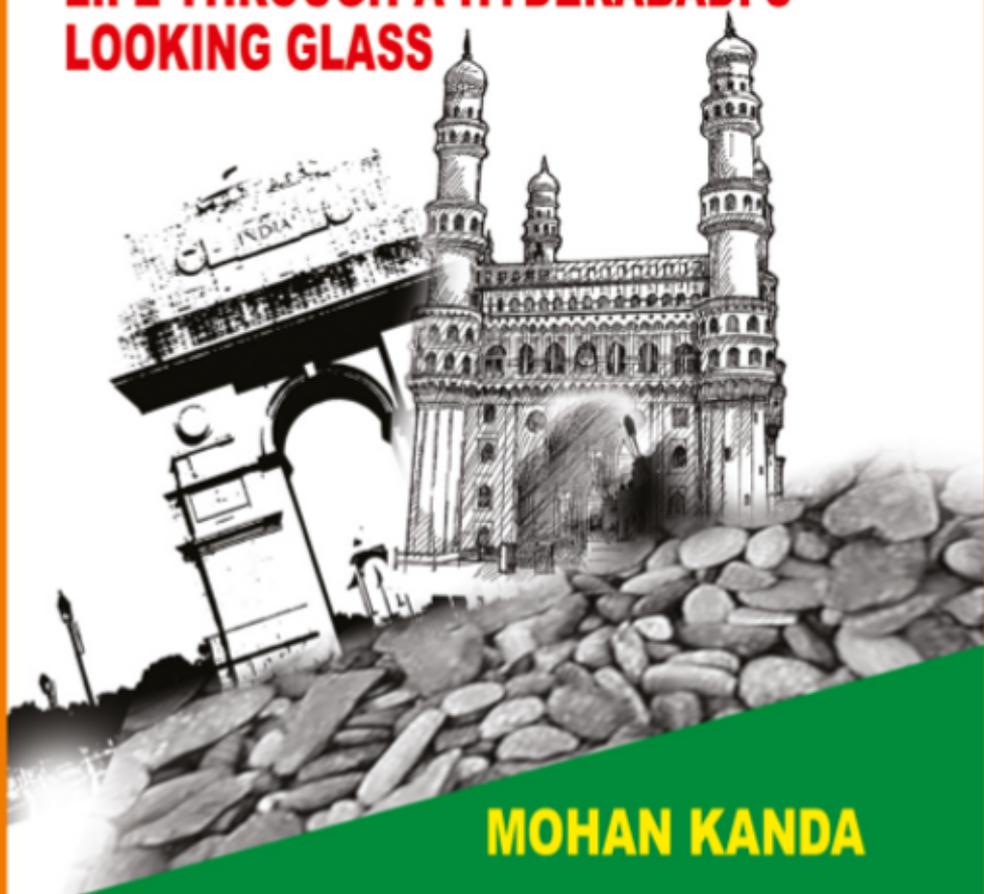


TREKKING OVER PEBBLES

LIFE THROUGH A HYDERABADI'S
LOOKING GLASS



MOHAN KANDA

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THANK YOU

The primary source of inspiration for *Mohana Makarandam* was my cousin Ramakrishna who finally goaded me into that effort and would practically not rest until I began.

My sincerest thanks to Mullapudi V. Ramana, essayist playwright, satirist, movie-script writer and humourist par excellence of yesteryears. Widely acclaimed – and not without reason – as the Telugu Wodehouse, ‘Ramana’ regaled Telugus for several decades with his inimitable wit, style and deep insight into human nature and its frailties.

And ‘Bapu’, as he was known to generations of Telugus – cartoonist, film director and caricaturist without parallel, was a household name for all Telugu speaking people everywhere. So much so that his drawings became a part of the daily lives of all manner of Telugus. Good looking women are still fondly called ‘Bapu’s pictures’

The two formed a formidable and inseparable duo – ‘Bapu – Ramana’ was, in fact, like the name of one individual. Their combined effort has left a footprint on the sands of Telugu literature that will remain green forever. I am lucky to have been considered a friend by them. Ramana in fact honoured me by dedicating a set of limericks with the title “Vinnava (have you heard) Kanda Mohan”.

When I first entertained, encouraged by friends and well-wishers, to pen down some thoughts about the incidents and personalities from my life and times, it was to them that I turned for guidance. But for their spontaneous advice this book would never have been.

On my request to find me a interpreter for *Mohana Makarandam*, Ramana suggested Prasad referring to him as the best possible person for such a task.

I am also deeply indebted to M.B.S. Prasad who all but wrote the original Telugu book. Thoughts and ideas which I never knew I possessed flowed out smoothly and continuously, thanks to his intense probing over several long sessions of discussions. His advice and suggestions have greatly enhanced the value of this book. Thanks Prasad.

I am grateful to P.V.R.K. Prasad whose writings enjoy immense popularity amongst the Telugu readership. He was good enough also to write the foreword for *Mohana Makarandam*, when it was brought out in book form.

My thanks also due to Babu for enriching the content of the book with his outrageously funny and extremely appropriate caricatures.

Old friend, great singer, and fellow Wodehouse fan V.R.S. (Ravi) Murty put the first draft together. He is one of those public school educated persons who can speak flawless Telugu though unable to read or write. Fortunately Prasad had also rendered an oral version of *Mohana Makarandam* which was uploaded at *greatandhra.com*. Ravi patiently listened to all the episodes and then wrote out in brief what he thought each episode should look like in English. One look at what he gave me was enough to encourage me to proceed further. Thanks a lot Ravi.

Professor E. Nageswara Rao, my brother-in-law *bava garu*, then took on the gigantic task of translation of that book into English and finished it in the shortest possible time. Thank you *bava garu*.

SOCIAL COST BENEFIT

*When our first parents were driven out of Paradise,
Adam is believed to have remarked to Eve:*

"My dear. We live in an age of transition."

- W.R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's

B.P.R. Vithal, one of the most distinguished civil servants who served in the erstwhile composite state of Andhra Pradesh had a wry sense of humor. His caustic wit and biting satire considerably lightened the otherwise drab and dull ambience that normally pervades the corridors of the Secretariat.

A story goes that once when the name of a particular officer was recommended to him for a post in the finance department that he headed, his retort was, "I concede we practice idiocy in this department. But it is the cultivated variety – not the congenital type!"

While addressing a gathering of secretaries to government in the state soon after taking over as the Deputy Chairman of the State Planning Board, Vithal said "as I age I find I am losing some of the ambitions I had nursed earlier. What is more, I have lost some of my delusions also!" I have found in my case, however, that

I have been able to preserve some of my unfulfilled desires even to this advanced age. As I grew up I realised that some of them will probably never happen. I had, for instance, wanted to be a pilot, but realised it was out of the question once I entered college. Similarly, while in service, I always wanted to serve in the finance department. This, however, was not to be, either in the state or in the government of India. The closest I came was to serve as the secretary in charge of planning in the finance and planning department of the state government.

Given the nature of their duties, those dealing with financial matters in the government have occasionally, perforce, to appear somewhat dense. This is understandable but only upto a point. I heard that a hospital wanted an air-conditioning plant to be installed in a new operation theatre. The person in the finance department suggested the use of an air-cooler. Surely was over-doing the art of penny pinching?

The stint I had as Managing Director of the Andhra Pradesh Fisheries Development Corporation (APFDC), was probably the most satisfying assignment I had.

In 1979, I was posted as Managing Director of APFDC, a public sector undertaking of the Andhra Pradesh government which was entrusted with several functions relating to the fisheries sector. These include the operation of fishing trawlers, running an ice plant and a prawn processing unit, construction of trawlers in a shipyard, the procurement and sale of fresh water and marine prawns and fish from the operators of mechanized fishing boats operating from the fishing harbors along the coast of the state and from individual fishermen fishing with traditional craft and tackle.

The prospect of being able to contribute to the economic well-being of the traditional fishermen and promoting consumption of fish especially by the inmates of the hostels meant for school and college students belonging to the Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and Backward Castes excited me the most. The fishermen

AUTHORITY CONQUERS ANARCHY

While arriving at a set of priorities is important for one to be an effective team leader, it is equally necessary to be able to convey those priorities to the members of the team, as well as those whom the team exists to serve. It is often essential to send the right signals out by setting an example by one's actions.

In 1972, there was a prolonged and widespread public agitation in the Andhra region of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh state. The demand was for a separate Andhra state.

Those in authority, as well as prominent leaders of the movement, became helpless spectators as the movement escalated. They wanted to achieve amity politically by allowing tempers to cool. For too long, they desisted from stern action against the agitators who were emotionally charged. Such was the spontaneity of the public sentiment at that time that, no sooner than someone called for a stoppage (bandh) of work, everyone responded without so much as ascertaining the legitimacy of the source of the announcement. This happened frequently and government offices, business establishments and educational institutions alike remained shut down for several months at a stretch throughout that region.

The agitation witnessed several violent incidents all over the state. On several occasions the uprising had to be quelled with

measures such as lathi charges, the use of tear gas shells and even firing. Unlawful elements often exploited the situation with the innocent public suffering the consequences.

When things got out of hand at a point, the central government stepped in. The popularly elected Legislative Assembly was dissolved, the Council of Ministers asked to resign and President's rule imposed. The Governor along with his Advisers took over the reigns of the government which now comprised only of officials.

I was serving as the sub-collector of Ongole revenue division in Prakasam district at that time.

On the 22nd of November, 1972 the police in Ongole town had to resort to lathi-charge, and tear-gas to disburse a crowd of agitators. When those measures failed, they opened fire killing four people. Curfew was imposed in the town and shoot-at-sight orders enforced.

I was camping in the nearby Chirala town at that time. In the wake of the incident the Collector summoned me back to Ongole. As I was entering the town I could see flames rising into the sky as several buildings were burning, having been set afire by the angry mob fleeing from the place of the incident. A group of agitating youth stopped me from entering the town as they felt that my presence would strengthen the hands of the official machinery. It was only after patiently persuading them that I would have a constructive role to play in restoring peace and order in the town that I was allowed to enter. The Collector, the Superintendent of Police and I discussed in detail the measures to bring the situation under control quickly.

Quite obviously the administration had lost its connect with the people who were angry and upset. None was willing to participate in any discussions. Several attempts to bring to the table prominent citizens who could assist in the process were of no avail. The situation clearly called for some out-of-the-box thinking.

THINKING ON ONE'S FEET

He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing

-Oscar Wilde

In the year 1991, the Prime Minister of India P.V. Narasimha Rao, had arranged a meeting between central ministers/officials and representatives of the Andhra Pradesh state government. The face to face exercise was taking place following a request made by N. Janardhan Reddy the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh state. The idea was to hasten the process of approval by the government of India of a number of programmes and projects submitted by the state government.

The delegation of which I was a member was led by the Chief Minister. Most of the pending cases pertained to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests then headed by Kamalnath. Many of them had earlier been repeatedly returned to the state seeking one clarification or the other relating to compliance to the requirements of environmental protection.

Janardhan Reddy set the ball rolling seeking the intervention of the PM for early clearance of the matters.

Kamalnath, at the very outset, remarked that there was nothing pending with his ministry, and sat back.

Now there is a good deal of ambiguity associated with the word 'pendency'. This is often exploited by the bureaucracy which employs several ploys to escape blame. A story (probably apocryphal) is told about a senior civil servant of the 1950s vintage in Andhra Pradesh. The gentleman in question was particular about leaving the office promptly as the work-day ended. He also liked to be known as an efficient person whose desk was always spotlessly clean. His staff one day decided mischievously to trick him into overstaying. Precisely at 5.30 PM (closing time of the office) there appeared in the in-tray on his desk a voluminous file with several documents flagged for perusal; and a lengthy note explaining the contents of the case and seeking a decision. The officer in question was no greenhorn. A seasoned veteran with decades of wisdom and experience behind him, he was undeterred by the challenge.

He removed one of the flags, and wrote,

"Where is flag K?"

He then put the file in the out-tray and walked out cheerfully!

XXXXX

Upon hearing Kamalnath's somewhat abrupt opening remarks, I sensed that some bureaucratic trick had been played within his ministry. In all fairness, and without meaning in any way to underplay the efficiency of the systems at work in the ministries of the Government of India, one knew that to create an illusion of zero pendency was no rocket science. Any number of seemingly legitimate queries can be raised - by any department, at any level, on any subject. Seeking further information or a clarification is a standard method of transferring the ball to the other court. This is what seemed to have happened.

But what next?

A flash of inspiration, the timely kicking in of presence of mind, is what a situation like that demands.

SECRET DOCUMENT – LOST AND FOUND

Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India had, in the year 1982, undergone heart surgery. He was advised rest and could not discharge his functions for six weeks. In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of India, Justice Hidayatullah, the then Vice President of India, was to perform the functions of the President during that period. The Vice President would go to Rashtrapati Bhavan for an hour or so every day and attend to the papers in the President's office. I accompanied him on these visits.

Justice Hidayatullah also continued to attend to the work of the Vice President from his office at 6, Maulana Azad Road, New Delhi.

One morning I discovered to my horror that a secret communication, addressed to the President of India from one of our missions abroad, was missing. I had, on the previous evening, left it somewhat carelessly on my desk while going home.

I ransacked the desks, cupboards, drawers, etc. both in the office and at home. No matter how assiduously I searched, the paper could not be traced. Quite apart from the embarrassment of having misplaced an important paper, I was really and truly face to face with the consequences of gross negligence in a highly sensitive matter.

I asked around discreetly whether anyone else in the office had stumbled upon the paper by chance. There was no sign of the letter.

My dilemma was whether or not to bring the Vice President into the picture at that stage. In that mood of apprehension I told myself that I would never have been in such a predicament had I not been posted as Secretary to the Vice President in the first place. I was not there of my own volition. The series of events that led to the present situation flashed in my mind's eye.

I was the Collector of Guntur district in 1977, when Sharda Mukherjea (wife of the late Subroto Mukherjea, the first Indian to be the Chief of Air Staff of independent India), a former Member of Parliament, was the Governor of Andhra Pradesh state. She was visiting the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam which lies in the neighboring district of Nalgonda. A museum of Buddhist artefacts, edicts, statues etc. is the prime attraction there. It is situated in an island in the Krishna river, which is part of Guntur district. In accordance with protocol I was present for the Governor's visit to the museum, all dressed up in a *galabund* despite the sweltering heat and oppressive humidity. The Governor's visit lasted for about forty minutes and, after seeing her off, I returned to headquarters.

News came within a few days that Sharda Mukherjea desired that I be posted as the Secretary to the Governor. Chief Minister Vengala Rao was on a visit to Guntur district at that time. He confirmed the information, also adding that he had not been in favour of to my being disturbed from my post (I had barely been there for a few months after looking forward for quite some time to being in-charge of a district). Apparently the Governor was quite firm about the posting.

I have covered elsewhere some interesting events relating to my tenure in the Raj Bhavan, Hyderabad. A year after I joined the Governor's Secretariat, Sharda Mukherjea moved as the Governor of Gujarat state. Even as I was fancying my chances of reverting to a field posting came the news that K.C. Abraham, the

WHAT PRESIDENT SHANKAR DAYAL SHARMA NEVER GOT TO KNOW

President Shankar Dayal Sharma will never have known how close I came to facing the most embarrassing moment of my life, albeit on account of his having done the right thing.

1995. I was Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of India. I had been made responsible for organizing the "Agri Expo 1995" exhibition in Pragati Maidan situated near the Old Fort in Delhi. The then minister of agriculture Balram Jhakar had invited the President of India to inaugurate the Exposition. The President had been 'pleased' (as the President always is, even while sacking a civil servant!) to accept the invitation.

Extensive and elaborate arrangements had been made for the function. The military staff from Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Delhi Police, and others made several visits to the venue to check on the security and other arrangements being made. Finally, after weeks of hard work, everything had been put in place. I reached the venue well ahead of the appointed time, for a last minute dotting of the "i"s and crossing of the "t"s, as it were. To add to my woes Sarita Das, the Ministers Special Assistant drop in uninvited to 'inspect' the exhibition and described the very first exhibit right at the entrance as 'puerile'. I had, by then, learnt to ignore her comments and carried on regardless.

End of Preview.

Rest of the book can be read @
<http://kinige.com/book/Trekking+Over+Pebbles>

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