

A SURPRISE INSPECTION PRODUCES RESULTS.

The Chief Engineer (Construction) and I were returning to Calcutta by road after inspecting some Construction works at Digha. We were about 60 Kms. from Calcutta. It was 7 p.m. I said "Let us visit the Kolaghat Station. I want to see the Booking office".

It was a snap decision for a SURPRISE inspection. I wanted to see for myself the state of affairs in the Booking Office with particular reference to the use of SPT (Self Printing Ticket) machines. During discussions at a number of HOD meetings, it had been brought out that the SPT machines on the suburban stations were not working properly; as a result, staff had per force been obliged to issue card tickets; as a result, a substantial capacity of the Printing Press had to be diverted to this extra work of printing this extra demand for card tickets on the suburban section; as a result, the printing of card tickets for main line stations had fallen in

arrears; as a result, Paper Tickets had to be prepared and issued at many stations on the main line section; as a result, there was inconvenience to passengers at the booking counters and so on. The cause-effect relationship was so beautifully brought out by those present. However why exactly the SPT machines were not working was not obvious.

I must have spent about 30 minutes in the Kolaghat Booking office. I sent for the Station Master. He came in accompanied by a traffic inspector who happened to be at the station. I merely watched the operation. There were four SPT machines but not one of them was being used. The counter clerk was issuing only card tickets. The clerk in-charge of the booking office showed me a log book that was kept of daily events from which nothing could be made out clearly as to when a machine went defective, what action was taken, when it was restored, etc. It was even difficult to make out which of the four machines was giving more problems. It was explained generally that there were some problems with a particular type of paper roll and that better performance was obtained with a different type of roll.

I explained to those present a system of how to keep the records for watching performance, highlighting problems for attention and for follow up. I suggested that they should open a register immediately. In fact I made out the format myself and showed them and directed who was responsible for entering what information. I instructed that the Division should introduce such a system at all stations. The supervisory staff present were instructed to convey my orders to the Sr.DCS & DRM.

On return to Headquarters, I conveyed to CCS and CSTE (The S&T Department was responsible for maintenance) what I had seen and what directions I had given.

A week later the DRM spoke to me. He had introduced the system at a few stations and would monitor its implementation. He would extend it to other stations also very soon.

A month later the DRM sent up statistics to show that there was improvement in the quantum of sale of tickets through SPT machines.

Another month later the DRM reported through his periodical DO that the sale through SPT machines in the entire division had improved from 30% to 70%, reckoned as a percentage of total sale of all tickets on the suburban section. It was clear that if the statistics were correct this achievement had come about not from any improvement to the SPT machines themselves but only as a result of a better system of closer and systematic monitoring, leading to better co-ordination between using and maintaining departments.

It is quite possible that with the state of development in Electronics and Computers that is available today, compared to what existed when the SPT machines were introduced, more reliable, more modern and not necessarily more expensive machines can be designed and produced within India. It only requires a special effort and drive. Perhaps Indian Railways have since taken some effective action in this regard.

One particular aspect had been agitating me quite often. My unmistakable impression was that not enough attention is being paid to Systems improvement and simplification in

work procedures in areas where the Commercial department of the Railway has to take the lead and the initiative. The Commercial department is the front line department of Railway; it has the maximum interface with the Railway customers. It is sad that the importance of this Department and the role it can and should play to improve the Railway's image is not getting the attention it deserves at high levels in the Organisation. It is high time that Indian Railways wake up to this reality and do something positively about improving matters in this regard. A suggestion that occurs to me is that in the UPSC recruitment for the Operating and Commercial departments, Railways could induct persons with Engineering background and knowledge of modern Management methods. How this is to be achieved is a matter for the policy makers to consider.

THE NOTING SIDE AND ITS PITFALLS

Any one who has worked in Government knows that the starting point for action in any matter is the opening of a Case File on the subject. How a case file builds up from a single letter to thick volumes is to an objective observer as fascinating as watching a child grow into an adult - it is almost imperceptible. A feature of case files is that all correspondence and letters exchanged are filed on one side, called the "correspondence side" and the pages are numbered serially, and that all comments, discussions, decisions, approvals etc., are filed on the other side called the "Noting side" also numbered serially. The notes on this side refer to the correspondence as being at serial number such and such. The higher the level of the executive or the decision-maker, the chances are that the less he examines the original correspondence so carefully but rather that he relies more on the summaries, the briefs etc., on the Noting side. I have not had an opportunity to work in the Railway Board. But I know that the same pattern prevails in that office too, with this difference that the correspondence and notings are kept in separate bundles physically and move together, instead of being in one file as on Railways. Quite often, the noting file in the Railway Board out-grows the correspondence file in size. I suppose this arises only partly from the importance attached to decisions and approvals taken at the highest policy making levels in Railway Administration; more often it could be due to the numerous levels in the hierarchy

and the different departments to be consulted or wishing to be consulted and even due to "passing-the-buck" culture so ingeniously developed and perfected in Government offices.

That should suffice for an introduction. It was Dec.'1987, I was GM on South Eastern Railway and on a visit to Chakradharpur Division. After the day's inspection was over, I sat down for a meeting with the DRM and his officers and invited their comments on any aspects of Railway working. Promptly came an officer's voice.

"Sir, we think twice before coming to Garden Reach (S.E. Rly. Headquarters) for any meeting. It is difficult enough to get accommodation in the Officers' Rest House. What is worse is that I have to pay for my wife's stay in the Rest House. And you know, sir, there is domestic pressure for occasional visits to Calcutta, placed as we are in interesting places like "ABC". Everyone knew that use of the term "interesting" was a sarcasm. "ABC" stood for the Divisional headquarters stations of Adra, Bilaspur and Chakradharpur on S.E. Railway, which were small towns with very little scope for shopping or entertainment of any kind.

I saw his point. I had known for a fact that in no other Railway the officer was required to pay for the Rest House accommodation for his wife. I had myself never been asked to pay such charges on the other Railways where I had worked. That the rules were different on South Eastern Railway was a revelation. How could it be, I wondered.

On my return to Calcutta, I called for the case file. The officer was correct. The rules as framed by South Eastern Railway, which had been enforced for four or five years, did stipulate payment for the spouse. Indeed, there were many other complicated sundry charges for use of miscellaneous facilities like Refrigerator, Heater, Gas Stove and so on.

I located the particular letter from the Railway Board (on the Correspondence side of the file) on the basis of which the rules had framed. There had been attempts by two of my predecessors in office to modify the rules. Although the GM's and the FA & CAOs were all sympathetic for the officers' representations and had expressed such sympathy in their observations on the noting side, they seemed to have got stuck with some kind of inevitability

as instructions had descended from Delhi. And for reasons which I could not fathom, the matter had not been raised with the Railway Board for review. The situation had come to be accepted.

I decided to have a fresh look. At a first step, I read the Board's letter - the villain of the piece - once, twice and thrice. The letter was indeed clumsily and ambiguously worded; but to my mind the interpretation made on South Eastern Railway was not justified. Indeed I discovered that if that interpretation was to be accepted, a strange corollary followed from the Board's letter itself that while charges have to be paid for wife's stay with the officer, if for some reason the officer has to go away from that station on work leaving his wife behind, she does not have to pay any charges. What an absurd situation, I said to myself.

I put down my interpretation of the Board's letter in simple and clear language on the noting side. I made it clear that an officer on duty did not have to pay any charges for his wife's stay. I also visualised various circumstances, use of gadgets, appliances etc., and framed a simple set of rules to cater for all possible situations. A note was sent with these proposals to FA & CAO seeking his concurrence.

FA & CAO's concurrence was received within a week and revised rules were circulated effective from 1st January 1988 applicable all over the South Eastern Railway.

I concede that this was no great breakthrough in Railway operations. It was a success and achievement nevertheless which gave me no small satisfaction. I believe that I had succeeded where others had failed because :-

- I was in full sympathy with the cause and was determined to achieve what I wanted to.
- I found the time to see the Correspondence side and the all-important letter of the Board critically and did not merely go by the interpretation of that letter as projected on the noting side.

- I did not leave it to anyone else to frame the detailed rules on the lines of my interpretation but did that part of the job also myself, so that in the issue of the revised instructions there would be no delay or ambiguity.
- I did not refer the matter to the Railway Board for clarification.
- Above all I had an FA&CAO who was not only sympathetic but also practical.

The officer community was happy to see the new set of rules. I too was happy because I could do some thing for them so quickly.

There could be a school of thought that the GM of a Railway who has many important things to do should not have spent so much time himself in this matter. That view is probably right, if looked at purely from conventional and classical approaches to Management and Organisation, the role of Delegation etc. But would that approach have got the results ? I leave it to the reader to come to his judgment and conclusions.

A digression from the main theme of this Chapter. On a Railway, the GM can achieve many things, if he has the FA & CAO on his side.

I was Dy. CEE in CLW - I think it was in 1972. My boss Mr S.C.Misra asked me one day " Do you know Mr. V ? He has been posted as GM/NF Rly."

"Yes sir, I know him very well. He was DCS/Catering long ago on Southern Railway; and I have had occasion to taste in his room sweets/snacks made by cooks, as part of their Trade Test".

Mr Misra continued. "His brother Mr. M is the FA & CAO on the same Railway". he paused.

I did not comment. Mr. Misra came out with this beauty of a philosophy:

"The Board have realised this situation a little late and are issuing revised orders. According to me, it is quite O.K. if the two - GM and FA & CAO - are brothers but only they should not be too brotherly. Don't you think so?"

I smiled in agreement.

THE HATTANGADI CHART

I must confess that till about 1962, that is until I had been in Railway service for some eight years, I did not have much of an idea about how to keep track of facts and figures which keep changing from day to day, and month to month; what system can be followed to store data; to retrieve them when required and to update and use them for either projecting a picture and or for taking action for progress and improvement. Those were days when Personal Computers had not entered the scene.

My predecessor Mr.S.S.Narayanan in the Tambaram Shed had kept an excellent chart for watching flow of materials required for the Rehabilitation work of the old EMUs. To say the least, I was terribly impressed by it. For him, it may have been child's play, trained as he had been in the Railway Electrification Organisation before coming over to Southern Railway. But to me, it was a starting point, which I kept improving as I progressed in my career.

The next major impact and impression was caused by a printed Progress Chart that had been introduced by my predecessor Mr. A.A. Hattangadi, as Dy. CEE/TM/CLW. It was used mainly to keep track of out-turn/production of various traction equipments. I started using it for many more applications within the Traction Motor Organisation. It soon caught the attention of the CME/CLW, who found it convenient to monitor outputs and inputs in other shops of CLW as well. It was he who christened it "The Hattangadi Chart" for conversational reference. Thereafter the Hattangadi chart became a household word in the CLW organisation and the chart was used in some form or another, right from the lowest

level chargeman in the Production or Stores organisation, upto GM. I hope that the Chart continues to be called as such in CLW, today.

A sample of the Hattangadi chart (blank) is at Appendix C. The vertical columns can be used to denote quantities or dates; and the horizontal rows to denote events, ideas, people, stages etc. There is no limit to the scope and variety of effective uses to which it can be put for information, control and monitoring in management. Fresh from CLW experience, I introduced the chart on Central Railway (in Kalyan Loco Shed and in Project management) and later on South Eastern Railway also, when I went there in 1985. It came to be accepted as a useful tool in those places and caught the fancy of some of my colleagues. Some typical applications on which I have used the chart are given below. As I said earlier, the possibilities are endless and are limited only by imagination.

CLW

1. Out-turn of Traction Equipments -daily, cumulative, 10 day, monthly etc.
2. Failures and rejections at various stages of inspection and testing in traction motor shops. (separate charts in each section)
3. Progress of inputs of components from other feeding shops, such as Steel foundry, machine shop etc.
4. As Quality Control chart for temperature rises measured on Test bed, on individual Traction Motors.
5. Output of individual sections in the TM Shop.
6. A Special Study on utilization of Over Head cranes in the Shop.
7. Breakdown duration and non-availability of important machinery and plant. (periods of use and periods of idleness)

Central Railway :-

8. Electric Loco failures - daily/cumulative.
9. Electric Loco availability.

10. Target and physical progress of various phases of the Project - Traction Machine Workshop, Nasik Road.

RDSO:-

11. Leave programme of officers.
12. Tour programme of officers.

South Eastern Railway :-

13. Progress of repair contracts on BHEL and others for locomotive transformer repairs.
14. Performance of the Railway (one chart per month)
 - Wagon Loading (daily/cumulative).
 - Punctuality of Mail and Express trains (daily).
 - Locomotive (failures) - Electric & Diesel daily and cumulative.
 - Loco utilisation -Electric & Diesel - daily and cumulative.
 - Earnings and Expenditure.

I am inclined to think that I just could not have got on with my assignments without the help of the Hattangadi chart, in some form or other. I do not regret having devoted a full Chapter to it in these Reminiscences; although many managers of today might think all this to be "common-place" and at any rate far below what can be achieved through a Personal Computer.

SYSTEMS METHODS AND STYLES IN MANAGEMENT

No manager can function without systems. When I started my career 40 years ago, I had not been exposed to formal instructions in the art and science of management at any Institution within the Railway or outside. Indeed Management as a subject of study was not very much known then. I read Drucker's famous book on Management and some others on Organisation only years later. Limited exposure to modern management techniques and thoughts came through listening to lectures by experts and reading articles in magazines. But the best part of whatever management techniques I adopted was evolved as a result of my own experimentation and experience through the years right upto my retirement in 1988.

Today's young managers with their exposure to Management as a subject of study start with an advantage. However, everyone has to develop and indeed develops his own style of Management. Again, no single style will be a guarantee for success in every situation. Even so I have chosen to present here some thoughts on this subject based on my experience.

1. INFORMATION SYSTEMS -

The Hattangadi Chart to which I have referred in the previous Chapter in some detail was one such system for keeping track of essential input information and using it in day-to-day management. As I have said earlier, I set great store by it.

I am an old timer. I strongly believe that for certain purposes and in certain areas of activities, a black board and a few pieces of chalk will be far more beneficial to the Organisation than tonnes of paper including computer print outs.

In the Traction Motor shops of CLW we had put up black boards at various locations to indicate important machinery and plant which were out of action. Details were filled on a day to day basis by the supervisor in-charge. We could through this means get prompt attention from the Millwright organisation, better than what any number of written notes to the Works Manager (millwright) could have achieved. Similarly, important materials holding

up works, status of actual out turn with reference to targets, extent of failures and rejections in the various work centres were displayed promptly on black board and up dated almost continuously . This automatically saved a lot of questioning and answering sessions, whenever the shops were visited or inspected by officers at various levels.

When I took charge of the Kalyan Loco Shed in 1976, a startling discovery that I made was that while everyone was struggling, the key supervisors did not know how the Shed was performing with reference to traffic requirements regarding availability of locomotives for service. A simple well designed black board enabled me to highlight this important information; and it improved the involvement of everyone in the shed, for them to work better and with a purpose. The performance of this Loco shed in both availability and reliability had been one of sustained improvement from that crucial year 1976-77 for many years, although the locos have only become older. I am flattered to think that the thrust that I gave in that year did play its part, however small, in this achievement. It was, of course, followed by vigorous efforts by others who succeeded me in the management of the shed.

The Loco Power Controllers' desk at South Eastern Railway Head quarters was an area to which I extended my attention when I took charge as CEE/SE RLY. I got a board provided in front of the Controller in which he was expected to display against each Locomotive Shed, a disc in either, red or yellow or green colour depending upon whether the sheds outage was very much below target, just below or on target or above. Clear instructions were given in regard to reference levels. Often times one did not have to go upto the controller's desk but could see the status even as one walked down the corridor. It also helped to improve their involvement. The Controllers were from drivers' Cadre and it was easy for them to associate performance with aspects of signals, which they had been used to all their life.

2. TIME MANAGEMENT -

Much has been written about this in Management literature. Experience is no different. I was a great respecter of time as a valuable resource of a manager. Punctuality was an

obsession with me, whether it be meetings, inspection or visits. I learnt a lot in this respect from Mr.S.C.Misra who was CME and later GM in CLW. I had seen many in top positions, to whom their time or the time of others did not seem to count much in their scale of values. I was so determined that I should set a different example for the few months that I occupied the post of GM on S.E Rly. Almost the very first thing that I did was to allot a time slot to a set time-table for discussions and meetings with individual Heads of Departments, for site inspections, and for meeting customers and outsiders. Staff who had problems which were not getting solved had access to me at a specified time on a particular day of the week for a definite duration. To some extent the senior officers considered my system to be a "closed-door policy" and resented it, as they had been used to "walk-in-any-time approach" by my predecessor. But over a period of time, they got used to the regulations and restrictions and in fact found them to be helpful in organising and managing their day-to-day work. It was of course understood that emergencies were exceptions, to this policy.

Arising out of my approach to time management, was also my "one thing at a time " concept. To be true, I just did not have the ability to tackle too many things at the same instant of time. But I sincerely believed that even for those who can, their output and quality of their decisions would be far better if one matter is tackled at a given time. For example, I abhorred looking into files, with people gathered around me for discussions. This meant carrying papers home or sitting late hours in office at times, but invariably I felt more relaxed that way.

3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES -

For me, the corporate goal always came first and departmental affinity only next. On this account, I did have to face occasionally displeasure communicated to me in private conversations with higher ups but I did not allow such reprimands to affect my attitude to work.

Action comes first. Fixing responsibility for failure comes later. Extend a hand where you can to help a person solve what could really be called his problem. If he mistakes your

help as interference, you could of course back out at the earliest opportunity. These sum up some of my attitudes.

I remember distinctly when as Sr.DEE in-charge of the Kalyan Loco Shed we were stuck for certain imported axle bearings for the DC locos. There had been no input of bearings for over 7 to 8 years and the mechanical Work Shops had consumed progressively bearings from stock until a zero state was reached. Some "casefiles" for procurement of new bearings had been initiated but nothing had progressed between a uninterested Dy.CME and a not-so-keen DY.COS. Although it was not my direct field of responsibility I felt that as one responsible for locomotive maintenance and in the larger context, I had to interfere and take action. I pulled out the case file and progressed it through various stages, including detailed justification, finance clearance, sorting out confusion between stock and non-stock demands, expediting and keeping alive the firm's offers, arranging DGTD clearance, fixing meeting of the Tender Committee, getting the foreign exchange released from the Board and so on, until orders were placed. And what a relief it must have been for Central Railway when the bearings were received. I had left the Railway by then for RDSO.

4. DECISION MAKING -

On this area again, much has been written in Management books. I shall cover only one aspect. The most difficult decisions I had to take were invariably on personnel or staff matters. The cases needed a lot of study and attention. Often times, I found it prudent not to accept whatever was put up. And when I dealt with a difficult case, I almost imagined that the employee talked to me through his representation. I believed it would be an advantage to have a direct discussion with the person concerned, wherever possible, as I felt that would help me to see his point of view before any important decisions were taken that could affect his career. Some times, during such interviews, special problems relating to his family life used to surface and these were given appropriate weightage. I cannot claim that I did not do any injustice at all. I can only say that I had not decided on my case, without the total involvement of my being.

A digression. Talking of Personnel matters, I have heard about a golden rule that any Manager should know by name and by face his men - as many of them under his control as he possibly can. I tried hard throughout my career to practice this and achieved a measure of success -- not cent per cent certainly --in following it. The logic of this advice, I suppose, is that only if you are genuinely interested in your man, you would care to know and remember his name and face.

5. MINUTES OF MEETINGS -

Drawing up minutes of meetings - particularly co- ordination meetings dealing with a large number of items with a number of agencies - is an art. There were many occasions when minutes of meetings, imperfectly cyclostyled, running to 20 or more pages used to reach the concerned departments, almost a month after the meeting took place and in fact just before the next meeting was due. Stores co-ordination meetings held between executives and stores officers were classic examples. A new approach was tried when I was Dy.CEE (Traction Motor development) in CLW, when a number of imported materials had to be watched closely through various stages such as , DGTD clearance, finance concurrence; quotations; tender committee; foreign exchange release; opening of Letter of Credit; issue of import licence; arranging shipment; and so on. A Master Chart was prepared listing these items and providing columns against each to represent each stage of the progress. All that was done during the meetings was to record the dates of the events, where they had already been completed and the expected dates for those events which were still in progress. This chart was on a tracing paper and blue prints used to be circulated within a day of the meeting, as the entries were made then and there at the meeting itself. As usually happens, promises are not always kept and target dates do get changed. In that event the old date is merely scored out (not wiped out) and the fresh date recorded. I also deliberately restrained myself and my assistants from raising too many questions on reasons for postponing dates, for one or two meetings. This strategy helped expedite action; for the person who shifts targets repeatedly knows that everyone present at the meeting sees all the successive dates that have been promised earlier. Of course, one may say this is all un-necessary, if we watch progress on the Computer. I beg to disagree.

6. MANAGEMENT BY EXCEPTION -

Management by Exception is a well-known technique. The format of reports and information systems must be designed to highlight problems, and exceptions/shortfalls with reference to targets rather than project in a routine way all information. I do recall the changes made by me in 1976 in the Daily Reports of locomotive performance and availability, which used to emanate from Kalyan Loco Shed, in consonance with this concept. I found that it was being continued, long after I left Central Railway. Perhaps it is in vogue today. I only hope that this continuation is not out of "dead habit".

Talking of habits, reminds me of a piece of information I was getting as GM SE Rly., on a sheet of paper containing particulars of wagon loading, punctuality, engine availability and so on. While all the other figures in this statement used to vary from day to day -naturally so- there were four figures which never changed. They related to Containers - that much I could make out. The COPS and the CCS whom I consulted did not have faintest notion of what the figures meant. The clerk who was compiling the daily reports for the GM was summoned. He said that out of habit and as there were no other inputs from the Commercial department, he had been furnishing the same figures everyday, for years. On further enquiry, it transpired that the figures referred to availability of road vehicles for moving containers in Calcutta. One of the figures viz. 12, which referred to the total fleet strength represented the fact as of 12 years earlier even though in the intervening period a number of vehicles had been condemned progressively. It also came to light that the Railway Board in the mean-time had issued policy instructions that the Railways should make more and more use of contract vehicles instead of departmental vehicles and that in this area the S.E.Rly. had actually lapsed, due to lack of timely action.

I knocked out this piece of information from the daily report and instead got a weekly status report directly from the Dy. CCS concerned highlighting only figures relevant to Container activity and the problems areas. This change in itself resulted in improvement of container operations.

Another moral of this story. If you do not understand some information put up to you, you do not lose your face by enlisting help to understand it. You will gain certainly. Even the organisation may benefit eventually.

A final word of advice to the managers aspiring for satisfaction, success and achievement in whatever way field they may be placed. This is my own "Coinage" - not borrowed from any Book on management - but born out of my experiences and interaction with other Managers in Railways and outside.

- Doing without thinking is disastrous
- Thinking without doing is useless
- Combine both and you are bound to go places.

ACCIDENTS

Like many others who have been associated with train operation, I too had my share of experiences in attending to train accidents, conducting enquiries etc. I had occasion to see some electrical accidents also. I shall narrate here a few examples of interest.

1) Three accidents at Saidapet (1962).

Neutral sections on tracks electrified on the AC system of traction are well known. The OHE is there but over some distance there is no voltage on it. Have you ever heard of an electrified track without OHE at all for some distance ? Yes, it existed for many years on the Madras beach - Tambaram Sub-urban section electrified on 1500 Volts DC. It was a train accident in 1962 that led to the decision to provide OHE at these gaps. This may be of interest of readers, historically. The situation existed at Saidapat station on the section. The two level crossings on either side of the station had not been provided with OHE, to enable a tall temple car to pass through during a certain festival once a year. The train used to coast and clear the gaps. As mostly EMUs operated, there was not much possibility of a complete train getting stuck or disabled. Once in 1962, an Up train was held up on the platform for

some problem and the next Up train following had ignored the signal and collided in the rear. The motor man of train No 2 pleaded that the visibility was not good and as he wanted to clear the gap, he did not bring the speed down as much as he would have done at other locations. Theoretically the effectiveness of brake application would also get affected as the exhauster would slow down while passing through the zone of no OHE. I attended the accident. The last coach of train No. 1 had derailed due to the impact from rear. Luckily there were no casualties but only a few injuries. The ACRS who inquired into this case recommended among other things that the gaps in the OHE should be wired up to permit normal operation as at other locations. This was done within a couple of months and the temple authorities were reconciled to the new situation. The motor man was of course punished.

The above accident brought in its wake two other accidents. The same evening, as we were at the accident site, there was an averted collision on the other track (Down platform line at Saidapat station) between two fully packed EMU trains. Single line working had been introduced on the Down line for some time as result of the rear end collision on the Up line; but due to some mistake, trains coming from opposite direction were allowed on the same line (Down line). The motormen applied brakes and just managed to stop short of each other on the Down platform line. I saw less than half a meter gap between the two trains. What a miraculous escape, I thought. If only the motor-men had not been extremely vigilant, it would have been a serious disaster. In this case, failure had clearly taken place in implementing Single Line working and staff were taken up, after inquiry at Railway level.

In executing the work of bridging the gap in the OHE, there was an electrical accident in which one OHE worker was electrocuted and charred to death, while still on the OHE structure.

The work had been planned for bridging the gap on the up line OHE on the level crossing on the Madras side. I was at the site from midnight to about 01.30 hours. The Foreman had started the work and was quite confident of completing it before 4 am - in time

for the morning service to start. I satisfied myself that he had things under control and went back home.

At 4 am., information was received that electrocution had occurred. One of the workers - a youth of about 30 years - for no apparent reason had gone over unnoticed by anybody to the Down side OHE which was alive and got killed. I was at the site again by 5 a.m. The two OHEs Up & Dn although supported by the common crossgantry were physically 10 meters apart. The foreman had taken Power Block only on one line (Up line) where the work had to be done. Enquiries revealed that all along the practice of night work was that power block used to be taken on both lines although not strictly required from technical or work reasons. The deviation from practice, not giving adequate warning and not taking adequate care of the men had resulted in the accident. The foreman was reverted. For many days and nights I could not rest properly. The site of the charred body used to haunt me. If only I had continued to remain at the site ? If only I had done some more questioning regarding power block, safety etc. ? If only by some chance I could have watched the chap walk over to the other side ? These questions continued to torment me for some days. I had learnt my lessons too.

- i) Any amount of check, double check and cross check on safety matters cannot ever be superfluous.
- ii) A practice right or wrong, necessary or unnecessary, if continued long enough acquires a status of recognition and acceptance-far more than written out rules and procedures. Deviations from such established practices have to be handled carefully.

2. Midsection derailments on Metre gauge :

Two midsection derailments of goods trains on the metre gauge occurred in 1965, within a couple of months interval, at almost the same location on the Tambaram-Vilupuram section of Southern Railway. I was a member of the Enquiry Committee on both. In the first case, there was clear evidence of over speeding and the Enquiry Committee did not have to

do much. In the second case the driver had exceeded the speed marginally (50 kmph against 48 kmph max. prescribed). Although the driver was technically at fault, the members felt that this in itself could not have caused the accident. There was such a mess up of the wagons that in spite of our best efforts we could not detect anything clearly wrong with the track or with the wagons as could have led to the derailment. Our mistake was that we said so in our Enquiry report. The Railway Board was not satisfied. A higher level Committee was appointed to enquire into this case. This Committee's findings were eventually accepted and in fact we were all given copies of their Report. We had sent our comments on that Report and with that I thought the matter had ended.

There was a call from COPS one morning. I must meet him at once. When I went to his room I found the other two officers who were with me on the enquiry committee (DME & DOS) already seated before the COPS. This gentleman was generally reputed to be a "terror" and we were rightly apprehensive that something terrible was going to happen to us. After exchanging pleasantries COPS ordered coffee for us. Coffee over, he tried to put up a stern face and said "I know what you gentlemen are capable of and the excellent work you are doing. The Board do not seem to be happy about you, however. You know the ... derailment case. The Board have said I should call you and fire you. I have done it. I can now faithfully record this on the file. You may go now. pE0@ Incidentally, I have gone through your Comments on the High level Committee's report. There is perhaps sense in what you say. However, for me, it is all over". We were relieved too that it was all over.

Electrification on meter gauge has not been extended further. I do not know whether there have been any more similar incidents at the above location or any similar location which is close to a Neutral section located in a trough with downward gradients towards the Neutral section from both directions. If there have been some incidents, it is quite possible that the Railway has done scientific in-depth investigations and arrived at rational conclusions.

After my subsequent posting on Central Railway and in RDSO I am wiser than I was in 1964-65. I am inclined to think that research and experimentation is called for (very much

similar to what Japanese National Railways did) by creating and simulating derailments to determine the true factors. It is time that Indian Railways recognise System problems as primary cause of accidents and staff contribution if any as secondary cause. Only then the long term goal of achieving reduction in accidents can be realised.

3. Electrical Fires :

While I was working in Chittranjan, there was a serious fire one morning (1971 ? I am not sure) at the 11 KV receiving station caused by oil splash from a 11 KV. Indoor oil circuit breaker on the switch gear panel. This resulted in a few casualties and high degree burn injuries to staff present at that time in the sub-station premises. Ever since, I have insisted on and specified only air circuit breakers (ACB's) for LT and 11 KV Switch gear in whatever projects that I handled. But I used to find even in later years, OCB's being procured and installed for even LT applications at many places. I am happy to see however that the current trend and practice is to go away from oil circuit breakers.

I had initiated some studies of a preliminary nature on the possible use of silicon oil in place of the conventional transformer oil in locomotive and EMU transformers. That was when I was in RDSO (1982-85). Perhaps, the Railways have considered the subject further and dropped the idea. Silicon oil is no doubt much more expensive. But it is free from risk of fire; besides life is very much more than that of conventional transformer oil. It may be necessary and desirable to review this technical matter from time to time, depending upon the progress made in other countries having 25 KV AC traction.

4. EMU Fire at Matunga :

The most gruesome accident that I ever attended was in Feb.'76 when a number of passengers were charred and burned to instant death in a DC EMU fire between Sion & Matunga stations of Central Railway. I remember the day very well. I was on long leave then, having left CLW and waiting for a posting in Bombay on Central or Western Railway. I happened to be with CEE/C.Rly. in his office when the information came to him. We were at

site in less than half an hour. The fire had spread so fast that passengers did not have the time to shift or move from their positions. Many had been burnt where they were, in their seated position. The cause of the fire was held to be some highly volatile explosive material carried in the EMU coach. But the accident triggered a number of measures which were implemented on Railways to prevent fires of electrical origin on EMU's.

5. Derailments on Ghat Section :

On the Central Railway, goods trains running into Catch sidings in the Ghat Sections between Kasara and Igatpuri and between Karjat and Lonavala used to be accepted with resignation as to their inevitability, once upon a time. With the introduction of Dynamic Braking on WCG2 locos on banking duty from 1976-77 the incidences came down. But derailments of goods trains in the ascending direction continued to occur with alarming regularity. In the restoration work on many of the derailments on the Bombay division, the Breakdown train at Kalyan under the control of the Electrical Engineers played an important part. That was valuable experience to me during my tenure in Bombay division.

I recall two funny experiences. I had been at the accident site on the North East Ghats near TGR2 substation during a derailment (1976). Almost 24 hours had passed after the accident. We were working quite hard re-railing wagon after wagon. It was day break. One four wheeler, soon after it was rerailed started moving due to the gradient effect along the slip siding, into the sub-station siding with no obstruction on the way. This event probably escaped the attention of the staff concerned. I noticed this when the wagon was barely 30 meters away from the closed rolling shutter of the sub-station. There was a small stretch of rising gradient very close to the sub-station but judging from the speed of the wagon I was certain that it would bang against the rolling shutter in no time. To obstruct the movement, I tried to throw from fairly close distance, whatever bits and pieces of wood I could find in the vicinity, but missed my mark totally. As a last resort I had a foolish impulse - why not stop the wagon physically with all my strength. I tried this too quite seriously and sincerely but I was not Samson and I had no step out. The wagon hit the shutter, damaged it slightly and stopped. No serious mishap was caused. By this time others at the site including my DEE had

gathered. No questions were asked. They were perhaps too polite to tell me what a fool I was. But at that time I did think that they must have been dumb-founded in their admiration for my concern for the safety of the sub-station.

Soon after the restoration work was over, I jumped on to the engine cab of a train coming to Bombay on the right line. It was around 9 a.m. I was tired and wanted to reach home early. It was a long distance mail train running about 40 minutes late and nobody would have batted an eyelid for this minor deviation from punctuality, especially in such circumstances. Yet as our train entered Bombay V.T. platform line and stopped, there was a strange experience. I saw that the hands of the huge clock which was showing 11.50 went back suddenly to 11.10 (right time arrival) and after staying there for a while went back to 11.55 again. Whose brainwave it was to do this manipulation, I cannot say, or was it a strange coincidence of someone attending to the clock mechanism at that time? Minor deviations from punctuality being corrected by "adjustments" are not uncommon in Railway operation. They are communicated or telephone or through shouts as the trains pass cabins or even by hand gestures between the guards and operating staff at terminal stations so as to ensure right time entries in the relevant records/registers. I wonder whether any one has come across any thing as bizarre as putting a clock back.

6. A goods train touches 120 kmph. :

One of the worst pile up of wagons that I ever saw was in 1977 at Karjat Yard. An Up goods train coming from Lonavala had after stopping at all the three compulsory halts in the descending direction lost control, picked up speed and hurtled towards Karjat station. The two engines (coupler) separated from the formation and rushed away, coming to a stop a kilometer from Karjat towards Bombay. The wagons had piled up one above the other, I particularly remember three wagons sitting on top of one another. The speedometer chart (The speedometer was working and the chart correctly indicated) showed 120 kmph having been touched. The brake blocks had been worn out and the tyres of the wheels of the wagon had turned blue. The state of affairs provided ample proof, if proof was needed, as to what

severe disaster can happen if brake application is delayed ever so little and the limitations of the vacuum brake system in particular for controlling trains on heavily graded sections.

Comparison of operation and safety on trains with Air brakes and those with Vacuum brakes would convince any one of the superiority of Air brakes. Will the 21st century see a total switch over to Air brakes for coaching and wagons stock on Indian Railways ? A start has been made no doubt. But when will an implementable plan of programme be drawn up ? There will be problems, upsets; some sacrifice must be made during the period of transition. The Railway must have the courage to spell out a comprehensive plan and pursue it with a missionary zeal for implementation. The magnitude of the task, colossal as it is, will only get more and more difficult as years go by.

7. Level crossing accidents, collisions and derailments :

I consider that accidents at level crossings and collisions can be prevented assuredly and positively. Certainly their incidence can be reduced significantly compared to present levels, if concerted efforts are made with determination and sincerity. Compliance with rules is the key factor. And this can come about through education, training and inspections. There should be a serious awareness of the existence of shortcuts and a determination to eliminate shortcuts totally. Amending rules and procedures, introduction of technological innovations to meet practical needs without jeopardising safety is the surest way to eliminate short cuts. As long as we turn a blind eye to realities , accidents will continue to happen. Rules are as safe as men can implement them.

I would not sound as confident, however, regarding derailments. Of course, exceptions are cases where obvious interference to rolling stock or track caused the derailment. I do remember one instance where the Golden Rock workshop had sent out a meter gauge EMU wheel after a repair process in which they had welded a collar on the journal, although welding was prohibited. The axle broke at this location leading to a derailment.

Rail fractures if not detected in time could lead to derailment. Quite a few fractures occur at fish bolt holes; yet it is a pity that there is reluctance on Railways to implement the

very sound advice given by RDSO years ago regarding how to drill holes providing chamfer so as to reduce stress concentration. Welded track will not totally eliminate this problem. It is a matter of fact that welded joints have also been featuring in some of the rail fractures. That a rail will fracture, simply because it is old, is a statement which has to be taken with a "Kilogram of salt".

8. Staff responsibility and Failure of Material :

The emphasis in many accident enquiries, has been to get through with them somehow and any-how. Formalities, procedures, time schedules, concern for avoiding delays in finalisation, fixing staff responsibility and giving punishments get attention in preference to recognising the core areas of ignorance and deficiencies and taking action to effect system improvements to overcome such ignorance relating to staff or such deficiencies relating to systems and equipment.

Truth becomes a casualty, if one sees only fear of punishment all the time. And if truth does not come out, no purpose is served by any inquiry. The earlier this is recognised, the better. I would go to the extent of suggesting a self imposed temporary holiday of say one year from the "staff responsibility syndrome", that has prevailed all along. I am certain that this in itself will cause no increase in accidents. The railwaymen have a tradition of devoted service. It is inconceivable that some one does anything wrong merely to cause an accident and will do it, merely because he knows that he is not going to be taken up. Often times, his own life is in danger if an accident happens; and surely no one except a person of insane mind would want to end his life and that of many others.

The classification "Material failure " as being cause of an accident is deceptive. Every material failure is a systems failure; a management failure. Are designs, specifications, quality control and acceptance procedures, replacements and repair schedules, instructions etc. correctly laid down and are they being followed? These are questions which the top management must ask repeatedly of themselves and not rest until satisfactory answers are

found and implemented. That is the only sure way of achieving reduction in accidents on Railways. Will Indian Railways do an introspection everytime an accident happens ?

HINDI - THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

A few months before I retired in 1988, I was honoured, along with some others from all over Indian Railways, for outstanding contribution to the cause and use of Hindi on Railways, at a special Function held in Bhubaneswar, the Minister of state for Railways being present. I was AGM, SE Railway on leave then, having been asked to step down only a few weeks earlier from GM- ship.

Having spent a good part of my career (20 years) in West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, I have sincerely believed that knowledge and use of Hindi helps to bring you closer to your staff and to your customers; although theoretically speaking, one might argue that one will be able to pull on even in Hindi-speaking regions without uttering a couple of words or writing a couple of sentences in Hindi.

I shall now narrate some incidents, mainly for their story value.

1. Let me begin at the beginning. I had done a few months as Probationary officer. I was to be tested for Hindi. A senior colleague and friend, from the Accounts department had warned me. He had been a victim of the Hindi policy. His regular promotion from Junior scale to Senior scale had been held back, because he had failed to clear the Hindi hurdle.

CEE, Central Railway took the test for me and for other Probationers. He was from Uttar Pradesh. May be, because we had qualified in some examination in our school days, a practical test by the CEE took place instead of a rigorous examination by a Hindi organisation. The CEE tossed at us a passage, about a page long in Hindi. It was, I recall a story on "Panna the faithful" a wellknown tale from Rajasthan. We had to translate it into English. That done, the passage was taken back and we were asked to render the stuff in our own Hindi from

memory. That was tough, I thought. Luckily, four out of five of us including me came through. I heaved a sigh of relief.

2. Some four to five years later, when I was on Southern Railway, I was told that it would be desirable for me to take an examination in Hindi once again. For a few days, I attended a regular class conducted in the office during working hours. The subject matter of the lessons and the quality of Text Books was mediocre. I remember even today a poem which was pushed down our throats in those classes, I got fed up after a few days and dropped out. I never wrote an examination in Hindi again in my career. May be, I missed an advance increment, I was not too sure. In any case, I never bothered to check on the relevant rules again.

3. The anti-Hindi agitation that broke out in April 1965 in Tamil Nadu created problems all over Southern Railway. I was DEE, Traction at Tambaram at that time, In-charge of the electric train services, between Madras Beach and Tambaram. The riots broke out suddenly. Extensive damage was caused to the numerous signals and level crossing gates on the section. A few rakes got damaged and had to be withdrawn. The suburban services had to be suspended. Train services elsewhere on the entire Southern Railway System were also affected.

Two days had passed. I felt that the hard-ship that was being caused to the public was too much. Could I do something ? On the third day, I took the initiative to restore the suburban services, by taking some special action, all on my own. My action included :-

i) Traveling in the cab of a special EMU train along with the AEN, from Tambaram to Madras Beach, to assess personally the extent of damage, the mood of the people and mood of the staff. The 30 kilometer journey took over four hours, as I chose to stop at every vulnerable point and at every station on the section and make inquiries.

ii) Promulgation of special rules for train operation (not authorised by General rules) under conditions of non-functioning of signals and of level crossing gates at so many

locations. The restoration was notified by me by issue of an all-concerned message from Madras Beach. I had satisfied myself that the climate had cooled down and was favourable. As part of the precautions for safety, even keys for operation of cross overs at certain intermediate stations were removed from the Station Masters concerned and kept in my custody to prevent any possibility of operation which could leave to unsafe conditions.

iii) 3-Unit trains (nine coach trains) were formed and run for the first time on that section. Single and 2-Unit trains were the rule till then. We started with an interval of one hour between trains and progressively reduced it from day to day as we gained experience and confidence. Time tables were prepared in my office on a day-to-day basis and sent to all the Stations by the last train of the day, valid for the next day.

The above operation went on for about two weeks without any hitch or untoward incident, until restoration works were completed and normal operation became possible. I was lucky to have a DS (a Traffic officer) who supported me. He told me that some doubts were raised about the conditions under which the trains were being run; whether they were authorised by rules; Whether they were safe enough etc., but he had assured GM that my rules were safer than the General rules, in the circumstances.

[A SIDE STORY:- When I wrote these lines in 1992, I had not included a certain detail. It was towards the end of 1994, that I remembered it, when I received a letter from a gentleman in Calcutta, written to me in some other context. I reproduce an extract from that letter:-

Calcutta

2.11.94

My dear Mr. N-----,

May I introduce myself as the brother-in-law of ----- your close friend. I remember with gratitude the care and affection shown by you and your family members when during the anti- Hindi agitation in early 1965, we took refuge in your residence, with some other lady

co-passengers of a train which was halted at Tambaram, due to the above agitation. Perhaps you may remember me and this incident-----"

I remembered the incident- not the persons. I had accommodated some passengers, who were stranded at Tambaram station, as they had no means of continuing their journey to Madras by road or by rail. They were provided food and shelter in my house at Tambaram for a day or so. The credit for extending this hospitality should in a large measure, go to my wife, though].

4. On Central Railway, they were three experiences.

The day the first WCG2 loco was successfully commissioned by Kalyan Loco Shed with a system of Dynamic Braking, I felt so happy as Sr. DEE in-charge that I penned a DO myself in Hindi to the DS of the Bombay division late in the evening before I left the Shed.

The second experience was of the fanaticism of the CPLO, who functioned as GM for a while on Central Railway. His fiat was that all officers should sign in Hindi. I started practicing a Hindi signature and implemented the orders immediately. Many others did. There were a few who did nothing. Some others complied with the orders as long as this boss was in the chair and reverted to English signatures when he left.

Strangely, the Hindi signature caught on with me and from that day is being used by me for all communications, official and private - even today. I have now ceased to think of it as a signature in Hindi.

I am not even sure if it is correct at all to assign a language reference to a signature. A combination of dashes, dots, curves and circles characterises many signatures and to look for a language or even resemblance to alphabets in a particular script may be quite a frustrating exercise. In fact, many recipients of my letters have exclaimed " Is that so?" , when I proudly said that I had signed my letter to them in Hindi.

The third experience was in 1977. It was a two page letter to the Railway Board that had been put up to me for signature. I had only a few days earlier taken over as Deputy Chief Electrical Engine (Loco) at Central Railway Head quarters. The letter was a brief technical report concerning a DC locomotive failure, which has caused disruption to operation of trains. What surprised me was that this particular letter had been typed out in Hindi. The language was tough-technical terms such as Commutator, Traction motor, Micanite segments etc. having been cast in difficult pure Hindi, beyond my comprehension.

I sent for the assistant concerned. Saxena was a thin fellow of small build. He came out with an explanation, even before I asked him a question.

"Sir, you know that was a failure we would be hard put, to explain satisfactorily. In such cases, sir, your predecessor's policy has been to frame the Report in Hindi which, sir, is quite in accordance with the policy on Official Language. We have been quite successful so far, for there have been no inconvenient back references or further queries from the Railway Board". I signed the letter and pushed the file into the out-tray.

A funny incident happened in 1984 when I was Director (Standards) in Electrical in RDSO Lucknow. We were informed that a High Power Committee was due to visit RDSO to review progress made in implementation of the Official Language policy. At a preliminary internal meeting held before the Committee's arrival the Hindi officer read out a report of progress for the previous quarter. When he finished, I raised a point of order. Why use difficult words when simple ones can serve purpose? It is difficult to understand (TANKAN) why not say "typing" in such reports?. The Director-General RDSO who was presiding was annoyed. He attributed my problem to my lack of proficiency in the language, I was no doubt hurt and upset but thought no more about it later.

The D-day arrived. There was a formal meeting with the Committee, which consisted mostly of politicians. In his speech, the Chairman of the Committee emphasised that certain words which were well known such as "Station masters", "typing" etc, should be adopted as such in Hindi, without going in for complicated words. I smiled, within myself, of course.

What a coincidence, I thought, I could see the DG look hard in my direction. Did he think I had tutored the Committee Chairman.?

6) February/1987, The Hindi cell of the SE Rly. head quarters had put up a note to me as AGM. My approval had been sought to the purchase of Hindi books valued Rupees one lakh immediately, so as to ensure that the funds available in the budget were fully utilised before the close of the financial year (March-87). The Railway Board's letter on the file wanting the Railway to ensure that the funds should not lapse was highlighted.

I was not keen to sanction this straight away. I raised the following queries, writing them out in my handwriting in Hindi.

i) What books have been purchased in the year? Give me a list and their distribution. Is there any clue as to what use has been made of these books? Has any one read any book?

ii) Where is the list of books that you propose to buy now if Rupees one lakh is sanctioned?

iii) The proposal has come up in English. It should have come up in Hindi. Do so now. In fact' all notes from the Hindi cell should come up in Hindi only.

I never saw the proposal again. My confidential assistant whispered to me later that the Hindi cell had subsequently put up the same proposal to my colleague AGM (Operations) when I was away from headquarters on tour and obtained his sanction. I did not do any further probing and closed the case from my mind.

I have had a suspicion all along that it was my direction in Hindi on this particular file, more than anything else I might have done, that prompted the special recognition and award that I got at the Bhubaneswar function a year later.

7. A strange experience in December 1988 at the time of my inspection as GM of SE Rly on the Bilaspur division, in the heart of the Hindi belt. The notice displaying a list of edible items and their prices at the refreshment stall at a small way side station was in English and not in Hindi, and nobody had given a thought to this folly until I pointed it out.

Let me conclude with some advice. Elements of imposition, threats and compulsions and linking proficiency in Hindi with one's advancement in career that have been the policy so far is not the right approach. For, you may achieve Hindi in a way but you will not achieve results. There is need to take a fresh look at the entire gamut of laws and rules, including Constitutional provisions, concerning the use of Hindi as official language. It is necessary to revise the policy, towards enlisting the cooperation and understanding of persons from the non-Hindi belt. There is need to eliminate impractical, costly and time wasting procedures and systems that produce only pseudo-satisfaction derived from statistics of doubtful reliability. The delusion has gone on long enough. The time has come to decide on a realistic approach after due introspection without emotional or other bias.

A FAUX PAS

I recall only one occasion in my entire career when I committed a blunder. It was not a blunder that affected the working of Railways in any manner but a blunder all the same, which caused me considerable anguish.

It was March 1987, the Centenary year of South Eastern Railway. I was AGM then. There was to be a function at the Headquarters of the Railway at Garden Reach on an evening, as a culmination of the celebration through the year all over the Railway. We had brought out a few Commemoration Postage stamps. I had myself gone to Nasik to discuss and settle details regarding the printing of these stamps at the Security Press there and to get them delivered in time. In many other matters of organisational detail connected with the function such as drafting, printing and issue of invitations, arranging special Complimentary passes for officers and staff etc, I had assisted the GM and relieved him generally of the burden.

The Red letter day arrived. The public function was to start at 4.30 pm. Shri Madhavrao Scindia, Minister for Railways, was to preside and Shri Arjun Singh, Minister for Communications was to release the stamps. I had written out my welcome speech the previous night and got it typed and ready that morning, but busy as I was with some activity or the other throughout the forenoon, I really did not have the time to have a look at the typed matter. In fact I was tired by the afternoon and just managed to get myself ready in time to reach the area for welcoming the guests. The VIPs were slightly delayed. GM brought them and seated them on the dais. After the customary garlanding and prayer music was over, I read out my welcome speech.

The presentation of awards to officers and staff who had done meritorious service, the release of the stamps, and speech making by VIPs and GM followed. The function was over in about an hour and everyone adjourned to an enclosure behind the dais for tea and refreshments.

My good friend COPS greeted me when I got off the dais.

"An excellent speech, Sir, and very well delivered. But you had promoted Shri Arjun Singh. You referred to him more than once in your speech as Minister for Commerce".

I realised my mistake. My stenographer had typed out the expansion for 'COM' appearing in my manuscript as "commerce" instead of "Communications". And I had read it out without a thought. How I committed such a Faux Pas, is a mystery to me, to this day.

When I joined the Ministers, the GM and guests for tea, none of them batted an eyelid. I could understand the Ministers not making an issue of it. But the GM never referred to my lapse, not only that evening but not even once at any of our later encounters. It showed me the man that he was too big to bother about trivialities.

MOMENTS OF DISCOMFORT

I have so far talked mostly about those unforgettable experiences in which I had something to contribute and derived satisfaction from such effort. But, there were also moments when things did not quite work out satisfactorily and I did undergo pain, anguish and even agony. However much I would like to forget those unpleasant experiences, they do crop up in my memory from time to time. It is for this reason that forgettable as they are, I have decided to touch on them in these Reminiscences.

1) "DEE/HQ has also delayed this case. All he had to say was-refer someone else."

These were the words of GM, Southern Railway passed on by his Secretary in a confidential note to me. I remember the words distinctly, after so many years. It was in 1956. I was then officiating on a Special Duty post in Sr. Scale at headquarters. My total service on a working post at that time was less than a year. The DEE/HQ, my colleague and many years my senior was the only other senior scale officer in the headquarters those days. We used to report to CEE directly, there being no intermediate level officer. The DEE/HQ used to fall sick quite often and for prolonged periods ; and I had to manage and handle both portfolios. There was a lot of file work to do and inexperienced as I was, I had not mastered the knack of dealing with a such a variety of cases. I carried on nevertheless and made up partly by putting in long hours at work.

There was one case on which an Estimate of costs had been asked of the CEE's office for the Electrical portion of the work on modifying a coach in the Perambur workshop. I do not remember now the details of the work. The case file was lying unattended among the files on the table of the DEE/HQ. I remember having picked it up once or twice and dropped it back again, not quite knowing what to do with it further.

One day, there was a phone call from the CME's office, asking for the case. I consulted a senior Estimator in the office. "Let DEE/Shops, Perambur go into this and furnish the Estimate. Why should we handle it in headquarters, sir ?" he said. After some three weeks of hibernation in the room of DEE/HQ, the file went to the OUT tray, with my endorsement on those lines.

"Little drops of water make the ,mighty ocean" they say. Evidently, the case had been delayed by many at different stages and had somehow caught the GM's attention. The Secretary had made an analysis of delays and I suppose I was one among many others to receive admonition.

The GM's Note stung me. I swallowed the stricture. I deserved it, perhaps; but, I had learnt a valuable lesson, so early in my career. Speed of disposal of paper work is as important as doing things or as getting things done.

In later years, I acquired a reputation for prompt orders on cases referred to me. But I took care, as much as I could, to ensure that thoroughness was not sacrificed for speed in disposal.

2). I did have difficulty in getting through my "confirmation test" in senior scale (1966) at a time when in every sphere of work and activity, my performance had been accepted as outstanding. I was subjected to the ignominy of being asked to answer a second written test, simply because I did not answer all the questions in the first test. My representation before the Assessment Committee that quality of the answers rather than the quantity should be the consideration for judgement did not cut ice with them. The committee comprised three JA grade officers including one from the Electrical department. I had literally to propel myself to write my answers, in the second test. The CEE, who knew my real worth and merit must have intervened and I suppose the Committee must have most reluctantly passed me eventually.

3) A minor jolt was felt when in 1968 orders were received promoting my junior to JA grade and retaining him on the same Railway. (Southern Railway), when we were both functioning in the headquarters office at Madras. We were great friends and if I felt somewhat distressed, he felt terribly embarrassed. There was loose talk in the office that I had been over-looked. The uncertainty ended when orders were received next week promoting me and posting me to South Eastern Railway. I took the first train to Calcutta and

reported to the CEE, South Eastern Railway, only to be told that the orders were being revised and that I should go to CLW/Chittaranjan. I reported at Chittranjan forthwith - a couple of days before the orders were received posting me there. (Mine must have been a unique case, for I learnt later that officers generally were delaying their taking over at CLW, as that was considered to be a "bad" station). At that stage I could not help feeling distressed that an officer who had shown mettle all through should have been subjected to this cavalier treatment. But the depression passed away very soon. The next seven and half years were spent in Chittranjan on a most satisfying assignment full of diverse technical and managerial challenges on the official front and a happy environment on the domestic front.

4) The GM rang me up.

"N, you are not going to Sweden. The Board's telegram just received says so-and-so is going". He added in his own inimitable humorous style "the Board have now discovered the spelling mistake in their original orders, I suppose".

Only a couple of days earlier I had stood tea, snacks and sweets to all HOD's in the GM's room, at GM's directions.

The officer who was nominated in my place was junior to me. That did not hurt me so much as the fact, which I came to know later, that the change had come about because I was not medically cleared. I had been suffering from hypertension for many years but it was kept under control with drugs. I could work for long hours without any problems, play tennis and undertake journeys frequently on tour. Yet for reasons best known to him the DMO did not clear me. May be, he had my interests at heart. What pained me more was that he had not even hinted to me about his recommendation.

It was to be a three month exposure to Electric Traction in Sweden. ASEA, a well known manufacturer in the field of Traction equipments was to be visited. In the context of my responsibilities at that time, namely manufacture of traction equipment in CLW, I felt sorry that a rare opportunity had been missed.

5). 1975, It was a pleasant evening on the lawns adjoining the Officers Club at Chittaranjan. The youngsters were putting up a variety entertainment programme and my son was to take part as 'hero' in an English play. I was looking forward to it. GM called me aside and said "I am sorry to tell you this. So-and-so, your junior has been promoted and posted as CEE on NF Railway. I thought you should know".

The GM was my well wisher. So was he a well-wisher for the officer who had been promoted above me. But there was nothing he could do, as the decisions had taken by the Railway Board.

Five officers of our batch and four of the next batch to which X who had been promoted belonged, had been overlooked. I knew X very well. We were friends. In fact we had studied in the same Institutions for our degree and post graduate diploma in Engineering. He was a pleasant fellow. What hurt was that almost everyone of the seniors who had been overlooked was not only equally competent but had put in devoted and result-oriented efforts. Only a couple of months earlier my transfer out of CLW on promotion to an intermediate level known as Engineer-in Chief, had been obviated by getting the higher grade post transferred for operation at CLW and retaining me at CLW against that post. I was told by a friend in Delhi that the Board had considered my services indispensable for CLW's Production efforts.

It took many months for me to recover from the "shock", although I tried my best not to let it affect my work in any manner.

The superseded Officers, including me, made a representation to the Board. We met the Member concerned and explained our case. But nothing happened. The damage had been done. Although injustice was transparent, those in power did not have the guts or the desire to correct a patently wrong decision. The setback in inter-se-seniority affected us through the rest of our career, most seriously.

6). 1975. It was well past mid-night. I was seated in the office of GM/CLW, being subjected to an interrogation by an Enquiry Committee appointed by the Railway Board. GM

was also present. Certain purchases made in the past from CLW's French Collaborator of raw materials and components required for traction motor manufacture were being gone into, long after the transactions had taken place. I had a good memory and having been in the thick of it all, could present the facts cogently, in the proper perspective and in sufficient detail. Some more officers of CLW were also questioned by the Committee.

Many of us in CLW had acted in what we thought was in the best interests of CLW's production, which after all was the primary purpose of the Collaboration with the French collaborators. And in many cases we had very little time in which to take decisions.

I had learnt a lesson. In arm-chair comfort at a future date one could look into full stops and commas in written Agreements with magnifying glass and take a totally different view of past actions. But what I have not been able to appreciate to this day is why senior officers were being subjected to questioning in late night sessions.

Nothing much came out of the Enquiry. But the stress and strain of having to defend and justify one's action when it was all above board did arouse in me doubts from time to time about "Action vs. Inaction" in Government environment. Thank God, for the remaining years of my service too, I did not change a bit but continued to put my neck out and take on challenges and responsibilities as I had always done.

7. "If you want to see the dirtiest shop in CLW, visit the Traction Motor Shop".

That was the note from GM (1973) to all senior officers in CLW. GM had endorsed a copy to me. I was the Deputy CEE in-charge of Traction Motor Shop then. The Note hurt me. The manner, I thought was unusual. I was instantly "angry" with the GM. But then, TM Shops were dirty; there was no doubt about that. It was a process shop, as distinct from an assembly shop. Cut pieces of various types of insulation, varnishes, banding wires, banding tapes, a large number of tools and fixtures were part of the scene in a small area which did make the place look unorganised and dirty. Inevitably, to maintain the premises in clean and tidy condition did demand a lot more effort than other centres of activity in CLW. The

pressure and problems in day to day production did not permit me to concentrate on cleanliness per se. Then there were staff problems too. I felt that I did not deserve such a curt note. But I did not want to put up a defence. I accepted that we had to improve and decided that officers and supervisors should deliberately tear themselves away from other work, only to concentrate on cleanliness at least for a few minutes every day. Some improvement came about as a result; but the conditions continued to be un-satisfactory until I left CLW.

But an occasion soon arose, which convinced me that I had perhaps wrongly judged the GM. One day, his confidential assistant showed me the Appraisal Report written by my immediate superior namely the CEE and conveyed GM's desire that I should see GM. GM told me that he was not in agreement with the kind of adverse remarks made by the CEE and suggested that I should see the CEE first. The CEE was visibly upset when I challenged him. He withdrew the report from me. I do not know what happened thereafter. As I did not receive any communication of adverse remarks, I presumed that the report was re-written by the CEE omitting or toning down the unfavourable remark. I did not care anyway to check with the CEE or GM later. But the entire episode had left a bitter taste which persisted for sometime.

8. I missed opportunities to work as DRM, twice in my career. In 1978, the GM, Central Railway wanted me to go to Nagpur as DRM but as I was at that time having frequent episodes of bleeding from a duodenal ulcer and medical advice was against my taking up an assignment that might aggravate the problem, I had to say NO. The second occasion was in 1980 when the Board issued orders posting me to Jhansi as DRM. I was keen to go this time, as I had by then overcome my medical problem with a course of prolonged medication but unfortunately the day before I was set to go, I slipped and fell down on a platform at Churchgate station and hurt my toe. X-Ray revealed a crack and I had to be in bed for some days. I did not go to Jhansi.

9. Early in 1982, when a vacancy of the CEE's post arose on Central Railway due to retirement of the incumbent, I was the choice of GM to take up the position. But within 15

days of my taking over and as I was settling down, orders were received from the Railway Board transferring me to RDSO as Director (Standards) Electrical. The Adviser (Electrical) Railway Board and the then Director (Standards) Electrical/ RDSO - both of them my seniors and well wishers - insisted that I should move to RDSO as they could not find a better person for the post. Yet only three years later, I was told by the Member (Mechanical) that although my records had been outstanding and excellent, I must have experience as open line CEE, if I had to go up further in the ladder. It was in that context I went over in 1985 as CEE on South Eastern Railway Calcutta. I had acquitted myself well by all accounts and when at that stage (1986) an opportunity was there before the Board for considering me for posting as General manager, I was denied such a posting for what-ever reason and some adhoc arrangement was continued for months to accommodate an officer in GM's chair on some other Railway. The last straw was in March 1988 when after I had successfully functioned as GM for six months on South Eastern Railway, I had to step down, as I was denied a similar temporary benefit of continuing as GM, with only a few months to go, for my superannuation (58 years of age). More about this later, in these Reminiscences.

I did not allow these "upsets" to affect my work or contribution. I had the strength of will and purpose and dedication to continue to give of my best right through to the Railways. In the ultimate analysis and in the larger context, the denials of opportunities and lack of consideration shown to me are after all not worth any "cribbing" about. But I have chosen to present them in this narrative, only to bring out that "Injustices" do get meted to one in his career from time to time whether by commission or by omission, whether by intent or by default. The System is too big for the individual, however glorified an opinion he may have justly or otherwise about himself.

The prescription for happiness in such circumstances comes from the famous lines of the Bhagwad Gita.

- Which in essence means "Do your duty unmindful of benefits to yourself"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND ACTION

I have thrown up at many places in these "REMINISCENCES" ideas for managers in the Electrical Department and in others on the Indian Railways, to consider, pursue and progress. They were presented as a natural fallout of the experiences that I have related in the main stories. I shall present here some more ideas, which I have had occasion to brood about. For some reason or other, I have not been able to see them through to fruition may be due to lack of time from my side or due to lack of interest from those who were concerned with implementation. I continue to believe that there is merit in these ideas and that they deserve consideration, for effecting improvement in the concerned spheres of activities and performance on the Railways.

1. An Equitable Tariff for Traction Energy.

Between 30 % and 40 % of the total operating expenses of a Railway is accounted for by fuel/energy for traction whatever the Motive power - steam, diesel or electric.

The initial expectation that the energy costs for Electric traction would be significantly less than for diesel traction has not materialised in reality for over 30 years, for various reasons, the most prominent one being the unreasonably stiff tariff terms of State Electricity Boards and the steep hikes imposed from year to year.

The Railways have been pleading in vain for years on the followings points :-

- i) The method of billing does not take into account the fact that the same train load moves from the zone of one substation to the next and that the practice of charging for Maximum Demand at each substation separately and individually is unrealistic. The Railway's

plea that simultaneously Maximum Demand as felt on the Power System rather than individual demands should be the basis has not been accepted by the supplier.

ii) Railway operations being continuous- 24 hours in a day -the traction load does help to fill up the valleys in the power demand pattern on the system. Yet there is no recognition or allowance by Electricity Boards for this beneficial feature.

iii) As a "fifteen minutes", maximum demand is the basis generally, a slight bunching of trains experienced once in a month, even for reasons outside Railway's control and in public interest distorts the MD picture and results in heavy MD charges for the entire month. Often times, penal MD rates are charged for MD in excess of sanctioned MD. When Power supply from a sub station to the OHE is extended occasionally to take care of some problems or failures at the adjacent sub-station, the distortion is worse. Where a tariff structure has a cruel provision for excess energy charges (In addition to excess MD charges) on the untenable presumption that such drawals of excess energy takes place during periods of excess MD, the unreasonableness of the levies goes beyond the limits of imagination.

iv) Low power factor penalties are quite stiff. Even where correction equipments are installed, there could arise situations when a correction which is beneficial to the State Electricity Board could get penalised. For instance, if there is no load or less active load at certain times, the KVARH contributed by the correction equipments may increase the overall KVAH summed up for the month and thus result in increased penalty payments and so on.

The result is that though the tariff terms as published are the same for Railways as for many other customers, yet in reality the overall all inclusive rate per KWH that Railway Traction has had to bear is invariably higher - not lower - than that borne by other industry. Committees set up from time to time, meetings at various levels etc have not helped to evolve acceptable solutions so far. That there should be a common uniform tariff for all Traction supplies through out the country, although ideal from the Railway's point of view is not likely to be accepted by Electricity Boards, who have all along enjoyed total autonomy

and freedom to revise the tariff from time to time and of late are under pressure from World Bank and other lending institutions to earn profits. To hope for special favour for Railway will ever remain a dream in the circumstances. Could the Railways consider a different approach on the following lines?

i) The bottom line would be that the Railways will pay neither more nor less than what other Extra High Tension consumers pay to the Electricity Boards, reckoned on the basis of overall all-inclusive rate per KWH.

ii) Each electricity supplier will be dealt with separately. There will be no insistence from Railways on uniform traction tariff. If uniformity is achieved otherwise, it would be considered to be a bonus benefit.

iii) It is necessary to measure and reckon only energy i.e. KWH, as the basis for payment.

iv) The rate per KWH is to be a single figure applicable for one full financial year, for the energy consumed in that year. Payment may of course be made monthly or once in two months as per prevailing practice of meter reading and billing.

v) The "provisional" rate per KWH for traction to be adopted for billing purposes will be 1.2 times the rate i.e. all inclusive rate per KWH including all charges i.e. KWH, KVA, Power Factor, fuel surcharge etc. but excluding elements of fines/arrears) as actually billed on High Tension and accepted without dispute by other consumers on EHT during the second previous year, Such all inclusive rate is merely equal to:-

Sum Total of amounts realised from all such consumers

Sum Total KWH supplied to all such consumers

Thus for 1995-96 for example, the over all rate per KWH to be paid by the Railway for Traction energy will be 1.2 times the average rate worked out for other consumers for the year 1993-94.

vi) The multiplication factor 1.2 is intended to cover a notional 20% increase over a two year period to allow for likely increase in input costs to the suppliers. As and when the exact figure of actual over all rate applicable to other consumers for a particular year can be calculated and becomes available, a single adjustment bill (+ or -) for the whole year can be settled , with reference to the provisional payments made earlier, as a final settlement for that years's traction energy.

vii) It is probably true that the over all Power Factor for traction supply is lower than what applies to many other customers on EHT. However there will be no separate or further charges on power factor or special calculations of Power Factor as being done now i.e.

(Sum total of KWH for the month

(Sum total of KVAH for the month)

The requirement of the Electricity Supplier for a better Power Factor will be agreed to be met by compulsory/obligatory installation of Power Factor Correction Capacitors at Railway's cost at appropriate locations, the KVAR capacity of such capacitors being mutually decided. For example, a fixed percentage of the sanctioned MD. say 20 % can be considered to be a reasonable percentage for such provision at each point of supply.

The simplification in procedure and the economies that can be achieved with mutual benefit in metering equipments and arrangements for reading, calculation etc., have much to recommend towards adoption of these proposals. I would consider that even as a trial idea, by agreement between one particular Railway and one particular Electricity Board, it should

be implemented ; for it seems to offer some hope for solution in a problem area which has been defying a solution for many years, in spite of efforts at various levels.

2. How to Improve Adhesion?

Wheel slipping and stalling of goods trains has been a problem on many sections on Indian Railways. The rail-wheel surface condition is a physical one and if that is not satisfactory, no amount of superior technology in the design, manufacture and operation of locomotives is ever going to help overcome this problem. It has been seen in the Chakardharpur Division, South Eastern Railway that certain types of leaves from trees falling on rails at certain times of the year result in poor rail condition. I have read similar reports from Japanese Railways also.

Some trials were made on Chakardharpur Division of South Eastern Railway in 1987-88. On an electric locomotive, a cleaning brush mechanism was fitted near one of the leading wheels. The mechanism employed a Third Rail Current Collector borrowed from Metro Railway Calcutta, so as to provide a good spring pressure and a cleaning brush which rested on the rail surface. The locomotive was run up and down. Brushes made of different materials were tried. As General Manager South Eastern Railway, I myself spent a night on this trial. More experimentation and innovative efforts may produce results of practical utility for implementation on chosen sections on Indian Railways. If the vulnerable stretches are known as also the period of the year and of the time of the day when the problem is likely to be most severely felt, a special locomotive fitted with such cleaning brushes could improve the adhesion significantly; and the line capacity lost nationally on account of running such a locomotive will be more than off set by gains in operation due to reduction in slipping/stalling problems.

While on the subject of stalling of goods trains, one other suggestion which I tried on Central Railway with clear evidence of success comes to mind. If a stop signal (Home Signal) is located at a place where the gradient and curve are unfavourable and experience indicates that starting a train from such location is difficult, why then bring the train at all upto that point ? If the location at the preceding signal i.e. the "distant" signal is more favourable,

why not stop at that distant signal itself and wait for it to pick up a double yellow or green aspect, so that you can start comfortably and sail past the Home? If need be, the lamps at the Distant signal can be replaced more frequently to reduce probability of lamps failing and consequent detention to trains at a location far away from a cabin or station.

Although I succeeded in the trials in 1976-77 and pressed for implementation, at least at a few well known difficult locations on Kalyan-Kasara section of the Bombay Division of Central Railway, the proposal did not receive encouragement, let alone acceptance. I suppose the operating people were averse to stopping a train at a signal which permitted it to move.

Even today, I believe that the idea has merit and should be applied wherever it is feasible, relevant, applicable and useful to solve an existing problem. Much depends of course on a clear knowledge of the terrain, the local problems, operating conditions prevailing etc.

3. Demanding for and printing of card tickets. There used to be a perpetual shortage of card tickets at many stations at South Eastern Railway in 1986-87-88. As AGM/SE Rly, I had gone into this question in some depth and discovered that if the process of generating demands for tickets and for scheduling their printing at the Press can be computerised, a lot of simplification, speeding up, and error free and omission-free operation could be achieved, compared to the practice of manual work at so many stations being repeatedly carried out. I had a passion for this idea and in-fact got the basics of a system evolved and explained to the concerned departmental officers incharge but unfortunately I could not see it through implementation during my tenure.

Foot note :

I am not sure if the problem of shortage of Card tickets still persists on Railways, even occasionally. If it does, computerisation could be a solution. I have since (October 1994) put down my ideas in detail and made specific proposals for consideration by the Ministry of

Railways. My article on this subject appeared in the October-December 94 issue of the Journal of the Institute of Rail Transport, published from New Delhi.

4. Evaluation of Suburban Train Performance

Punctuality is not a true index of performance of suburban train services operated by EMUs.

The Control could cancel a number of trains and yet the punctuality will improve, on paper. Does it help ?

The peak hour performance is far more critical from the commuters' point of view.

What is really needed is an attempt to assess how badly Railways have inconvenienced commuters because a train has been delayed or a train has been cancelled .

It is quite feasible to express the extent of inconvenience by a single number. For this, there is no need to collect any more statistics than what is being dealt with today. With such an Index, one could compare performance day-to-day and month-to-month much more easily than now possible. There is no necessity for middle level and top level management to look at too many figures (yet not get any wiser !) as they do now. It would also enable them to evaluate more precisely the extent of contribution to poor performance, department wise. Indeed, by extension of the method a fair comparison between two different suburban systems is possible.

In 1977, I proposed this concept of measurement of suburban train performance on Central Railway, by what I chose to call "Inconvenience Index Numbers". It was not accepted, whatever the reason. However my paper on this subject entitled. "A new approach to the evaluation of suburban train performance" was accepted and published in an issue of Journal of the Institute for Rail Transport, New Delhi in 1977.

As I have emphasised elsewhere in these Reminiscences, the public are Railway's masters. The Railways should judge themselves and their performance by the quality of service to customers, as comprehensively and completely and above all as faithfully as they can. My proposal is only the result of extending this approach to assessment of Suburban Train performance . I would even today advocate a switch-over to this method. May be, I am too much of an optimist and a dreamer. The basic question, I suppose, is whether in the first place the Indian Railways want to know reality and in the second place whether they wish to present a true and honest picture.

5. A New Aid to Store Depots on Indian Railways

It will be no exaggeration to say that from the day that I joined Railways till I retired, concern about availability in time or in adequate quantities of essential materials required for operation and maintenance of important assets used to surface quite often at various forums in Divisions, workshops, Production Units, Construction Units, at Zonal Headquarters and even in the Railway Board. Lack of vital materials was very often cited as a major handicap in the efficient and trouble - free discharge of executive responsibilities. It was not uncommon that even relatively simple items of stores used to cause hold up. It was expected that in respect of at least the "stocked" items, the magnitude of the problem would get reduced substantially with the Computerisation of Inventory Management. But that expectation has not quite been fulfilled.

I felt at one point of time that a practical approach lay in setting up at Stores Depots attached to loco sheds and such other vital consumer points, a visual, easy-to-grasp presentation of the status at least in respect of the so called vital items in such a manner that such a display could be viewed and understood easily by the officers and staff of the stores department as well as by the executives in-charge of the shed or similar responsibility. Action as called for to progress pending matters, to accelerate the process of procurement and to arrange the required inputs could result from joint inter-action of the two departments' staff.

The details of my proposal were contained in a paper that I wrote in 1980 while I was on Central Railway. The paper was entitled "A new Aid to Stores depots on Indian Railways" and was circulated to the senior executives and administrators of Stores department of Central Railway. The proposal was also formally sent to the Railway Board. In 1985, when I went over to S.E.Rly. as Chief Electrical Engineer, I attempted to implement the system at least on one electric loco shed, on a trial basis. Unfortunately, although there was no resistance as such to the idea on Central Railway and on S.E.Rly., the Stores department did not appear to be too enthusiastic about implementation; and the idea remained on paper. There was of course total silence - no reaction at all - from the Stores directorate of the Railway Board.

Essentially, the system that I visualised consisted of two almirahs/open racks, with a number of compartments, specially designed to contain ring folder types of files, one folder for each item proposed to be watched through the system; and their movement shifting from one compartment to another compartment every month on a nominated day, jointly by the field supervisors of the stores and Executives Departments (See figure). Some of the compartments would be in a Zone clearly marked RED and the other compartments in a Zone clearly marked GREEN. There will be separate rows for items having different lead times such as 6,9,12 and 24 months. One almirah would be meant to enable watch over the progress from the stage of demanding to the stage of placement of orders and the second almirah from placement of orders to receipt of materials. As long as a folder remained in the Green zone, no particular attention was to be paid. Once it moved to the Red zone, it meant that some action was needed to be taken. According to me, the merits of this system lay in the following aspects :-

- i. The status would get up dated every month, with practically no extra writing work.
- ii. To Railwaymen, Red and Green signals mean a lot. High-lighting dangerous or not-so-satisfactory status through Red colour and a satisfactory status through green colour was expected to make an impact, which would have far more influence in expediting action than any written statements progress reports, minutes of meetings or even exception

statements thrown by a Computer.

iii. As the system depended on joint check by stores and departmental supervisors, for updating status every month, a feeling of camaraderie was expected to develop at grass root level, which in itself would solve a few problems. Besides, changes arising out of changed situations, technological development including obsolescence would get consideration for action then and there without loss of time.

I am not advocating for a moment that the system that I have envisaged should supplant whatever systems are in force, including Inventory Management through Computers. My proposals, if implemented, would only supplement them.

Note:

(Those who are interested in further details may refer to my Paper on the subject which should be available in pE0@ the archives of the Stores Directorate of the Railway Board as also with Electrical and Stores Departments at the Head Quarters of Central and South Eastern Railways).

6. Refund rules :-

The rules for refund in case of passenger tickets have been simplified over the years and have now incorporated quite a lot of delegation down the line, even to Railway Stations. Efforts will continue to be made, I am sure, to effect further simplification and improvements in due course.

While I was on South Eastern Railway, I devoted some time to one limited aspect viz How to make the Rules, whatever they are, intelligible to the public and for that matter even to Railway Officers and staff who are required to deal with the subject of refunds on a case to case basis, day in and day out. At present one has to go through "While", "Whereas", "Except", "Not more than" and such other legalistic jargon, to decide what should be done in a particular case. It takes time and effort, even for experienced persons; it can be quite demanding, for newcomers. I asked myself - why not rewrite Rules in a logical fashion, make the presentation in sentences in the form of "Direct Speech" and sequentially arrange the instructions exactly on the same lines as the Trouble Shooting Manual for locomotive

operation which instructs the driver precisely what steps he should follow, should a particular problem crop up in a locomotive. On my suggestion, one Electrical Engineer of Waltain Division who dealt with Electric Locomotives made a first draft. This was perfected by me with the assistance of another Electrical Engineer at Head Quarters of South Eastern Railway in 1987, when I was AGM on that Railway. The document, which found "resigned" acceptance by the Commercial Department of the Railway was circulated by me to AGMs of all Railways at one of the periodical meetings held in 1987 in the Railway Board with AGMs to discuss Public Grievances. I have not heard about any further progress in this matter. I suppose the circulation of the document was not only the beginning but also the end of my proposal.

If someone on Indian Railways is interested in enforcing a simpler and easier to understand presentation of a set of instructions, here is an opportunity. He can revive the idea of a "Trouble shooting manual" for refunds and progress it towards adoption. But if confusion and "make it difficult to understand" are the desired goals, let the dead be buried for ever.

I BID GOOD BYE TO RAILWAYS

I was born on 24 October 1930 and my date of superannuation was to be 31 October 1988. But I retired voluntarily three months earlier - on 5 August 1988; and I had effectively ceased to work some four months prior to that date, as I went on leave. This is how it happened.

It was morning of 29 March 1988. I was sipping my coffee. The GM's Bungalow in Garden Reach faces the Hooghly. As one watches the river and the shore beyond and the ships and boats that pass, the sight relaxes one mentally and physically and prepares him for the gruelling and eventful working day ahead. I looked forward to this session, everyday.

There was a phone call. Chairman, Railway Board was on line.

"The GM's panel is out. Mr. M. is on the panel. You have to hand over charge to him. Formal orders will issue in a day or two", he said.

I was stunned for words, for a while. I recovered and asked him what was going to happen to me.

"You go as AGM".

"Is there no way I can continue as GM ? You know very well what I have done for the Railways throughout and as GM for the last six months. All targets have been achieved. And I have only a few months to go before I retire."

" Yes, I know. But you are not on the panel. I am thinking of posting you as AGM on Eastern Railway."

"Can I get posted to Central or Western Railway ? I thought of settling down in or near Bombay. Posting in Bombay would help me".

" That is not possible. As Mr. M..... has been working under you, I thought you may have some embarrassment to continue on South Eastern Railway. Hence the proposal to shift you to Eastern Railway ".

"No. There will be no embarrassment for me. I would like to be kept on South Eastern Railway".

The conversation ended.

I felt hurt. I felt let down. I went through mentally the many many assignments I had held, putting my heart and soul into the job. The conversation that the Minister (MOSR) had with me in October 1987, soon after I took over as GM on South Eastern Railway was still fresh in my memory.

We were travelling in the GM's Inspection Carriage on the Bilaspur Division. MOSR called me. My predecessor, who had been elevated as Member (Mechanical), was with the Minister.

" Mr. Natarajan, we have posted you as GM. It is a tough assignment, please remember, I have been assured that you will do well".

I told the Minister that I was confident and would do well. Certainly I would spare no effort.

Indeed, I had done well by any standards. The freight loading targets had been fulfilled. Revenue Expenditure was under control. The construction works had progressed well. The relations with organised labour were cordial. Besides, I had contributed, through innovative thinking and dynamic action, to success and accomplishment in many areas of activity. I had put in almost 16 hours of work on an average everyday.

However. The formal orders came on 30th march. Mr. M--was away from Headquarters. On his return, I handed over charge to him on 1st April 1988.

I had made up my mind. I had no ill-will against Mr. M---. But I did not want to be No. 2 after having been No. 1 so successfully. Besides I was not sure whether in my frame of mind, I could continue to contribute as effectively as I had done all my life. I felt that the time had come for me to go. I reported "Sick" - for the first time when I was not really sick- and proceeded on leave.

I had cancelled , only six months earlier, a planned holiday to Kashmir as at that time the decision of the Ministry to ask me to work as GM came all of a sudden. I now felt that the time had come for me to go on that holiday. The trip was unplanned ; yet it went off well.

I came back from a long leave to work only for some three days before I bid formal good-bye to Railways.

I had enjoyed every moment of my career on the Railways. I learnt a lot, having been exposed to a variety of experiences. I had the satisfaction that I could contribute my bit to this great Organisation. I knew that my colleagues and co-workers were happy with me and that I enjoyed their confidence and love. In the ultimate analysis, what more could a man ask for ?

How true it is that the Ground Rules of Happiness are:-

Something to do

Something to love

Something to hope for !