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# UNIFORMLY CRAZY

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A Timeless Classic of Military Humour



**ASHOK MAHAJAN**

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# PART ONE - BIG SHOTS

## A General's Military Lesson At Staff College

To Camberley, indeed, I've been  
And the British War Museum I've seen,  
And the 'Op Order' by Monty  
Once owned by his aunty,  
When he was Commander at E1 Alamein.

War annals are both grim and buoyant,  
We chewed a bit of history by Bryant.  
But let's press on.  
What's today's lesson?  
Ops of war? Let's come back to the point.

I learnt tactics from an Old Goat,  
You're lucky I'm here. So please note:  
Advance and attack,  
Defence and running back,  
And do learn all your precis by rote.

In defence, be defensive, in attack, offensive;  
In advance, ahead, but be slightly apprehensive,  
Since teaching withdrawal  
Is bad for morale  
We don't make that quite comprehensive.

Remember, the man with a sword and a star  
Never dies in a zone of war;  
When the soldiers face slaughter  
He's required at Headquarter  
To devise new strategies from afar.

## Shikar

1

The most gruesome shikari you ever saw  
Was Major Irani with a pugnacious jaw.  
First he shot the game  
Then he stuffed the same,  
Once he did it to his own mother-in-law.

2

Brigadier Shergill had bagged wild boars,  
Nor was ruffled by leonine roars,  
But a call from his wife  
Made him run for life,  
Or piteously crawl on all fours.

3

Cheers to Colonel Hazari,  
Life-member of the African Safari  
Whose single cartridge  
Killed a dozen partridge  
Yet he looked for the missing quarry.

4

Huddled atop a machaan  
With the gamekeeper, General Chauhan  
Stuttered in the dark  
In Corbett Park,  
"If that man-eater climbs up, we're gone!"

## PETS

1

The wife of Brigadier Bajaj  
One morning kept screaming, "Raj! Raj!!"  
A queer way to proclaim  
Her hubby's first name  
Till a poodle shot out from the garage.

2

The General's wife keeps a most rare cat,  
Specially trained not to go for a rat.  
He is the luckiest Tom of his ilk,  
Only feeds on condensed milk  
And tinned sardines - and sleeps in a hat.

3

Tabby and terrier and wife  
Have brought the General to verge of domestic strife  
Big trouble is brewing  
Because of barking and mewing,  
They are all in for a cat and dog life.

4

Mrs D'Souza who had Pekinese as a pet  
One day seemed most thoroughly upset;  
His diet chief  
Of biscuits and beef  
Was untouched and she must consult the vet.

5

The Nandas had procured from Britain  
An expensive Siamese kitten.  
A dog's bite while chasing a mouse  
On the outskirts of Flag Staff house  
Had made him a 'Twice-Shy-Once-Bitten'.

6

*(Priyanka Gandhi prefaces Dog Care Made Easy by Major General R.M. Kharb, Director, Army Vet Corps. Indian Express, 27 February 2005)*

You trained my pups and taught them tricks  
You rid them of mange mites and ticks.  
Sure I'll be there for the book launch, Kharb  
Your doggie skills are just superb.  
To the Fighting Arms well you may say  
A canine doc, too, has his day  
Now wouldn't that be a cocky blurb!

## Nurse Verse

1

"Any MH\*", says Captain John, "is fun;  
It's a place no bachelor may shun.  
When convents are barred  
It's easier in a ward.  
Some sister is better than none."

2

The hospital's matron Miss Thomas  
Is so buxom; she holds out promise  
Of outdoor thrills,  
Such as climbing of hills  
Which are undulating, round and enormous.

3

Lieutenant Miss Ponnu Kutty  
Is the hospital's Black Beauty;

Indeed, she is sporting  
And so ready for courting,  
Patients date her on and off duty.

4

If you meet nurses outside MH, harry them,  
As a patient in Officers' Ward, parry them.  
For it's the fad and the fashion  
The in-thing in their profession  
First to nurse their patients, then to marry them.

5

### **A Spat Between Brigadier Ceremonials And Head, MNS, Major General Nina Pillai (NP)\***

Brig: Because you are Eve, not Adam  
We address you not Sir, but Madam.

NP: Though I wear a sari and carry a purse  
Am a General first, then a nurse.

Brig: Granted you were a great Matron  
And a war-ambulance veteran.

NP: As Head of Service, I must have the tag  
A star plate on my car, and flag.

Brig: Madam, you can't these perks avail  
You are, for the Army, just a Nightingale.

## **Red Triangle**

1

The Divisional Commander, Ram Krishan,  
Made family planning Formation's mission.  
He counselled his boys  
Against conjugal joys  
And banned copulation without permission.

2

So the Brigadier, Meherji Homi,  
Addressed all troops on vasectomy.  
"The pleasures of the bed  
Won't diminish", he said,  
"If you slash that part of anatomy."



3

And Colonel Mann, most enthusiastic,  
Explained with a contraption elastic  
At his monthly durbar  
That effects of a war  
Versus overpopulation are less drastic.

4

The spouse of Brigade Sparrow\*  
Dawdles like a sow with her farrow.  
A woman less fitter  
Wouldn't have spawned such a litter;  
She never told her man, "thehro! thehro!"

5

Virile Quarter Master Hazara  
At Baisakhi goes home to Phagwara.  
Each year, during leave,  
His eve must conceive  
And punctually deliver at Dussehra.

6

The wife of Colonel Gonsalves  
When asked why she's bloated always  
Said, "For us contraception  
From its very inception  
Has been banned, so Pope Paul says."

## Filings Of The Iron-duke\*

1

Wellington is not just the name of the British Iron Duke;  
It's also a military cantonment (and that's no fluke!)  
Great generals were trained there;  
All their values ingrained there,  
Such as drinking scotch, owning horses and a Buick.

2

Said the staff-qualified Major Dharni,  
"I withstand the Old Man's blarney  
And listen to all his bull  
With 'Yes, Sir' and three bags full  
For good staff work only means carney."

3

Barked General Mistry's dog, - a spitz;  
I repudiate the whole of Clausewitz;  
My favourite nominee  
Is Antoine Jomini;  
I hereby tear ON WAR to bits.

4

Major General Himmat Singh Wallaich  
Told officers at Staff College,  
"For good grading at staff,  
I'd prefer your better half,  
Lots of parties and scotch --- NOT your knowledge!"

5

General Dalal who spent a year at Fort Knox  
Extols Yankee Generals in his talks.  
"Stuart, Lee and Sherman  
They beat any German."  
He simulates MacArthur in his walks.

## Jackals

1

Decorated Brigadier Vinod,  
Shit-scared of earthworm and toad;  
Once ran out of toilet  
With his batman as pilot  
Yelling, "There's a cobra in my commode."

2

There once was a Colonel called Swamy  
Who fled when things got stormy.  
He came from Madras  
And he only ate grass;  
Why the bloody hell did he join the Army?

3

"Your predecessor was too loud in his bark",  
The Raksha Mantri to the Chief did remark;  
"Stop using 'if and 'but',  
Learn to keep your trap shut,  
You're earmarked for our Embassy in Denmark."

## The War Song of Bahadur Singh

### (In imitation of an old poem)

In war-ops of any kind  
Wherever there was fighting  
He led his brigade from behind  
He found it more exciting.  
And, when away his soldiers fled,  
Camouflaged in jeep he sped  
That sophisticated  
Cultivated  
Brigadier Bahadur Singh.  
When to evade the enemy's course  
To hide they all proceeded  
No soldier in that gallant force  
Hid half as well as he did.  
If safety was the crying need  
Always he took the lead  
That tactical  
Very practical  
Brigadier Bahadur Singh

And, when hostilities ended  
To show he was impartial  
At once he recommended  
Junior officers for court martial.  
In the overall commotion  
He earned a quick promotion  
That most hated  
Decorated  
General Bahadur Singh.

## Native Airs

1  
Each femme is a child of the soil;  
So is Mrs Swamy from Nagercoil.  
Each of her ilk  
Likes Kanchipuram silk  
And cooking with tamarind and oil.

2

The wife of Captain Magh Singh  
Is from Moga like Mrs Suhag Singh;  
They're very chummy  
On weekends play rummy  
And jointly call on Mrs Dilbagh Singh.

3  
Meet Mrs Savitri Nair;  
Kerala is her universe entire,  
She won't hobnob  
With ladies from Punjab,  
But only with Namboodiri and Iyer.

4  
The Goan wife of Peter Saldana  
Is only friendly with Mrs Borgonah;  
She loves to boast  
About the Konkan coast  
With its coconut, jack and banana.

5  
Brigadier Apte rightly or wrongly  
Likes officers from Pune and Sangli  
And Maratha folklore  
Of peshwas and before  
And Shivaji - about whom he feels strongly.

6  
"I am of peasant stock from Ludhiana,"  
Quoth the Quarter Master, Captain Tewana,  
"I'm fond of lassi  
And my buffalo Jassi  
And two bulls - Jugnoo and Parwana."

7  
Captain Ghosh, his scooter, he would park it  
Each morning before town's fish-market.  
Has a morbid wish  
To eat fish, more fish;  
He'd grab the whole catch if he could shark it.

## Hair Force

1

MCTE's\* Captain Man Singh  
Joined Mhow's school of ball-room dancing.  
He crushed the toes  
Of his Goan teacher, Rose,  
By his native Bhangra prancing.

2  
Major Kirpal Singh, in the Mess, observed  
"Brits taught us to eat things absurd  
Such as bread and custard;  
What we need is mustard,  
Makki-roti, buffalo milk and curd."

3  
Virk, the Sikh General, to all of us appeared  
Too straight and too strict, a ram-rod to be feared;  
Till we found he favoured groups  
Among officers and troops –  
All those of his ilk, with a turban and a beard!

4  
Few officers are sturdier and stronger  
Then Colonel Tarsem Singh Sangar.  
He is rugged and handsome  
As fabled Samson  
Because his hair keep growing longer and longer.

## The Staff Car

Said the wife of General Gill,  
"Long drives, indeed, are a thrill;  
With gas inflationary,  
We keep our Zen stationary  
But never let the staff car stand still."

"Authorised one, we somehow manage two  
And our kids aren't early birds too;  
They make such a fuss  
To go by a bus,  
Unlike other army children who do."

"Both General and I are hell-bent  
To use jalopeys to the fullest extent;  
A four-wheeler must run,  
Specially an official one,  
Else, for what is a four-wheeler meant?"

"So I take it to places near and far  
To picnics, kitty parties and bazaar,  
Beauty parlour and boutique  
Six days in a week.  
O, how handy to have a staff car!"

## Parties

1  
There is a party for Major General Bose  
And the menu will be sumptuous, I suppose,  
All orders on austerity  
Are meant for posterity;  
Each junior officer must pay through his nose.

2  
There's no etiquette or rule you can teach,  
Which can't by Bakshi be breached.  
He will help himself best  
Ahead of Chief Guest  
And miss out on the after-dinner speech.

3  
The CO's throwing an 'At Home', it is learned,  
The whole Officers' Mess will be overturned  
For comestibles in the butlery  
And silver and cutlery;  
And some of it will never be returned.

4  
Like a metad or a bandicoot rat,  
Sharma is least anxious if he is fat;  
He will undo his button  
For broiler and mutton  
And plates of pudding after that.

## Test Exercise

The caravan of the Corps Commander, Sainik Shaw  
Quite a palace on wheels we soldiers ever saw  
Decor of a five-star  
Colour TV and VCR  
A double-bed duly dunlopped, if he missed his squaw  
And for two months on Ravi's banks  
Brigadier Randhawa slogged armoured ranks;  
You'll really get the jitters

To know ten thousand litres  
Were quaffed by Vijayanta tanks.

But it's a Test Exercise  
Lal Desh is to be cut to size;  
Tank manoeuvres in Mukerian  
Surpass Manstein and Guderian.  
Then General Shaw sums it up precise.

Let the Army pay compensation  
For all the ruined cultivation,  
Wells and borings undone,  
Farm-embankments overrun;  
Though a poor nation drained,  
The crews have been well trained.  
Congratulations!

## The Brigadier Throws A Dinner

The Divisional Commander, newly posted,  
Is being by the Brigadier hosted.  
There is teal and mallard,  
White sauce, Russian salad  
And how often his health is toasted.

He compliments cooking of Aneeta  
(The hostess who at once turns sweeter)  
And hogs much more than he's able  
Not knowing every dish on the table  
Is the work of the Goan cook, Peter.

## Brigadier's Wife To OC Supplies

"Is this the way how a garrison is fed  
Veg stale, for a week no bread  
Eggs marble-sized  
Meat over-priced  
And the chicken reduced to a mere biped?"

Most humbly, the OC her pardon begs  
For poor rations and tiny eggs  
Then he gives her his word,  
'As for the poultry bird  
You'll get Ma'am, henceforth, the one with four legs.

## Vanity Bags

1

Yearly, the wife of General Bali  
Bags prizes on dahlia and holly;  
Yet the whole world knows  
Every flower that grows  
In her garden, is due to the poor old mali.

2

Though Mrs Pinto looks like a mantis,  
And is aware of what Easter and Lent is,  
Yet, if she'd her way,  
She would publicly display  
Her whole range of smuggled panties.

3

General Joseph is best known as 'Smarty  
(Else you can't be a general in the Art'y)  
But his wife, Tina Violet  
Takes hours at her toilet;  
So he's always late at the party.

4

Mrs Sandhu breaks into smiles  
At the mere mention of foreign textiles.  
She has spent a fortune on  
American georgette and chiffon  
And bright terenes in latest prints and styles.

5

The spouse of Major General Vas  
Was showing off her imported black bras  
Both padded and unpadded  
Some are 'strapless' too, she added,  
'Ah! But I've lingerie even more jazz.'

6

The General's wife at Srinagar is grandiose  
An ignoramus with an upturned nose;  
She can't tell a lily  
From a bougainvily  
Yet presides over all the Flower Shows!

7

It's rare that senior wives (Forget their looks!)  
Show a yen for serious stuff such as books



They rather doll up like strumpets  
Blow loud their trumpets  
And for kitchen work employ unit cooks.

8  
Her head full of inanities  
Kitty-parties, mahjong, insanities;  
Ever-conscious of rank  
The wife of General Frank  
Is a compact of hierarchical vanties

## DSOI TALES

1  
Rub a dub dub! Rub a dub!  
Six wives in the card room of the club.  
Never will a loser vacate  
But the winner scoot with 'It's getting late',  
'My poor kids will be starving without their grub.

2  
The wife of Major General Vij  
Six days at the club plays Bridge  
When her man returns  
Though inside he burns  
He picks up a cold sandwich from the fridge.

3  
There once was a Captain called Paul  
Who lost his cool in a brawl.  
He made a mockery  
Of the club's crockery  
Then paid through his nose for all.

4  
Whispered Mrs Lal, chronic club-bird,  
To her paramour with face beblubbered,  
'Your love may be true  
But this is no spot to woo.  
My hubby is behind that cupboard.'

## General Kapur Goes On An Official Trip

Said General Winnie Kapur,  
I went abroad on a tour  
Booze at home is dear

I quaffed scotch and beer  
In Fankfurt, Rome, Luxembourg.

Though my sow is still erotic  
Monogamy is a state neurotic  
You long for a change  
From the known to the strange;  
Paris tarts are simply exotic.

It's a monster who goes overseas  
And won't bring for his nephew or niece  
Some sherry or cologne  
Blackberry, iphone  
But yes, keep away from the customs, please.

Touching down brings a touch of grief  
At the thought of penning the Tour Brief;  
But my PA was a sport  
Who fetched last year's report  
Straight I bounced it up to the Chief!

## Valedictory

Brigadier Bains is posted to far off lands  
They garland him and then, shake hands  
In a farewell function  
At the Railway junction  
With pipes and drums and two brass bands.

Mrs Bains sheds maudlin tears  
(Which will dry as the crowd disappears)  
Two ladies are grieving  
Because she is leaving  
For others, good riddance of bad rubbish. Three Cheers!

## Career Prospects

1

The Brigade Commander Ezra Moses  
How deep in flowers his nose is!  
The sly coarse vulture  
Took to floriculture  
Since the General's wife tends tea-roses

2

Major Sondhi is disillusioned and pale  
There is an element of sadness to his tale;  
Though he possesses class

He has displeased the brass  
And'll end up Lieutenant Colonel Time Scale.

3  
Said the MS\*, "For this foreign assignment  
I don't care for your views on non-alignment;  
All I want to know is  
How skilled your cow is  
In games that don't call for refinement."

4  
Quoth the wife of Jat General Varma,  
"Promotions are a matter of Karma;  
My lucky Jatman  
Worked as Batman  
To Slim and Mountbatten of Burma."

## PART TWO SENA BHAVAN YARNS

'The Indian Army is somewhat like a sundae -a bit of this and a bit of that, and nuts on top.'

### Fully Operational

God may be omniscient, but he scarcely knew what was happening on a May morning on the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan, Army Headquarters, New Delhi.

In room No 948, Maj. Gen. S.P. Puri, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, was busy making a phone call to his son-in-law in Mumbai who worked as an executive in the Citibank. The General became a grandfather just last week and made it a point to enquire about the health of his daughter and that of the baby girl first thing in the morning. In room No. 935, Brigadier M.C. Nair, deputy to the Major General, was writing a long letter to his brother-in-law in Kottayam. The refrain of the epistle was that he must attend Court on his behalf in a case of litigation pertaining to the encroachment of his coconut farm in Tellichery. In room No. 926, Col. Reddy was busy talking to his kickie-wickie whom he had left only an hour ago, that he would certainly ring up the gas agency and tell them to deliver a cylinder to her by noon. In room No.924, Major Tripathi was handing over his liquor card with a five hundred rupee note to the karamchari, Chuni Lal, and asking him to queue up at once at the canteen counter for his monthly quota of two bottles of whisky and two of rum.

In short, on that May morning, military operations were in full swing on the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan, Army Headquarters.

Sena Bhavan is an elegant lime-green building. Its nine storeys overreach its sides and make its structure resemble a low pagoda when seen from a distance. Situated between Krishna

Menon Marg and Dalhousie Marg on one side, and Dupleix Marg and Rajaji Marg on the other, it sprawls handsomely in all directions. The adamantine edifice of the South Block towards its north with its manifold guarded ingresses gapes down at it through cavernous eyes.

At nine in the morning, five days a week, one can see buses and army trucks disgorging their load of officers and men in the spacious square that separates Sena Bhavan from South Block. There are other kinds of transport too - scooters, jeeps and cars. The scooters disappear into the underground vehicle park which also acts as a basement-changeroom for officers who come in civvies and must get into uniforms before they enter the main block. The senior lot arrive in black staff-cars. A part of the naval headquarters is located on ground floor of Sena Bhavan. One of its wings houses the auditing staff of the Central Defence Accounts Department. There is a fair sprinkling of Air Force personnel as well. The crowds at Sena Bhavan, therefore, are an odd mélange of olivegreen, white, khaki and civvies. Jamuns spread their dense shades over the pavements where vendors squat in a line. Some sell fresh lime, four a rupee, or salted and peppered cucumber slices. Other hawk wares of daily use to the office-goers - plastic coverlets for identity cards, fastening chains of bell-metal, wallets, refills and dotpens, combs, laces, tiffin boxes and tumblers.

At the entrance to the main building is a porch which leads to a foyer through a flight of stairs and a pathway of slaty tiles. Four otis elevators at one end haul the employees to their respective floors. Invariably, one and sometimes two, are found out of action causing long queues of men. It won't be strange if sometimes a red-tab is seen waiting in line behind his own office runner. No one has enquired why the elevators go out of action day after day. But there it is. There are women employees as well. Somehow they work on ground floor or first floor. They have never been seen huddled together in elevators along with men.

The sooty-grey walls below the limegreen projections and the smoke-coloured concrete paving in front of the main building lend Sena Bhavan an air of extreme sobriety. There are bosky banyans growing within its compound and an angle-iron wire fence that encircles it on all sides. High up from the various floors, at regular intervals, rectangular shapes of coolers appear, fixed into the glass windows. Karamcharis armed with polyvinyl hoses fill their troughs with water. Quite often the eighth and ninth floors do not have coolers functional because of water scarcity. And naturally, the affected occupants of the offices sweat and whine about their clammy conditions.

After the Larkins' spy case, security was tightened for entry into Sena Bhavan. An identity card by itself was not enough to prove one's identity. Any newly posted officer to the war intelligence directorate of which the communication intelligence was part, had to have two additional items. One was a photo pass for which the officer had to report to the office of the chief security officer and the other was a security pass. There was a posse of security men at the entrances to the eighth and ninth floors and they would stop officers - colonels and below - for checking. Brigadiers and generals were left alone.

The Defence security staff was mainly drawn from a pool of ex-servicemen and they were mortally afraid of the red-tabs. So brigadiers and generals moved about unchecked and unchallenged despite the fact that all celebrated moles sprang from these ranks.

On the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan Major General Puri, additional director communication intelligence, entered the toilet. The general thought a pee here was an ordeal. Two civilians and one soldier had forestalled him and occupied the three tiled urinals. While he waited, his eye travelled toward the Indian type latrines which had their doors ajar. The pans of both were dirty. Some karamcharis came early on duty and made full use of office conveniences. He viewed the sight with utter revulsion. But he knew he could do nothing about it. This was May. The water would not reach upto the ninth floor and there were more than a hundred people working there - officers, junior commissioned officers, non-commissioned officers, other ranks and civilians. The last category included personal assistants, stenographers, clerks, draughtsmen, peons, attendants and safai karamcharis.

The soldier, on seeing the general waiting, accelerated his micturation, shook his member in a hurry, buttoned the flies of his trousers and slunk away. The civilians lingered. In disgust, the general somehow relieved himself and made his way back to the office.

But his office was sumptuously furnished. It had a thick, beige-coloured wall-to-wall carpet with a three-piece sofa to match whose opulent upholstery seduced junior officers into sleep whenever the general convened his little meetings. Rufous antimacassars covered the upper halves of their backs. The drapery was rich, tumbling down like a wave from the pelmets and breaking into ripples of coffee brown pleats. The office table was an endless expanse of sunmica. Three telephones - red, applegreen and black - bathed the tabletop with their polychromic luminosity, resting on the right side of the chair where the general sat. An intercom set lay on the left. As he settled down, a telephone rang. Nalini was on the line.

'Hello, darling', she said.

'Hullo', the general answered rather listlessly.

'You know, the staff car hasn't fetched up yet. I am getting late for the shopping trip'.

'Okay, I will send it across', the general answered.

Indeed, military operations were in full swing on the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan, Army Headquarters, on that May morning.

## General Talk

If the Indian bureaucracy has on its rolls all kinds of secretaries - the personal and the private, the deputy and the joint, the additional and the special, the principal and the cabinet-the Indian army has on its rolls all kinds of generals.

There is the general general and the specialist general, the technical general and the non-technical general, the staff general and the command general. There is also the tank general and the gunnery general, the infantry general and the mechanized infantry general, the ordnance general and the supply general, the medical general and the educational general, the law general and the intelligence general, the NCC general and the Assam Rifles general. There is the general for training and the general for operations. There is the general for canteen and the general for transport. There is the general for logistics and the general for statistics. And there is even a postal general and a veterinary general (one of whom,

incidentally, looked after Priyanka Gandhi's dogs). The commandant of the military academy is a general. The commandant of the military college is a general. The area commander is a general. The divisional commander is a general. The commander of a corps is a general and the commander of an army is a general. Like the common house crow, generals are found all over India from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Jodhpur to Jorhat. They may be promoted singly or in batches, their tenures may be brief or long, they may administer or train, instruct or command. They may be lean or fat, short or tall, smart or sloppy, fair or dark, but the one thing Indian generals share in common-they never die in battle.

At Sena Bhavan what made generals of one branch feel more important than others is their proximity to the theatre of operations. More so in peace than during war. The intelligence department at army headquarters was an inter-service affair with officers from Air Force, Army and Naval Signals thrown in-and one place they all took pride in was the operations room. It invested the outfit with an air of secrecy and prestige. It also bestowed upon them a stamp of exclusiveness from other directorates housed in Sena Bhavan who did not have one. The operations room was a sort of a hall with grilled windows and dark curtains. There were all kinds of maps covered with transparent talc, fixed to its walls marked with coloured pins, flags, arrows and labels. Here they held daily briefings, which were referred to as 'Morning Prayers' (which could sometimes take place even in the afternoons). When things became hot on the borders, these briefings were attended by the General. At other times it was the Brigadier who presided. There were at least half a dozen pointers of various lengths that stood in a corner of the operations room which contained a sand model. A staff officer was earmarked for reading out the morning prayers and while doing so he invariably carried one of those black wooden pointers with white-painted tips. The routine verbal drills covered the battle fronts one by one, and were generally rounded off with 'nothing to report'.

The brigadier, knowing that after their obligatory attendance, the officers would disperse and not be traceable for the whole day, used the occasion for progressing priority tasks given out by the general. One of these related to the replacement of the old Direction Finders in the units - electronic equipment deployed on the borders for detection of troop movements, strategic bases and installations of target countries. The purchase of new Direction Finders involved expenses of a few crore in foreign exchange. The general was keen that the deal be struck before his retirement. The brigadier knew the urgency and realised also that his promotion depended upon it. After the staff officer had rattled off his usual lacklustre reports, Brigadier Nair queried Wing Commander Agarwal, incharge of the purchase and procurement section. 'You were supposed to show me Satish', he said, 'the draft Statement of the DF Case.

The wing commander was a short, chubby officer with dreamy eyes and an absent-minded look. Being a non-flyer, he did not belong to the elite cadre of the Fighter pilots. Eons ago, he had lost all interest in things professional. What absorbed him lately was the cult of equity. He operated as a sub-broker to Murli & Co of the Delhi Stock Exchange, a brokering firm, housed in the Delite cinema building. The question from the brigadier scarcely registered in his mind.

'What statement, Sir?'

'The DFs.'

'O yes, the DFs. Actually I had told Major Tripathi about the case, Sir. He will put up the draft to you.'

'No, he won't. You will..... And let me have it next Wednesday.'

'But I'm from the Air Force, Sir. The DF is your problem...

'You are part and parcel of the War Intelligence department', cut in the brigadier, 'which is an inter-service organization. You can't use the plea of being from the Air Force and evade responsibility.

'No harm in trying, Sir', Agarwal intoned pukishly.

No sooner he returned to his office, he recommenced his telephone dialogue with the broker. 'Shuklaji, ready? Here I go. Sell Elgi Tyre 200, Wimco 100, JK Synthetics 200, Spic 200 ... Buy DCM Toyota 200, Gujarat Chemical 200... Dekho main boli ke time pahunch raha hoon. Between 1 and 2. During our lunch break.

Agarwal shared the office with Tripathi. Another subordinate, Apte, was presently on leave. After finishing the call he turned to Tripathi. 'What news about the procurement of antennae from Kaldevi Engineering Company?'

'I telephoned the Radio Experimental Unit and they needed a couple of omni, half a dozen helical beams and three corner reflectors in the ultra high frequency range. So I checked with the Kaldevi catalogue. The whole caboodle will cost around 16 lakhs. Sanction of the Deputy Secretary Systems was required. So I went over to the South Block.'

'And what happened then?'

'Well, you know he has closed the front door of his office. You can approach him only through the babu from the side door, who said the DS was busy in a meeting and I should come some other time.'

'The bastard. What do these IAS chaps think they are?'

Tripathi was a devout fan of Hindi poets and this was the right time for a quote. He intoned:

*Is mahanagar mein jahan bhijata hoon  
kursi pur eik saanp ko  
kundli mare baitha paata hoon.*

Agarwal was not interested. He was getting late for the stock market and before he could forget, he dashed off the one instruction playing in his mind. 'Well, forget it for the time being. What I want you to get at is the Statement of Case on Direction Finders. The brigadier hauled me up for it at today's morning prayers.

'But, Sir,' groaned Tripathi, 'that would be a very, very complicated affair.'

'Why so?' asked Agarwal.

'Because equipment earmarked for import is like equity stock. It brings in a host of shareholders clamouring for dividends.'

'Clarify', said Agarwal.

'I can make it clear', answered Tripathi, 'but only through the Arms Merchant's Song:

You may float a global tender

You may do your tests and trials  
Naught will move till you tell your vendor  
It's us alone who move the files.

Your deal is truly done  
Be it Barak or Denel Missile  
German sub or Bofors gun  
Just grease our palms with a smile."

'That is a fine jingle on the craft of graft', applauded Agarwal, as he marched out of the office.

## Pay Pangs

On the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan, in room No. 926, Colonel P. Bharat Reddy, picked up the green-coloured dak folder from the in-tray and untied its red tape. As he shuffled the papers, his eyes suddenly rivetted to one specific piece of mail. It was a single sheet of paper that could scarcely be categorised as a classified operational matter, or a military secret, or a crucial strategic information, or some urgent officialese warranting immediate action. His eyeballs did not move, his eye-lashes did not waver. There were movements elsewhere. His lips pursed, his brows wrinkled and his head drooped. It was his monthly Statement of Account from the office of the Controller of Defence Accounts (Officers), Golibar Maidan, Pune. An entymologist would have scarcely examined an insect more minutely under the microscope.

He first scrutinised the credit side of the infernal sheet and read the amounts against his basic pay, rank pay, dearness allowance, kit maintenance allowance etc. 'Damn it all', he groaned to himself, 'Why haven't they credited my city compensatory allowance so far? Why have they not reimbursed my house rent? Why have they not reimbursed my son's tuition fee?

And when his eyes shifted to the debit side, the impact of the fiduciary message of carnage was fully driven home. They had increased his income tax. They had levied him surcharge, too. There was overbilling in furniture charges, water charges and electricity charges. Worse, a new debit amount surfaced under the heading, 'conservancy charges'.

After balancing the total credits against the total debits, all that was remitted to his bankers was a princely sum of rupees five thousand two hundred twenty-one and paise sixteen only. 'God alone knows when will the Fourth Pay Commission be convened?' he wondered.

Crimson with rage, he took out the offending sheet from the pile of papers, shoved the dak-folder back into the in-tray and yelled for the havildar clerk. He will show these civilian babus, he muttered under his breath. He will bring them to book.

'Ram Singh', he shouted, 'Jaldi Aana. Take down this dictation. 'And he began his peroration of protest.



'You will do no other work except type this letter addressed to the CDA (O), Pune', Reddy said at the end of his epistolary narration.

'No other work, Sir? But I have to despatch an urgent report on...

'Leave it', Reddy cut in.

'What if there is a fire alarm, Sir?" said the hapless clerk.

'The Golibar Maidan arsonists have already burnt my house down. What worse fire can there be? Now go and type.'

Ram Singh chuckled to himself. He knew that an officer's monthly Statement of Account determined the state of his mind. Further remonstrance was futile.

## Labour Pains

From his room on the ninth floor, Major Tripathi watched with curiosity and amusement a throng of workers gathered under the shades of banyans in the Sena Bhavan compound. A speaker on the microphone, with folded hands, seemed to be exhorting the listeners to join him in some kind of prayers. But his very first utterance shook Tripathi out of his torpor:

'Tana shahi nahi chalegi', bellowed the speaker.

'Nahi chalegi, nahi chalegi', chorused the squatters.

'Tana shahi nahi chalegi', bellowed the speaker once again.

'Nahi chalegi, nahi chalegi', chorused the squatters once again.

The speaker moved on to the next hymn.

'Hamari maange poori karo', yelled the speaker.

'Poori karo, poori karo', chorused the squatters once again.

The speaker moved on to the third psalm which was minatory in the extreme. It was directed specifically at the Chief Administrative Officer.

'CAO murdabaad', bawled the speaker.

'Murdabaad, murdabaad', chorused the squatters.

'CAO murdabaad', bawled the speaker once again.

'Murdabaad, murdabaad', chorused the squatters once again.

A red flag fluttered from one of the banyan's massive arms. The men who had gathered were class three and class four employees of Sena Bhavan who had not been paid their arrears of dearness allowance which the CAO's office was notorious for delaying. Either the amount was not collected from the State Bank, or the central government circular authorising the payment had not been received at the CAO's office.

Wing Commander Agarwal, engrossed in his equity world, looked up absent-mindedly and quizzed Tripathi, 'What's up, Deepak?"

'These civilians really enjoy in the army, Sir', he said. 'I mean they can get away with shouting slogans and protests and not do a jot of work, while we can get court-martialled for smiling out of turn.'

## Making Of An Author

Dhanraj & Co., Dehra Dun, were publishers of military books. They had been in the business for over four decades. Their trade hinged on the army generals. They started their book business originally by recycling cheap editions of Liddell Hart, Jomini, Clausewitz, Marshall, Fuller etc. When they were exhausted of this as source material, they fell back upon the army generals. And to launch them on this spectacular journey was an incumbent Commandant of the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun, one Major General Malik. He was known as a military historian of some standing, was a graduate of Staff College at Camberley and taught at the Defence Services Staff College situated in the Nilgiri hills. Malik's works were prescribed for officers' promotion examinations, and at the military institutes of higher training. Malik's books sold like hot cakes.

A famous historian has observed, 'War has its own grammar but not its own logic.' As far as publications of military books went, Dhanraj & Co. became the logic and grammar of this phenomenon. They never looked back thereafter. There were a few emendations, of course, that he incorporated in his enterprise to make his products 'state of the art' and universally saleable. The first was that due to upgradations and review cadres in the Indian army, the major generals had proliferated to an unwieldy number, so much so, that they no longer carried that stamp of class or authority. In short the major-general's rank was a bit on the lower side to bear the imprint of such a prestigious house as Dhanraj & Co. So he no longer approached them for authorship. He now sought lieutenant-generals of the fighting arms, as they say: the infantry, artillery and the armoured corps. And he sought the retired chiefs.

From minute analysis and close scrutiny of various MSS authored by the brass, another fact came to the notice of Dhanraj & Co. The stuff, to say the least, whether on military history, tactics, logistics or strategy was not wholly original. Probably the living styles of lieutenant generals and chiefs did not leave them much time to pursue an old-fashioned vocation of military scholarship. Through a few legal notices from reputed British publishers whose agents were alert and active in India, Dhanraj realized that several opuscles churned out by his firm were plagiarized versions of work by other captains of war who took to the pen-Fuller, Slim, Montgomery, Bryant. So he introduced his second emendation which was somewhat unorthodox. He approached big stratocrats in uniform solely for the cachet of their exalted status so as to enable him to append their names to the volumes proposed to be published. He reserved the rights, however, of making their contents his own responsibility. The success of this innovation was manifest in the two recent bestsellers that the firm had floated in the market under the name of two former army chiefs: 'War, War and War' and 'Jawans Are Our Heroes'. Each title had sold 4000 copies, all within the family, so to say, lifted by army libraries on orders from above.

Dhanraj now waited in the PA's office as he heard lieutenant general Paintal's voice booming from inside. He seemed to be in conversation with another gunner. 'Nothing like the old guns. You remember the Garh Bhanjan, the fort-demolisher?' the older man asked.

'Yes, Sir, of course. And you may recall Fateh Lashkar, the army-conqueror, the younger man said, trying to be one-up.

'But then who can forget the Sher Dahaad, the tiger-roar', Paintal butted in.

'Or, Jahaan Ki Shaan, the world's glory', answered the visitor.

'What about Dhoom Dham?' said Paintal.

'What about Zam Zamaan?' replied the other, refusing to be beaten.

'Well, indeed, your stock of information is scarcely scanty. But tell me one thing. Don't you think our traditions are a bit antediluvian. Take our gun drill, for example', Paintal expanded. 'First of all, there seem to be too many men per gun and secondly, all the kneeling and standing that they do before they fire off each round, reminds one of a high church service.'

As soon as Paintal finished, the PA peeped in. 'Excuse me, Saar. Dhanraj has come to see you', he said.

'Who is Dhanraj?'

'O, Saar, the military publisher.'

'Send him in', he said, and then turned to the officer, 'See you then, Kataria.' The officer saluted and walked out. Dhanraj then made his appearance.

'Yes?' said Paintal.

'I came to ask permission to publish your book, Sir',  
Dhanraj said.

'But dammit, I have not written a word so far.'

'That is no problem', the publisher assured him.

'What do you mean?'

'Sir, we've already written all the chapters.

'Is that so?' said Paintal, surprised but inwardly pleased. 'Can you show them to me?'

'We can, Sir, but that won't be necessary. You can depend on Dhanraj for that. Our views on tactics and strategy, history and logistics are known the world over.'

'Nevertheless, you must have some people in your outfit to do this job for you?' Paintal asked.

'O yes, we have half-a-dozen copy-writers.'

'What do you mean "Copy-writers"?'

'Sir, they are professionals who are taught to copy from writings of others.

Paintal chuckled. 'What is the title of the book?'

Dhanraj put his hand in his shirt pocket and took out three folded slips of paper. 'They are all here. Pick any one of them, Sir.'

Paintal picked one, unfolded it. It read 'Security- India's Need of the Hour'. 'Too commonplace.'

'What about this one?' Dhanraj handed the second slip.

'Good Fences Make Good Neighbours', the general read aloud. 'Not bad, but I would prefer something even more catchy. Let's see the third one.' Paintal then straightened out the last slip. It read 'Owl or the Pussy Cat'. 'Could you explain this a bit?' he asked, rather amused.

'That is elementary, Sir. The two animals denote stealth and stupor respectively. The allusion to the Wellington owl and the famous jingle, Sir:

A wise old owl sat on an oak  
The more he heard, the less he spoke  
The less he spoke, the more he heard  
Let's all be like that wise old bird..... is well known to you, Sir.'

'Splendid', said Paintal, 'I will choose Owl or the Pussy Cat as the title of my book.'

'I was sure you'd like the idea, Sir'.  
'I want a good setup of the book.'

'It will be top class', said Dhanraj. 'Not since Everyman classics were launched did books have a finer finish: full-cloth, durable, sewn binding, silk-bead headbands, gold-stamping on the spine; ribbon-marker, fine acid-free cream weave, special end papers, clear acetate protective jacket...'

'And when will the book hit the stands?' the general cut short.

'Within three months from the time you sign the contract.'

'How much will you pay me?' Paintal asked, not forgetting the financial aspect of the deal.

'Rupees hundred a copy. The book of two hundred-odd pages will be priced at Rs 450/-. We will have a first print order of one thousand copies.'

'Isn't the price a bit too steep?'

'Not at all, Sir. You may be aware of Thinktank Printers who have come up as our rivals in the capital. They brought out a book by a former chief and priced it at Rs 600/-. The volume comprises no more than 250 pages. I also know the source from where they purloined the chapters.'

'How many copies were sold?' Paintal interrupted.

'None, Sir. The formations and the units were made to lift from the bookseller's godown - much like Nehru's autobiography brought out by Oxford, or the recent book by an ex-chief, published by Panas.'

'Ah, so you mean I will have to do some spadework on your behalf, conjectured Paintal.

'Yes Sir, naturally. The Director General Military Training and the Additional Director General Education Corps will be a positive help', Dhanraj suggested; and added, 'Also we will cyclostyle the demi-officials on your behalf, to be dashed off to major generals and brigadiers down the line.'

'You've worked it all out, I guess.'

'Business, Sir.' Dhanraj coughed and paused. 'The contract, please', and he pushed the paper toward the general.

Paintal demurred for a moment, then read and scrutinised the document, and affixed his signatures.

'When do I get the money?'

'Half the amount as payment in advance for five hundred copies; the balance, after the complete stock has been exhausted. We will be pleased to hand you over six complimentary copies as well.' Dhanraj then stood up, shuffling his chair a bit and bowed out of the office, beaming and triumphant.

## Rat Race

In the eighties, Sena Bhavan was a placid joint. Office computers had not yet inundated its interiors. Remingtons rattled away in the clerical cubicles adjacent to the offices. One day, as the head clerk sat adjusting his typewriter inserting the paper and carbon, a mouse emerged from a hole in the almirah and darted straight at his plastic tiffin box.

Daily two hundred employees had been bringing their tiffin's on the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan. Daily two hundred lunches were being guzzled by them at 1p.m. sharp. There may have been umpteen instances of late arrivals at the office, there may have been tardiness in opening and closing of mail bags, there may have been delays in replies to hundreds and thousands of acknowledgement receipts, confirmations, certificates, memos short and long, ordinary and extraordinary, secret and unclassified, but there was rarely an occasion when two hundred lunch boxes did not open at 1 p.m. on the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan. And the rats knew it. And the rats smelled it. But they did not take lunch. They took supper. Around 5.30 p.m. or so, when every man jack had deserted the ninth floor except, perhaps, the duty JCO, the rodents emerged from their hideouts.

They crept out of the old files, they crawled out of the pitted floors, they squirmed out of the bottom drawers, they leapt out of the top shelves, and they ate the leftovers of the lunches spilled on the floor or dumped in the wastepaper basket.

When the sweepers came to sweep the offices next morning, the rats returned to their hideouts. The cleaning men, then, would invariably find the baskets toppled, and bits of tissue paper used by office goers as lunch-wraps, strewn all over the floor. And rat-droppings deposited on the files which the sweepers did not clean and the clerks grudgingly dusted away.

But the mouse that darted at the tiffin box of the head clerk this afternoon, had clearly arrived before time. The babu just shooed it away.

## PART THREE ASSORTED EPAULETTES

### Club Waiter

#### Yousuf's Advice to a Captain's Wife

You have come to Mhow now, don't hold your baby,  
Ma'am  
You either take an ayah or wheel him in a pram.  
New ladies tailor dresses  
Behind where the Station Mess is  
And the best tailor in town, his name is Johnny Sam.  
You have come to Mhow now, do learn to drive a car  
Picnic at Berchia lake, a spot not very far.  
Let Sahib not once cringe  
At your weekend shopping binge  
In Indore city yonder or our own posh bazaar.

Don't miss the Sunday Club when its rooms are all ajar  
You could sunbathe in the foyer,  
Sahib tittle at the bar.  
Gents may talk of battle  
But ladies just tittle-tattle  
And their tales could have more fizz than all the  
chronicles of war.

### Stratocrats

1

The number of Generals beggars belief  
The Vice, the Deputy and the big Army Chief:

And Heads of Departments  
Like attendants of rail compartments  
Will they leave any plain soldiers, good grief!

2

*(Protocol - Deputy Chief's complaint as a backbencher at Republic Day Parade seating)*

How can I stand this nonsense  
Two rows behind the MOS for Defence?  
Three IGs of Police  
And the Vice President's niece  
O damn the Warrant of Precedence!

3

The Army Commander in a state of entrancement  
Spoke of our army, urged for enhancement  
Of its prestige and glory----  
And tradition hoary  
Though all he served was his personal advancement!

4

*(On Failed Generals of the '62 war-The Himalayan Blunder)*

'They were starched dinosaurs,' wrote Hendersen Brooks,  
'With their cantonment mindset and Sandhurst looks,  
These British subjects loyal  
Toasting Princess Royal  
And, fighting their battles on maps in books.'

5

*(In the Lootmar Republic, a General defends Brass thieves)*

When neta and babu as bandicoots set the pace  
What can the nation then expect from us in this race?  
Service before self?  
Honour before pelf?  
Why shouldn't we, too, pillage with brazen face?

## Clerihews

1

Captain Ganguli sat on a bunker wall  
Captain Ganguli had an awful fall  
An AMC doctor took him away  
Captain Gunguli never saw the light of day.

2

Lieutenant General S P Singh  
Is quite a hirsute thing  
A whole article appeared  
In Sainik Samachar on his beard.

3

Major General Rajpal Jalota  
Craved for mistresses and the latest Toyota  
He turned into a mole and tripled his salary  
Now his portrait hangs in the Rogues' Gallery.

4

Major Harminder Gill  
Climbed up the hill  
For a view of enemy mortars  
He never returned to Headquarters

5

"In Burma", said Brigadier Guleria,  
"We fought not Japs but malaria  
Even now it is ditto  
Our foe, mosquito."

## Commissars in Olive Green

1

Generals are generally found  
To live long - their health is sound  
And between now and forty seven  
Not one of them went to heaven  
Through an enemy bullet on the battle ground.

2

General Sodhi speaks in clipped accent and in style  
May deign to nod at us, once in a while  
But loosens his stiff neck  
Before the Defence Joint Sec  
Then you see him turn smarmy and servile.

3

That Liddel Hart was a lowly Captain -such  
Example will hurt our worthy generals much.  
They won't shed their swank  
Not learn from us of humble rank  
But pride in leaning on Brit or Yankee crutch.



4

In their frantic zeal to forge ahead  
The brass sleep with the army list in bed  
They make a careful note  
Of those who miss the boat  
And others who've retired, resigned or are dead.

### **Cosy Chair**

Why should a person who has for a decade sat  
In a chair at Delhi and done no soldiering at that  
Be termed an Army General?  
Our tenures are short, his eternal  
Should a soldier salute a sedentary bureaucrat?

### **Parsimony**

1

My hypothesis you will say is erroneous  
If I club harm with money and call it harmonious;  
But folks it's funny  
That a Parsi with money  
Turns out to be only parsimonious.

2

There once was a Colonel called Nath  
Who seldom bought uniform cloth  
His kerchiefs were rags  
He smoked borrowed fags  
Or cigarette butts thrown on the path.

3

The wife of Captain Bhola  
Twice a week must play Tambola;  
When she bags a line  
She makes a sign  
To the bearer for one Campa Cola.

4

Colonel and Mrs Talwar  
Rather impecunious are  
Yet all their labours  
Are to show off neighbours  
They own a brand-new car.

## Tigers Sub-area

1

"What if I've been passed over," drawled Brigadier Wagnate,  
Commander Sainabad Sub-area, "I still won't stagnate,  
If I'm favoured by luck  
I'll make a faster buck  
Through these contractors and end up as a magnate."

2

Ex-Military Attache Brigadier Kala  
Returned from the States with an Impala;  
Oh that sleek limousine  
Runs on free gasoline  
Of the petrol depot of Ambala.

3

The venal Brigadier Parminder  
Is Sub-area Commander, Jullundur;  
It's his last station  
And he's busy in nidification  
With his eyes set on plunder.

4

*(Headclerk to the young Adjutant)*  
"We're late, Saar," Sub-area babu on phone is telling,  
"You needn't check the grammar, you needn't check the spelling  
Jaldi, put your dhobimark",  
Urged the foxy headclerk,  
"Errors no one minds, 'tis delay that gets the yelling."

## Washing Dirty Linen

1

Such a pile of clothes! It's the CO's lass  
And her jeans and skirts make this mountainous mass;  
I'd be sooner on a road  
With a less heavy load  
Not as unit dhobi, bhai, but as a dhobi's ass.

2

Said dhobi Ram Lal, "Of all the spouses  
The CO's wife the greatest louse is;  
She forbade me to press  
Any soldier's dress  
Till I've washed all her petticoats and blouses."

## Impending Nuptials

At the Family Welfare Meet  
Come soldier-wives in sweltering heat;  
They'll be sitting, sitting, sitting  
At embroidery and knitting  
For the sake of CO's daughter, Simranjeet.

And neither tea, namkeen nor sweet  
Can turn their torture to a treat;  
They've been made to work apace  
At sewing, tatting, lace  
So trousseau of the Missie is complete.

## Culinary

1

For podgy Mrs Kobita Roy  
Cooking is perpetual joy;  
A daily dish  
Of rice and fish  
And Sandesh, is what her kids enjoy.

2

The Rajans have no single vice  
Their cuisine is really precise  
Eating carrots as a habit  
May seem irksome to a rabbit  
But they are always on rasam, sambhar and rice.

## Termagants

1

There once was a Brigadier called Mago  
Whose spouse was a real virago;  
All the junior wives  
Simply ran for their lives  
At brigade functions screaming, 'bhago, bhago'!

2

Rumours are getting ripe and riper  
The First Lady's no woman but a viper;  
One hiss to the Commander  
About critters who offend her  
Down they slump as if shot by a sniper.

## The Signal Officer In Chief

I served as a batman when I was a jawan  
To the Commanding Officer, Colonel Mann.

I polished his boots from vamp to heel  
And served drinks before his evening meal.

And I did odd chores for the First Lady  
Some of which, you may say, were a trifle shady.

I cleaned each window and I cleaned each door  
And I swept and scrubbed the mosaic floor.

And Lo! I was picked as the smartest boy  
And promoted Lance Naik from a sepoy.

Yet I slaved still more with just one mission  
To be recommended by the CO for a commission.

So I did baby-sitting and dish-washing too;  
And he despatched me sure for the Interview.

A gentleman cadet was I to be soon  
Parading the square at Dehra Doon.

Once with a pip, my we was eased  
Since I knew the rule, 'Keep the CO pleased.

Bang I was sent on a course each year  
Where they graded me alpha for standing free beer.

With thumping chits that I yearly earned  
To Wellington my thoughts finally turned.  
The Staff College entrance was real tough, damn!  
But I cheated and somehow passed the exam.

With bridge and golf and my sporting wife  
We were among the elite in our social life.

I wangled later a foreign posting  
Through pulls underhand and hectic hosting.

Three long years I stayed abroad  
Where I swindled, smuggled, played the fraud.

More things at the chancery there I learned  
Proved an asset when I returned.

I gave away gifts, I cocktailed hard  
And bagged a Distinguished Service Award.

Anyhow, to cut the long tale short  
I became CSO\* Corps for a start.

Then the Commandant of the College at Mhow,  
And lastly, as DG\* at Sena Bhavan now.

### **Moral**

So comrades all, to be very, very frank  
To be able to rise to the highest rank

Be a good batman to your CO's wife, I pray  
You, too, can become Signals Chief some day.

## **Gallantry Awards**

1

'Awards have been served to me as cakes on platters,'  
Bragged the bibulous Brigadier HC Slatters,  
'All my citations were old  
But brilliantly told;  
It is not the deed but the write-up that matters.'

2

Ketchup Colonel\*  
'No harm', said Colonel Maheshwari,  
'To fake encounters to bag awards of bravery.  
Isn't enemy-killing  
Gruesome blood-spilling?  
Tomato ketchup is far more savoury.'

3

You may have joined Kumaon, Gurkhas or Guards  
In quest of brave deeds and gallantry awards;  
But the surest way now  
Reach the MS somehow  
For mention-in-despatches and commendation cards.

4

*(The Superannuating General Speaks)*

In Sena Bhavan, my boy, there isn't a jot of work;  
There's my SO\* and the PA and an old civilian clerk.  
Morning golf on the links,  
Evening cards with the drinks,  
And a PVSM\*\* on retirement as a perk.

## AWWA President Speaks

Often the Air Chief's wife and I  
In the VIP planes do fly  
To Pune, Kolkata or Chennai  
Poor war widows' tears to dry.

But now we are shocked, suprised  
The CAG (so heartless, cruel!)  
Said crores worth of aviation fuel  
We burnt, was all unauthorised.

It seems VIP planes are only meant  
For the PM, the Vice and the President  
And their better-halves, pets and helps  
And the accompanying media whelps.  
(Now isn't it ridiculous and beyond belief Me, not a VIP, the wife of the Chief!)

True, while meeting war widows  
We arrange kitty parties and fashion shows.  
(Once I could even squeeze to be present at the wedding of my niece.)  
Outstation, we dine at the houses  
Of obliging junior spouses;  
And the aircraft's metro-hopping  
Comes in handy for all our shopping.

Presently the Air Chief and my man  
Are fighting it out as they only can,  
By jointly penning a rather blistry  
Missive to the Defence Ministry,

Saying, by not allowing their wives  
In VIP planes to fly  
They're hurting poor war widows' lives  
For none there'll be, their tears to dry.

## Self Before Service

1  
Visit the villa of General Sagat  
Richly furnished with carpet and drugget  
(Swiped from Officers' Messes Whose PMCs were asses)  
Without his spending a nickel or nugget.

2  
There once was a Quarter Master called Coutts  
Who purloined from unit stores new boots,  
Blankets and socks  
Stoves and padlocks  
And rations dry and fresh, including fruits.

3  
When New Delhi swelters in heat  
How hot is the general's seat!  
So it's all on the house  
His highness and spouse  
Twin unit guests in a hilly retreat.

4  
There once was a general at Leh  
Would ring up his wife in Bombay;  
They would chat for hours  
About weather and flowers  
Because his phone bill the army would pay.

## Sots

1  
The grumpy Peter D'Cruz  
Showers officialdom with choice abuse;  
It happens to be Friday  
And a damn Dry Day  
He can't wet his bill with the booze.

2

When the evening draws they herd like cattle  
Around the bar and from their sozzled prattle,  
Billingsgate, brawls,  
The thought just appals  
More officers are slain by bottle than battle.

## Annual Hunt

Said the Nilgiri rabbit to the jackal,  
'Clubbers at dawn will be out, one and all;  
The gentry at Ooty  
I'm told is quite snooty,  
Big shots brush past the small.'

'Riders with guns, misled by their hounds  
Will be scouring the hills and firing their rounds;  
For two decades nigh  
They couldn't shoot a fly,  
Our safest sanctuary, pal, is their hunting grounds.

## Bitching

(Mrs Bedi complains to her husband against the Brigadier 's wife)

'Do you know, today, Mrs D'Mello, jee,  
Refused to say even hello, jee?  
She dared to snigger  
Last week at my figure  
When she herself is such a buffalo, jee!'

## Lapdogs

1

You can scarcely imagine the problem's enormity  
If you serve as a soldier but resent uniformity;  
Be in step though a rogue  
Do things which're in vogue  
The worst offence in army is nonconformity.

2

Major Savant, though of inferior extraction,  
Is ambitious and a man full of action;  
He's always on the right grid  
With the Old Man, wife and kid,  
And he'll be a Lieutenant Colonel by selection.



## Orderly Ordeal

1

The CO's house sprawls like a manor;  
His lady checks me as if she is my trainer  
While I clear the compound  
And the area around;  
Once I was a recruit but now her retainer.

Feudalism in the army still survives!  
The masalchi and cook lead meaner lives;  
What must be done?  
Well, if I've a gun  
I'll let off our Colonels, but shoot their wives.

2

Scores of soldiers vent their grouses  
Misemployed in Flagstaff houses  
It seems from their talk  
Not China or Pak  
Our greatest threat: -the Generals' spouses!

## Supersession Bug

1

You may've been cat's whiskers but now you are a waif  
Just a superseded major who has ceased to champ and  
Chafe;

Or, you may be top brass  
Though the biggest jackass  
Because all through your career, you slavered and chafe: played safe.

2

How crestfallen is Colonel Prem Lal Roshan  
He has been overlooked by the Board for promotion.  
Since he'll never command a Brigade  
He'll allow himself to fade.  
Alas! even war wouldn't have caused him such commotion.

## Brass Progeny

1

"Dad", the general's son from Mayo intoned in his slang,

"I'm finished with school. Don't feel no pang.  
I took to drug  
'Coz books are humbug;  
We're gonna visit places with chicks of a gang."

2

Miss Kaul has airs that are baulking  
Talk to her and she won't be talking;  
Her reading's pinned to 'heartland'  
Mills and Boon, Barbara Cartland;  
Yet she thinks she is a real bluestocking.

3

The service lore is replete with fads  
Of senior ladies, army's worst ads,  
But their offsprings, too,  
Often madden you  
When sons and daughters wear the ranks of their dads.

4

Miss Mala, a smart young lady,  
Is the daughter of Brigadier K D;  
An ardent buff  
Of the au courant stuff----  
Pop and porn and tribady.

## Maquillage

1

Mrs Yadav, though of ripening age,  
Never skips the date with Centre stage;  
Mascara and matte  
Paints and dyes, thereat,  
Only make her look like a mandrill out of a cage.

2

Daily she comes for a sitting at the Taj  
Her smiles are cut out like scraps of collage;  
The wily, infernal  
Wife of the Colonel,  
It's ogres of her mind need a facial massage.

3

Mrs Kurien of Kerala state  
Uses tons of toiletry, of late;  
The sister of her hubby

Is a nurse in Abu Dhabi  
While her brothers are smugglers in Kuwait.

4  
Mrs Singh from Chandigarh's sixteenth sector  
Trundles away like an Escort tractor;  
She's truly mastered  
The art of being plastered  
A melange of Lakme, Ponds, Maxfactor.

5  
Mrs Jain is one of those foppish breeds  
Whose wardrobe far exceeds her needs;  
Neck ring'd with stones  
She's soaked in colognes  
And glossy ads that she always reads.

## Ladies of the Armoured Corps

1  
*(Marrying European ladies was not so uncommon among senior officers of yore. Nowhere more so than in Armoured Corps. Quite often the reason was other than 'l'affaire de coeur')*

She could be a scullion or poor seamstress with thimble  
A horror to look at, some Stein, Klee or Kimble;  
Spurs\* adore a Miss  
Brit, German or Swiss;  
To wed a phoren dame is a sure status symbol!

2  
They only use French pads during menses  
And in place of specs, wear contact lenses;  
O these Armoured Corps ladies!  
What I'm most afraid is  
How their hubbies can defray such expenses?

3  
The Cavalry is famous for late night dances  
Where subalterns quietly await their chances  
To be dashing and chivalrous  
To ladies who are frivolous  
And game for sly, extra-marital advances.

4  
The Alpha Squadron Commander's Sikh runner  
Gasped, "Yaar, our Saab's Mem is a stunner."  
"She'll be lovely to screw",

Agreed the command tank crew ----  
The driver, the operator and the gunner.

## PART FOUR - OFF DUTY

The snigger-swagger of military bearing,  
Cards, rum and cocacola,  
Brits taught us bragging, swearing,  
And to play croquet and Tambola.

### New Year Queen

The Fort William Headquarters at Kolkata was celebrating the new year in a big way. They had not only thrown open the event to the Navy at Diamond Harbour, to the Air Force at Barrackpore but also to the civilian haut monde. Chairing the committee for organizing the function was Major General Arvind Datta. And he began in his usual baritone: 'Gentlemen, as in the past, this time, too, we will be making merry at the new year eve. The added attraction is a grand gala dance culminating in crowning the Fort William Queen. We have already received several entries for the show.' Two dozen officers listened in rapt attention and scribbled away in their pocket-sized note pads, heads down.

'Now let's have a quick check of bandobast for the ritzy tamasha', continued Datta, 'Dipankar, let's start with you first. What task were you assigned?'

'Decorations and music, Sir', said Brigadier Dipankar Mukherjee who was an army medical corps man – half-apothecary, half-administrator - a square peg in a round hole, who found all military festivities a pain in the neck. 'I've catered for flagpoles, buntings and coloured coirmats from the local tent house, Sir.'

'And what about the dance music, Dipankar?" asked the General.

Mukherjee had not the slightest idea about jazz, rap, pop, rock or even the ancient foxtrot. 'Done Sir. I have contacted the Colonel Army Education Corps for the military band and the latter had it despatched with due diligence from the College and Centre...'

'What tunes are being played?' queried Datta.

'Veer Sipahi and the Cariappa March, Sir ...' There was a spontaneous peal of laughter from the gathering.

'My dear Dipankar, you are confusing the event with the NDA passing out parade.'

'But Sir, I was told that the woodwind and brass instruments are ideal for the goosestep....' This caused renewed tittering. Obviously, Mukherjee was unaware of Hitler's Third Reich.

The General realised it was futile to proceed with him any further and passed on to the next item on the agenda. 'Now Bunty, you are supposed to supervise ...', Datta shifted his gaze to a toothbrush-moustached, middle-aged officer. Colonel Bhanot (called Bunty) was a gunner of true calibre who knew his onions.

'Sir, my job is to oversee the catwalk', he answered.

'I hope it will be an attractive item, like last time.'

'Even better, Sir', responded Bunty.

'How so?' asked the general.

'Well Sir, we have requisitioned this time, a couple of well-known designers especially trained in New York and Paris in the area of fake stitches and phoney seams...'

'And how will that help?' cut in Datta.

'Ah Sir, you don't get it? Those counterfeit stitches and seams are the devices which engineer a wardrobe malfunction in a ramp doll's attire. It will bring the whole house down. Just imagine, Sir, what publicity can be gained by one exposed nipple, due to an inadvertent slipping of a silken bra...'

'Ah, ha! I get it', said the general, suppressing a chuckle. There were beatific smiles on the faces of other listeners.

'And now Sangma. It's your turn', the general pointed to a chubby-faced major.

'I'm incharge of the dance floor', said Sangma who hailed from Shillong. 'I've liaised with the local rep of the cosmetic Multinational, Soreal. They will provide us gratis, two tubs of deodorant for floor-smoothening and a bucket of cologne for the ladies' toilet which should send them swooning.'

'That's resourceful, boy', said Datta. 'And now to the master of ceremonies, who will conduct the beauty contest.'

'That's me, Sir', piped in Major D'Souza.

'Have you framed a quiz, Stanley?' asked the general.

Stanley D'Souza hailed from Mumbai and knew such things inside out. He stood up as if before a mike, held out three fingers of his left hand and gestured to an imaginary sylph to guess the number of digits.

'Great', nodded Datta, 'That will, indeed, test their math. Now what about the GK part?'

'That is question No. 4, Sir. What is the capital of France? Moscow, Beijing or Paris?' No sooner had he finished his interrogatory, there were protests from officers occupying the fourth row.

'The question is too tough'. They yelled in unison.

'Agreed', said the general. 'Be kind to the young ladies, Stanley.

D'Souza was not the one to be an impediment to chivalry. 'Right Sir. They have one more choice. What is the title of the Shakespearean play involving Romeo and Juliet?' There was an instant response.

'Tempest', replied a colonel sitting in the second row.

'Partly correct, Sir', said D'Souza. 'You get half the marks.'

'The last item now, gentlemen', said Datta, 'Who's looking after the expenses?'

'I am the Finance member', said brigadier Sridhar Pillay. 'Sir, I have contacted the Editor, Star Romance. They've agreed to sponsor the event. The winner will be fielded for Miss Galaxy Contest to be held in Helsinki next year, with two nights in Monte Carlo and three in Milan. The runner up will get two empty gold-rimmed jars filled with Soreal's new brand of vanishing cream.'

'That's really generous of them. Good work, Sridhar. Remind me when I sit down to write award citations next month. I could squeeze in a few encomiums for you all', said the general with a twinkle, and declared the meeting closed.

## Tale of A Cow

I was once allotted a spacious bungalow in an old army cantonment. Its state of ruin revealed that owls and ghosts must have been tenanting it for years. Being 'old soldiers', both my wife and I, however, overcame its sinister appearance and looked forward to vast spaces in its backyard for rearing a kitchen garden. Within three months we had a flourishing row of brinjal plants, tomatoes, sweet peas and a patch of greens. Then followed perdition. It was a brinded cow (with a cloven hoof, I may add!).

A make-shift fencing of euphorbia guarded our green treasure. But the rickety iron gate was our Achilles heel. The latch just closed in and could be undone by a clever jerk. We are told that by nature and temperament kine are guileless and timid. It did not apply to this cow. She had unriddled the Egyptian Sphinx, that is, divined how to unlatch the gate and brazenly barged in at will, usually in the afternoons, when my wife and I would be deep in our siesta. The loud creak of the gate's hinges would betray its malignant presence and wake us up with a start. My wife would march out with a rollerpin to deal firmly with her beastly behaviour. She was not equal to the task as the animal instantly recognized her as a member of the same species, and therefore, not much of a threat. In the meanwhile, we saw all our raw tomatoes vanish into the gullet of the ungulate.

A few days later I got the gate mended and felt myself secure once again. It was not to be. For, to my horror she had found a chink in my fencing by kicking dried cactus out of its roots and was voraciously guzzling away the newly-sprouted pea plants.

I vaulted out of my bed, and armed with a long bamboo stick, scampered towards the brute. She stood there imperturbable until I was a yard within her reach. I swung my staff. She bolted. I followed. She made a circle of my field wagging her tail rather insolently. I ran behind her. She ran faster.

From the bedroom window my wife kept watching this breathtaking duel. It was very much like the hero chasing the villain on a motorbike in a Hindi film. Suddenly I found myself lying prostrate on the ground. I had slipped - my feet landing into a manure pit that I had dug in one corner of the plot. Helplessly I watched the creature making a clean sweep of whatever was left of the brinjals, peas and greens. My neighbour's boy who was just returning from school, seeing me in this supine state, let out uninhibited peals of laughter. I returned crestfallen to my wife.

We buy all our vegetables from the local green grocer now.

## A Ph.D. For The General

'Incidentally, Suresh, how is the new electronic typewriter and all the computer paraphernalia functioning?' asked Major-General Das, Additional Director General Military Intelligence.

'I think it's OK, Sir', responded brigadier Suresh Nair expansively, 'The maintenance, however, is rather heavy - the ribbon, for example, requires to be changed from time to time. Then the printer connected to the word processor gets erratic a bit too often.'

'I see. I think, once Banerjee gets used to it, these little troubles will vanish. Anyway...', Das stopped in between, bringing a change of note in his voice. 'I was wanting to solicit your advice if I should not do my Ph. D. before I bid farewell to arms. As you very well know, we Wellington types...', (here the brigadier's chest, too, swelled up a bit), the major-general continued, 'are equivalent to M.Sc. in Defence Studies.'

'You would be proceeding on study leave, Sir?' Nair asked in surprise.

'Why study leave? I will do it while still on duty. You know, nobody will spare me from my chair', the major-general asserted with an air of self-importance.

'Yes, of course, Sir', the brigadier made haste to agree with his boss.

'Maybe, I shall want a bit of help. Some officer could be enlisted, you know, to draw books from the library, arrange the papers and so on. The electronic typewriter could come in very handy. Perhaps, you could suggest someone.'

'Will Banerjee do, Sir?' Nair spoke after a pause.

'Banerjee is, indeed, the man', the major-general answered with an extreme sense of satisfaction. Tell him to see me for a few minutes after office hours."

Lieutenant Colonel Banerjee was the General Staff Officer, Grade One, known for his military scholarship. For the rank that he held he was well versed in war strategy and war logistics. He had been an instructor at the College of Combat, Mhow, where he had participated in war-games, in lectures and demonstrations, in tactical exercises with and without troops. He had written military papers, sub-edited army journals, and devised new military theories. He had formulated original war plans and advocated a whole series of new manoeuvres. He had propounded original views on war in the plains, war in the mountains, war in the jungles and war in the desert. He had read the Jane Book of Military Warfare, the Jane Book of Military Intelligence, and the Jane Book of guns, tanks, ships and planes. If there was one thing Banerjee had missed, it was the actual war. During the '65 Indo-Pak conflict, he was suddenly taken ill for suspected gastroenteritis, and during the '71 war, he was a staff officer at Command Headquarters, Pune. But then good instructors and staff officers, Banerjee believed, did not need the actual experience of war.

At the precise moment when the Brigadier told him to see the major-general, Banerjee was absorbed in reading loudly an extract of the military history of Jats to Major Dhillon, staff officer to Das: "The splendid line of gallant fighters by their heroic exploits on the battle fields of the world in Festubert and Givenchy in France, at Ctesiphon and Kut on the banks of the Tigris, in the deserts from Alamein to Djebel Garci, and in the treacherous jungles from Meiktila to Kotah Baru, preferred death so that the Regiment may live and excel..."

'Bloody the hell', Dhillon said, 'this is wonderful book. Can I borrow it, Sir?'

'Later', Banerjee said, 'Later. Let me go through it first.' And before he could say something else, Nair had come in and conveyed to him the message.

When all the buses had departed from the gates of the South Block, Banerjee made a reluctant entry into the major-general's office.

'Banerjee, sit down, my boy, and just relax.

Accustomed as Banerjee was to the stiff and formal treatment the superior meted out to his subordinates, this benign gesture was a bit unusual.

'Tell me, have you done some work in the field of Nuclear Studies?' The major-general came to the point rather abruptly.

'Not... not much, Sir', Banerjee answered somewhat guardedly.

'How much?', the major-general persisted.

'Well, Sir, I'd written a small monograph on the speedy ability of nuclear devices in bumping off substantial chunks of the enemy forces, provided our forces are the first to strike. I'd taken the cue from the Allied experience of dropping a couple of tiny bombs on the yellow devils.'



'Very original', Das remarked a little sarcastically. But then he had no choice except Banerjee for the magnum-opus he was planning to submit, to enable him to apply for one of the Chairs several universities were lately advertising in the field of Defence Studies.

'Well, I've chosen to do a thesis on a similar theme. The topic is "India's Nuclear Needs". And I would be requiring some assistance from you, okay?'

'OK, Sir.' Banerjee smelled trouble ahead.

'I've a list of the books which are available in the libraries of National Defence College, Indian Institute of Defence Studies, South Block Defence Library, and our own on the eighth floor. You will find, the material will suffice.' He handed over the list of eleven which read as follows:

- ❑ India's Nuclear Arsenal - View from a Distance
- ❑ Nuclear Option for India
- ❑ Ought Third World to Go Nuclear?
- ❑ Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty & India.
- ❑ Nuclear, Biological & Chemical Warfare
- ❑ Should India Ban Nuclear Testing?
- ❑ Pakistan's Nuclear Threat to India
- ❑ China, The New Nuclear Power
- ❑ China, India, Pakistan, A Triumvirate of Nuclear Powers in Asia
- ❑ Developing Nations And Nuclear Strategy
- ❑ Can Super Powers Stop The Third World War Turning Nuclear?

As in the Hindu pantheon, Vishnu may be one of the Trinity but he is known by a thousand other names, so 'India's Nuclear Needs' was merely a topic chosen by the major-general which had to be a reincarnation of the eleven he had already chanced upon. Banerjee had divined the game. But he tactfully refrained from asking more questions, sparing the major-general the embarrassment of making the empirical mode of execution more explicit. For if the magnum opus was, for the sake of illustration, to be made up of 100 parts, then, say, 6 parts would be from serial one of the list, 4 from serial two of the list, 7 from serial three of the list, and so on till it made up the whole of 100 parts. What Banerjee had to work for, in actual fact, would be the introduction, conclusion, and the index. The bibliography was again to be lifted from the sources heretofore mentioned.

'Where will the viva voce be held, Sir?' Banerjee ventured to ask.

'Why, at Wellington of course. Some Prof Ranganathan from the University of Madras will come as an external examiner. There will be two senior officers from the Staff College. Well, viva is no problem. I'm pretty confident on that. You start the work right away, boy. I will give you three months from today.'

'What', Banerjee gasped. 'But that may not be possible, Sir.'

'You are a bright boy, Banerjee. Make it possible. Think of the future ahead of you.'

Banerjee understood. In the Indian army, one bad ACR sometimes was all that stood between retiring as a major or as a major-general. He left the office, immersed in troubled thought.

## With Tea, Of Course

The armed forces have recently taken to giving free rations to officers. But this has not stopped the wives of army officers and their children at times behaving somewhat like emaciated rustics from the rural areas who join the army as recruits and stampede its langars to emerge with lentil-soaked mounds of rice in their plates and a quarter-kilo of onions and cucumber as salad. Here is a sample.

A Formation Headquarters or a Training Centre organises a sports function. Call it a soccer match. The soldier players must come to attention before the match begins, sweat it out for the full ninety minutes, get knocked about, kicked, pushed and bruised in the bargain. At the close of the event they must again come to attention and then shuffle off to some obscure retreat of the barracks sucking half-dried piths of stale lemons.

The winners and runners-up do get trophies and steel glasses. But that's all. It is the poor miserable spectators under shamianas sitting snug in expensive upholstery who must be treated with trays of aerated drinks to slake their thirsts. The canopy is tastefully decorated. The sofas with cushion covers have name-tags pinned so that every red-tab and his spouse have adequate space for their buxom bottoms.

The event, a Vanity Fair, reminds you of the races at Ascot. The wives come plastered with paint, their earlobes coruscating with diamond tops. For the more conservative female, displaying of old-fashioned gold ornaments does not seem to be out-dated. All of them wear high heels. The top brass and his consort are specially demarcated by a crimson rug at their feet.

The tea after the match is yet to come. These bored and tired offsprings of a pseudo-aristocracy wend their way to elaborately laid-out tables under a huge marquee. The 'blue blood' truly spills out in their manners. First, the wife of the stratocrat fills her plate with pieces of cake and pastry, samosa, two types of biscuits, vada and bonda. She laces the latter liberally with coconut chutney.

Suddenly she remembers her two female progeny. By that time the crowd has swelled. She quietly and firmly addresses a minor functionary to carry out a search for her daughters. The proceedings are momentarily at a standstill. The two girls arrive giggling like geese who have just laid eggs in wicker baskets. Two more plates are handed out to them and they help themselves as generously as their mother.

The other wives and daughters are not far behind. The younger children hog the comestibles like silk-caterpillars guzzling mulberry leaves. The scenario reminds you of Bishop Hatto's granaries jam-packed by the starving poor.

On their way out, a soccer enthusiast who missed the event was eager to know the score. "How did the match end?" he asked. Her lips still bespattered with pastry icing, a saucy wench out of the elite bunch replied: "With tea, of course."

## Dairy Diary

Major-General Puri's four-acre farm was located 6 km away from Gurgaon towards Manesar on the Delhi-Jaipur highway. He had bought it from a Navy commodore whose only married son had emigrated to the USA some fifteen years ago. The Navy couple felt very lonely in India and since the son won't condescend to return, they decided to throw in their lot with him. The general's wife, Nalini, also discovered that she was a distant cousin of the commodore's wife. Fortunately for Puri, the departure of the Navy couple was hastened by the news of their daughter-in-law being in the family way. When negotiations for the sale of the farm began, the daughter-in-law happened to be in an advanced state of pregnancy. Then the son, one day, rang up his parents from San Francisco, California, and urgently solicited their presence at the time of his wife's delivery. This phone call almost clinched the farm deal. The commodore and his wife, sold, auctioned, gifted, dumped or destroyed their moveable belongings in a flurry of hectic activity. The major-general bagged the four acres of prime land at a throwaway price.

The rural spot was an hour's drive from Sena Bhavan. It was well-fenced and sheltered a flourishing orchard of keenu, orange, mango and guava trees. A tubewell fitted with a diesel-operating, high-powered motor drained the soil. One half of the farm was used for vegetable cultivation - cauliflower, cabbage, peas, potatoes and carrots. The other half housed a small dairy of buffaloes and jersey cows. Beyond the cattle-shed, stood a little cottage where Puri and his wife would sometimes spend the weekend.

Dhillon, the staff officer, was made in-charge of the place. It was a calculated decision of Puri, because Dhillon came from a peasant stock and his people owned and cultivated agricultural land in the Punjab. Dhillon took to his duties with distinct relish and a touch of professionalism, an attitude that pleased Puri who had already streamlined a host of farm activities to make it into a profitable venture.

Serving the major-general was Col. Ramaswamy, the Commandant of the local Communication Experimental Centre. Under him, functioned a military garrison overflowing with resources. Ramaswamy's first task was to earmark a maintenance force to run the farm on a day-to-day basis round the clock. One junior commissioned officer and one non-commissioned officer as the supervisory staff and four plain soldiers as working hands made up this detachment. And Dhillon was to oversee all of them.

Puri had tied up with the supplies general at Army Headquarters for sale of his farm produce to one of the several contractors doing business with the Army. Keenu, mango and guava trees fruiting in season were also auctioned away to him. The milk was sold to a local cooperative at Gurgaon. But for the past two weeks, Puri had been noting with alarm a steady decline in the yield of milk. And to obviate the chance of his bovine establishment dulling the edge of husbandry, he sent for Dhillon.

On the ninth floor of Sena Bhavan, every officer knew that Dhillon, the staff officer, was looking after the major-general's dairy. Tripathi, had nicknamed the Sikh officer as Puri's kamadhenu. And even Banerjee, the General Staff Officer Grade One, had made fun of Dhillon, flinging at him the snatches of a verse, 'The cow is of the bovine ilk; one end is moo, the other is milk.'

'Dhillon, the major-general wants to see you.' Banerji let out the words like an oracle. Dhillon went marching in.

'Now Paramjit', Puri bawled, not allowing the junior officer even to catch his breath, 'What the bloody hell is wrong with the dairy?'

It was from the major-general that Dhillon had caught the phrase concerning the nether regions of the earth. It was quite another matter that he interchanged the place of the definite article for his own linguistic convenience.

'Sir, Kalooti became pregnant last week. Bholi had stopped giving milk even earlier, Sir', Dhillon stuttered trying to gather his ruffled wits.

'How did Kalooti become pregnant?'

'Subedar Yadav told me it happened outside the farm.'

'Why are the buffaloes allowed to go out at all?'

'All buffaloes love water. That's why they are called water buffaloes, Sir. It's summer season. There is a pond outside the farm, where the buffaloes enjoy bathing.'

'Are the blasted animals like Haridwar pilgrims that they must be given the holy dip daily?' bellowed Puri. Dhillon kept quiet.

'But this pregnancy affair?' the major-general began all over again.

'Some mixing has taken place, Sir.'

'I don't want to hear all this, Dhillon. They are my animals and I don't like them mucking up with any riff-raff of a bull.'

'Could we buy one male buffalo, Sir? Then crossing won't be problem. Now crossing is thirty rupees per buffalo. Subedar Yadav is happy Kalooti became pregnant free of cost. He saved you thirty rupees, Sir.'

'Damn the thirty rupees ! No. It shouldn't happen again. And we're not buying any male buffalo', the major-general ruled. 'And what about Bholi?'

'We're calling the vet', Dhillon replied.

'He'll charge a hefty fee. See if you can get him down to the farm with the promise of a rum bottle.' Examining the dairy diary, Puri reverted to his stern manner and said stiffly, 'I also find other expenses which need your explanation.'

The staff officer then dwelt upon the rising costs of provender during May and June. 'Sir, we had to purchase 20 kilo khal, 2 quintals of burseen and 5 quintals of bhoosa to keep the dairy going.

'And how are the jersey cows faring?" the senior posed his last query.

'They're giving plenty of milk, Sir.

'Good', the major-general said and closed the interview.

\*\*\*

'What happened Dhillon?' asked Banerjee when the Sikh officer again hove in sight before him.

'Bloody the hell, Sir. He asked me about the dairy. I was prepared both on buffalo and cow.'

'You took the bull by the horns, eh?' Banerjee tried to be witty.

'No, Sir', Dhillon said morosely, 'He didn't agree about taking the bull.'

## A Parsi Bachelor At The Club

In the central hall of Mhow Club, Jehangir Angreziwalla, with a glass of whisky in his hand, was talking to two young officers. 'Can you tell me, boys, the nature of conflict between the vegetarians and non-vegetarians?'

The pair looked dumb-founded.

'Well', said Angreziwalla, craning his neck upwards, 'The battle between herbivores and carnivores is the battle between potatoes and pettitoes. Get it? No? Never mind. Let's move to some comely meat on hoof.' And Angreziwalla elbowed his way towards Sonali and Sarojini, daughters of Brig. Nair.

'Hi girls', he said, 'I'm Colonel Angreziwalla. Haven't seen pretty faces for a long time. Would you mind making pals with an old fogey?'

Sonali and Sarojini blushingly introduced themselves.

'Young ladies', Angreziwalla effused, 'you two remind me of Australia.'

'How uncle?'

'Fascinating geography, but very little history.

Sonali smiled. She had her hair mussed over her forehead and she wore a necklace of euro-rhinestones she had bought at the Golden Arch. Sarojini had taken an hour to file her nails before she came for the party. Angreziwalla breathed in the sisters' scent of sweet, pink talc, the calamine and the cologne. He darted a wicked quiver of oeillades at Sonali's smudge of eyeliner and lipstick, the shade of strawberries.

'Where's aunty, Uncle?' Sarojini asked the colonel.

'No aunty, girl. I'm still an eligible bachelor. Don't I look like one?' Angreziwalla retorted.

'Oh. But why didn't you get married?'

'I like girls, not women.'

'Why?'

'Because you give a woman an inch and she will want to become a ruler.'

Both the girls laughed. Then Sonali said, 'How do you pass your time? Watching TV or films?'

'Films. Hollywood. Mind you, only Hollywood. Hindi cinema is rotten. It will improve, I think, if they shoot more producers and less films.'

'Uncle, but I'm sure, you must be having someone in mind', Sonali reverted to the theme of matrimony.

'Parsis are a misfit in this country, young lady. Don't mind it, but we like the foreign stuff - British, French or American.'

'Can you tell us some Parsis in India who've married outside?'

'If I start, I won't end. But let me try. JRD, Jussawalla, Rusi Modi, Pesi Sorabjee, Zubin Mehta...'

'Why do you prefer them to Indian girls?' butted in Sonali.

'Well, personal preference, I suppose. Parsis love to go West. I could tell you a host of Parsis who have emigrated - Farookh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Rohinton Mistry, Darius Cooper, Bapsi Sidhwa... We even had a pop singer who died of AIDS in England- Freddy Mercury. He was immensely popular.'

'You couldn't find a Parsi girl for yourself, uncle?'

'No, our girls don't like Parsi boys. They become air hostesses or models and get hooked to British or American lads.'

'How sad!', exclaimed Sonali.

'In fact, both you girls should ask me for my snap.'

'Why so?' asked Sarojini.

'Because the Parsi population is dwindling so rapidly, we may become extinct earlier than the African rhino. Maybe, I'm the last of my species you've been talking to.' And Angrezwallah left the girls giggling, as he moved away towards the bar room.

## A Nice Song

Bill Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Act one. Scene one. Imagine the Duke's palace and His Grace humming

'If music be the food of love, play on  
Give me excess of it.....'

Then imagine an Officers' Mess where an evening party is on. And you've got a fairly good idea of what is happening. The two situations are similar but for the quality of music provided.

To the common man it appears that an organization like the Indian army is packed with droves of stiff-necked, sullen and serious minded morons. He may be right. But he is quite in the dark as to the nature and dispositions of their spouses - and their variegated pastimes - one of which is singing. The Officers' Mess is the place where these sirens frequently give vent to their vocal chords after sumptuously lining their capacious bellies with roast chicken and ice-cream. The scenario after dinner is somewhat as follows.

Ladies are sitting in a semi-circle on one side. Gents are sitting in a semi-circle opposite. Two young officers yawn simultaneously. Suddenly a member of the fair sex loudly clears her throat.

The sound carries across to the waiting eardrums of the Commanding Officer. He at once gestures imperiously to the Master of Ceremonies to start the show - a Captain P, let us say. His limited vocabulary cannot describe a song by any other epithet except 'nice'. He announces '... And now I request Mrs. G to give us a nice song'. And out comes Mrs. G with a filmy song, rather coarsely worded. No one discerns the banality of her voice, the cacophony of her throat. She tortures the crowd for full three minutes which seem like eternity. And no sooner has she finished, the MC re-announces, 'And now, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs M will sing a nice song'. And Mrs M launches her vocal assault on the innocent listeners. She is as equally gifted as the previous singer.

Somewhere in the middle, thinking herself to be a soprano, she tries to raise an octave and her voice cracks. But the crowd is sympathetic, even unaware of the faux pas. And when she finishes, Mrs K sings a nice song. And after that Mrs G comes back into the picture to sing another nice song. Then Major D, a self-proclaimed tenor, sings an old song which he does not fully remember and trails off in the middle. And after that there is bit of animation and bustle and the First Lady - the wife of the Commanding Officer - is requested to sing a nice song. She sings after great persuasion. When she finishes, there is thundering applause and encores from all sides. Majors X, Y and Z- all compliment her on her nice voice. She is flattered and is all smiles. Then the MC requests her for another nice song.....And thus the party languishes late into the night like a wounded snake crawling painfully on its belly.

Meanwhile, the two young officers who had yawned at the beginning of the proceedings, are now snoring peacefully in one secluded corner of the lawn.

## PART FIVE - ARMS AND THE MEN

### Signals

#### **(Nurslings of Mercury)**

1

*(Corps Commander annoyed at poor communications)*

Said the GOC to CSO of a corps  
"I'm impressed with your technical lore  
Your talk on the laser  
Was a real curtain-raiser  
But why are speech lines to divisions an ear-sore?"

2

It is customary to have a hangover  
In the regiment of Colonel Grover;  
On a day in October  
Not a man was sober,  
So he sent his spouse as GOC's Rover.

3

All military mags should be banned by some Top Bug  
The SIGNALMAN, for example, is so brazenly smug  
Every number, no matter how brief,  
Must carry on its pages the stamp  
of the Signal Officer-In-Chief:  
His visits, his speeches and three blow-ups of his mug.



4

A signal officer named Jain  
With computer-lingo began stuffing his brain;  
He wholly forgot  
His native argot  
They couldn't revert him from Pascal to plain.

5

The Divisional Commander in one of his tirades  
Grilled the Sparrow for poor signal aids,  
"Fibre Optics, Frequency Hopping,  
Cut out that name-dropping  
Just put me through to all my brigades."

6

The word operator is a common noun, Sir,  
But it stands for a special clown, Sir;  
Every trunk line  
Is always fine,  
Ring up, "The circuit is just down, Sir."

7

The Director-General was none too bright  
On communication breakdowns in satellite;  
He grew sadder and sadder  
For a lineman's ladder  
Could not reach the darn thing at that height.

8

In the computer centre at Mhow  
Bugs entered the Honeywell somehow;  
There was hue and cry  
When results went awry  
They are busy debugging even now.

## Judge Advocate General (JAG) Branch

### (Chief's Executioner)

1

The JAG is an impotent benchman  
No legal luminary but a henchman;  
At a nod from the Chief  
Can let off brass who's a thief  
But sentence some innocent trenchman.

2

If you piece together old Army Orders, carefully check  
The list of the dismissed and the cashiered forms a sordid trek;  
It reveals our Courts Martial  
Are rarely impartial  
To majors and captains who always get it in the neck.

## Army Medical Corps (AMC)

1

Every doctor in the AMC, my boy.  
Seems to be Chatterjee and Banerjee and Roy;  
As a patient if you meet them  
Be certain you greet them  
With 'Tagore and Bangla joi, joi.'

2

The AMC may not be aware of this fable  
(And when I narrate it I'm not unstable)  
That the maximum casualties by far  
Caused during the last great war  
Were by army doctors on the operating table.

3

It should be any patient's last desire  
To be admitted to a Military Hospital, sire,  
For though its hedges have even border  
And flower-beds and lawns are in order  
It's the surgeon's scalpel goes haywire.

4

I divulge a secret, it is better than a charm,  
It will always keep you away from harm;  
If you happen to be ill  
And want to go on living still  
Never report to a doctor wearing uniform.

## Artillery

Gunner brass keep their officers on the run,  
Masters of bull when inspections are done;  
Such sticklers to rules  
Stubborn as mules  
Their kickbacks worse than the Bofors gun!

## Armoured Corps

1

The armoured corps is known for cocktail parties  
Where they outwit each other at repartees,  
Such as Choudhary was a Dessert Fox  
And Habibullah a chocolate-box;  
O the armoured corps is full of real smarties!

2

COs of armoured regiments are envy of all ranks,  
They have fat balances in their banks;  
Their life-styles are regal  
Through earnings illegal  
From barrels of diesel pilfered from the tanks.

3

The cavalry officer was the first  
Who was trained in Blighty's Sandhurst;  
Some wog or gigolo  
Playing cricket and polo  
Quaffing gallons of beer in his thirst.

4

Blessed, indeed, are the President's Bodyguards  
Hobnobbing with VIPs and all society's Frauds;  
Banqueting round the year  
At the Viceroy's Bhavan here  
And bagging by polo-playing, their Bravery Awards.

5

(Tiger of the Whites - The DS\* Solution)

Scarfed, hands akimbo, a cigar he fumes  
Wears his flashy beret like a war-steed its plumes,  
'The pincer-movement of my tanks,  
Will crush the enemy on its flanks',  
Swaggers our George Patton of sand-model rooms.

\*DS -Directing Staff.

## Infantry

1

(An infantry officer's outburst at his frequent transfers)

It's out once again, the bloody posting order,  
It was Nagaland last time, now it's J&K border.  
O may some day scions of Bacchan  
And Tiger Pataudi, too, see Siachen  
And Bomdila, and become the cannon-fodder.

2

A battalion commander named Mittal  
Became addicted to chewing betel;  
Clerks handling the mail  
Once saw a red trail  
It was not his noting, it was spittle.

3

Mules come in handy on mountain paths, stony,  
On sands of Thar, camels tall and bony;  
But the infantry jawan  
Marches on and on  
For there's nothing more sure than the Shank's Pony.\*

## Corps of EME

About the EME, it's real fun talking  
The deeds of its workshops will send you rocking,  
Such as this weird stunt  
Of jeep with clutch-plate burnt  
Returning to the unit with engine knocking.

## Ordnance

1

Every article in the army has an ordnance label,  
You must know the part and catalogue and table;  
But why rack your brain  
It's all in vain  
Any item you demand is 'Not Ava'ble'.

2

### **Spurious Issues**

O these ordnance factories, why are they such a racket?  
Whate'er jawan's kit they make, they soon learn to fake it;  
Blankets that do not keep you warm  
Woollen socks that you darn and darn  
And, any bullet can pierce through their bulletproof jacket.

3

### **A Depot Commandant Speaks**

*(India Today, 'Dangerous Dealings', 10 September 1991)*

You've got to be part of an ordnance coterie  
To be allotted NSP\* weapons  
For it often happens  
That deal turns out better than winning a lottery.

They are coveted peaches of COD\*\* Jabalpur:  
The Wesson & Smiths, the Webley & Colts,  
The carbines and shotguns with clickety bolts,  
For two hundred I bought two, sold for two lakhs and more.

## **Supply Corps (ASC)**

1

Beware of the Railhead petrol depot  
Where any barrel could be a trick or a trap, oh!  
Oil tankers on the siding  
Could go into hiding  
Or evaporate into gas through mere rapport.

2

### **Ration General's Rationale\***

Yes, through contractors I balloon my kitty  
One can't say no to them. It's a pity.  
Moolah, car and a flat  
To line one's belly with fat  
O, 'tis essential, if you live in a city.

You must all take the smooth with the rough.  
There's an aim in supplying rotten stuff  
Be it maggots in meat  
Or, thrips in wheat  
They are to train your bloody tummies to be tough.

## Military Farms

1

If you are posted at Delhi, welcome with open arms  
The one and only Director of Military farms!  
He can supply you free  
As he does his gaffer, the QMG,  
A whole range of dairy products without any qualms.

2

### **Sainik-Farm General**

You enter his garden lawn through a bougainvillea arch  
His talk on himself is like a long route march  
He's used to salutes  
Batmen shining his boots  
Never will his stuffed shirt lose its starch.

## Defence Security Corps (DSC)

It is believed that a DSC sentry  
Will stop all illegal entry;  
But he shows a long arm  
To those in uniform  
Letting in moles and light-fingered gentry.

## Canteen Stores Dept (CSD)

1

Are taxes on CSD articles steeper?  
If not, the mystery indeed runs deeper;  
Else can you explain  
This phenomenon insane  
Of canteen items in the market cheaper?

2

### **Booze General\***

In two years, said the general, I retire  
The expense of my spouse makes me perspire  
So wild are her splurges  
So compulsive her urges  
She could bring home shopping malls entire.

My finances, indeed, were so tight  
I had to do something to ease my plight  
Then I thought to myself  
The only way was pelf  
Which could make my burden light.

Nothing sells quicker than duty-free liquor  
For canteen rum, there's no dearth of a buyer  
I sold fauji sharaab  
To folks in Punjab  
So my bank balance soars higher and higher.

## COW's Empire

1

### ***Regimental Dairy***

The beasts are called Nita, Rita, Gita –  
There are no kine with names sounding sweeter,  
Fed on unit-grown burseen T  
heir keepers in olive-green;  
And the milk? Mem Saab grabs every litre.

2

Where a CO's house is, there Subedar Major's heart is;  
To keep the Mem Saab beaming he knows what the art is  
For hosting CO's bosses  
Any kith and kin who passes  
He lends her cooks and waiters, and extra working parties.

3

### **Mango Pickles**

*(The RHM\* passes orders to jawans for safeguarding the unit orchard)*

One soldier to one mango tree –  
That's the hukum of the Mem Saab, jee;  
No squirrel or parakeet  
Be allowed to peck or eat  
Remember, no break for ten o'clock tea.

And, as for remaining sentry groups --  
Well, keep an eye for the monkey troops;  
Mem Saab says  
Within three days  
We'll all be plucking and pickling the drupes.

4

### A Sahayak Speaks

I passed Annual Range Classification  
Without firing a round,  
I cleared Map Reading Examination  
Without going on the ground.  
And six times this year, I slinked away on leave  
Junior most though, wear one stripe on my sleeve.

The holy COW, Mate,  
Is the mistress of my Fate.  
I kowtow to all her whims and wishes  
The world's at my feet for doing well the dishes.

### High Contacts

*(Thoughts of a Lieutenant General's wife strolling in the vicinity of Sena Bhavan)*

Early morning. How quiet are the drives!  
I always look out for the VIPs' wives  
As I walk my dog  
On Rajaji Marg;  
A VIP, you know, can change our lives.

### Queer Fish

1

The QMG didn't enlist the unit cook's views  
How the fridge in the langar is best put to use;  
So in the freezer he folded his uniform flat  
In the crisper, placed belt and jungle-hat  
And beside them, neatly, his PT shoes.

2

There once was a State Minister, Dutta  
Who rang up the Army Commander at Calcutta,  
"I request, General, this hour  
For aid to civil power,  
Now I'm speaking from a manhole in the gutter."

3



The Colonel's wife has a sensibility fine;  
Towards animals she's totally benign.  
She loves to canoodle  
Her fluffy, pale poodle  
While her hubby envies the canine.

4

The wife of Brigadier Handa  
Old alumnus of Delhi's Miranda  
Is a libber who can smoke  
And booze like any bloke  
And drills recruit squads from the verandah.

## The Unit Commander's Estate

1

*Stuffing Non-CSD Articles In CSD Canteen*

How I wish I were like Colonel Sareen!  
Supplying things to my own canteen  
Like hosiery by the dozen  
From an Amritsar cousin  
And netting hefty commissions in between.

2

*Captains' Tete-A-Tete*

'For whom's the unit carpenter daily  
Making all that furniture really?  
So much sunmica, plywood  
Fevicol, dry wood.'  
'Hush! For the CO's new mansion at Delhi.'

3

*(Adjutant to the CO's driver, grumbling at having to fill and sign the vehicle document on CO's behalf)*

'A few nugatory trips none will be grudging,  
But three hundred kilometres of the staff car's trudging  
With the old man and his clan  
Amounts to bank robbery, man;  
This car diary filling will only be fudging.'

4

### *Hanky-Panky*

Formations allot funds for unit's routine wants,  
He fakes receipts and bills, every rule he flaunts;  
The CO of today  
Augments his pay  
Through his privy purse of unit's Public Grants.

5

#### **Area Commander To Staff**

Honest souls are six feet underground  
All kinds of crooks in the army abound.  
Make a note in your diary  
Officers' Boards, Courts of Inquiry  
These must be held all the year around.

6

#### **Words From A Whistle Blower**

If you serve a reftab closing a defence deal  
In league with arms merchants, don't you helpless feel.  
There is no weapon better  
Than an anonymous letter  
To be penned to the CVC who will bring him to heel.

## English Ladder

1

Rank decides the quality of your English, my friend,  
A general's always better than a brigadier's in the end;  
And safely you may wager  
Had Shakespeare been a major  
Every colonel in the army, his drafts would emend.

2

#### **Bibliophobe Brass**

Said General Kitab Singh Bisht,  
'If you don't like books, not much have you missed.  
They scarce make you wise  
May even harm your eyes  
I read Statements of Account, and the Army List.

## Blue Blood

1

The College of Combat has training aids new

For higher commanders (Not for me and you);  
Twice a week they screen  
For the elite olive-green  
Training films that are totally blue.

2

### **Warning To Young Officers\***

If you are an ADC, and your young wife, a cutie,  
Beware of the GOC's roving eye on your Beauty.  
The wolf in brass  
To be alone with your lass  
Could pack you off on temporary duty.

3

Cadets and subalterns seem impressed  
By medallions on a general's chest,  
Linking coloured screeds  
With gallant deeds  
Unaware true heroes are all at rest.

4

From calls of sundry pedlars in the bazaar  
Can you tell whose wares genuine are?  
Among officers, I suppose,  
The real heroes are those  
Who opt out of rat race, yet never shun a war.

## **Faux Pas**

1

Captain Puri who philanders with chicks  
For once has o'erplayed his tricks;  
The Colonel's daughter  
Is in real hot water  
And he, in a hell of a fix!

2

### **Subaltern Being Admonished**

Moustaches: Being juniormost, you are not supposed to grow them.

Army Orders : One and all, you are supposed to know them.

Be seen, not be heard  
Never mouth an extra word.

Trumpets: Seniors alone are supposed to blow them.

3  
Poor sucker! It's the innocent's slaughter,  
ADC wedding the General's daughter;  
A real road-roller  
With a carious molar  
The nerd will be sorry he ever got her.

## Gourmands

1  
Manners of dames are at their worst  
When they help themselves as if they'd burst,  
Piling plates cheek by jowl  
At the sight of roast fowl;  
O, how subalterns rue the phrase 'Ladies First'!

2  
Said Mrs Mani of Calicut  
Kerala has a vegetable glut;  
Tapioca, plantain  
Our health maintain  
And just nothing to beat the coconut!

## Capital General

1  
Gorget and epaulettes tell who he is  
As if rank's the meed of a soldier; soldiering, show-biz.

Decalogue well-versed in craft and guile  
Who swings his ferruled baton in style.

Ribbon-rows upon chest with colours mixed  
Like an aerogramme with several stamps affixed.

Bemedall'd so, yet never bruised in war  
With orderlies and aides and star-plated car.

As a plain cadet joined, now pompous as a czar

With a farm in Gurgaon, flat in Som Vihar.

2

### **Musings Of A Freedom Fighter**

*(News Items 12 Oct 2006 HT, 11 Oct 2007 IE)*

In our time it was only a toady  
Who made his money and made a name  
While we breathed freedom in a quod, he  
Served alien masters and brought us shame.  
Now our Republic's guardians are much the same.

The house of a top brass by CBI is raided  
Another has with arms' merchants his honour traded.  
To the big bucks lore  
Have succumbed many more  
Sheer greed has got the red tabs degraded.

### **Envoi**

Call me mad  
Call me barmy  
Show me a poor General,  
And I'll lead you, lad,  
To an invincible Army.

3

### **Race Course Road Club Elections**

*(News Item, The Times of India, 17 September 2007)*

Fumed the retiring Chief Dilbagh Singh Dewana,  
'The PMO has left me holding a banana  
Nothing gubernatorial  
Nothing ambassadorial  
Well, then, I'll contest the President's post at Gymkhana.'

4

### **Army Chief Golfing**

*(News Item, Indian Express, 03 July 2005)*

'Have my four stars and flag fixed', he bellowed to his staff,  
'And a red mat laid in the cart's front half  
Even on a golf link  
I want folks to think  
I am not at par with the other riff-raff."

## **Army Ladies' Club**

Quoth the Club Sec, gulping a brandy neat,

"The Ladies' Club every week has a Ladies' Meet;  
They have coffee and snacks,  
And nothing on their backs,  
And to watch them trooping in is quite a treat."

Oh! The Ladies' Club! The Ladies' Club!  
With shows of live-flower and dead shrub;  
Where they teach to roast gallina  
In an ice-cold patina  
And hold swimming lessons in a tub!

With platinum finger-ring or aural carbuncle,  
Bejewelled necks and diamond truncal,  
Each imbued with a passion  
For the latest fashion –  
Rich nieces of some poor aunt or uncle.

Behold one, tottering on a high-heeled sandal;  
Another twirling proudly her parasol's handle.  
They'll cook yarns crummy,  
Over canasta and rummy,  
And return stuffed with snacks and scandal.