim of most

youngsters was to study Mechanical Engineering and Jamalpur was seen as the best place to do so. The SCRA scheme not only educated you in mechanical engineering but paid a stipend to boot and a Group A job in a major department the day after we completed the course. This attracted the best of the best and I must say without trying to be modest that we thought of ourselves as the crème de la crème and the world lay at feet waiting to be conquered.

At that time IR was split into major and minor departments. HODs of major departments were in a higher grade than those of the minor departments. The major departments were operating, commercial, engineering, mechanical and finance. Minor departments were electrical and stores, adjuncts of the mechanical department, and signalling of the civil engineering department. There was no personal department. Doctors were not Group A officers. Only officers of the major departments, excluding finance, were eligible to become Members of the Board, General Managers and Divisional Superintendents(today DRM). The position of FC was reserved for finance.

The Organisation structure was lean: just four tiers; an HOD, few JA grade officers in head quarters, senior scale officers heading divisions and junior scale officers learning the ropes. Even AMEs shouldered great responsibility and enjoyed vast powers. My two postings in junior scale are illustrative.

My first posting was AWM (C&W) Gorakhpur workshop. The C&W wing of GKPS was my responsibility. The loco wing was looked after by WM (loco). On top of both of us was DyCME. There was a PE and a few more officers. Basically four of us ran the shop. All I can say is that the responsibility for a 25 year old was heady as well as daunting.

My first day in service was dramatic. I reported to DyCME for joining, when word reached that some workers had gharaoaed the Carriage Foreman. Without batting an eye lid, the DyCME asked me to go and find out what was happening. I found my way to the shop and came across a horrifying sight. The Foreman, a tall gentleman, had been lined up against the wall and a man was swinging a sledge hammer and two men would hold the hammer just before it would hit his head. Since no one knew who I was, I was left alone. I was at a total loss what to do. Luckily help came in the form of a young charge man. He recognised me and advised that I should leave as things could get worse if I was recognised and assured me that Charge-men had worked out a plan and would diffuse the situation. And they did.

After six months of my posting as AME (C&W) I was summoned by the CME C S Lal, who was a pucca barra sahib, married to an English lady. He announced that I was being posted to Fatehgarh district (in those days NER still operated in the district pattern) in a dramatic manner.

He got up and walked around the table and leaned against it. In his Oxbridge English

he pronounced:

'I am sending you to the frontiers. But then you Punjabis always go to the frontiers. If you have a problem you can always come to me: but I will not listen to any frivolous complaints. Off you go. Good luck. Tally ho.'

Fatehgarh was called the frontier district for the reason that not only was it at one end of NER but was also notorious for its lawless.

Fatehgarh was a small district so instead of a DME it had an AME with senior scale powers. At 26 I found myself master of what I surveyed between Agra cant- Achenera and Kasganj - Izatnagar.

Communications with Gorakhpur were more or less non-existent. Phone lines worked indifferently. We had a SSB wireless set to talk when there was something very urgent. Even that was difficult as the distance between GPK and Fatehgarh made the signal fade. So we were more or less left to our devices. Be that as it may, it was great fun.

The lawlessness of the district was brought home to me on my first visit to the loco shed. There was a man working with a gun slung across his shoulder. I was at a loss what to do. Directly confronting him could be dangerous so I sent word that AME sahib was an admirer of guns so would he like to show him his gun? The man was more than pleased to show it. He handed it over with great pride. It was a 12 bore shot gun. I was

familiar with such guns. To my relief I found it was not loaded. I separated the barrel from the butt and handed it to the foreman. After that I gave him a piece of my mind. Somehow I got away with it. No guns appeared thereafter.

There were many other incidents that I faced, but I will relate one more and then close.

My carriage was attached to a goods train to take me to Fatehgarh from Kasganj. Suddenly armed men appeared carrying a man on a stretcher with a gun shot injury. They insisted that I carry him in the carriage. I refused but then I saw they were determined and since one can't really argue with men with guns we arrived at an understanding that I would turn a blind eye as long as they used the far end of the saloon and got off quietly. They kept their promise.

I hope what I have written gives some idea of the times and what it meant to be a young officer.



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