



## Going back 55 years: The bicycle that was not lost

True friendship flourishes on mutual love and understanding.

■ by U.N. Murthy

It was the year 1962. We were all teenagers, just 17 and bubbling with lot of enthusiasm after getting our admission into the engineering college. We paid the college fees and hostel fees and settled down in one of the three hostels. We, the first year students, were given accommodation in the old hostel, which was nothing but like military barracks used during World War II. The other two hostels were newly built blocks with fans in each room. The students were rotated from one hostel block to another each year.

The campus was huge, a few hundred acres in area and a lovely college building with all facilities like most advanced laboratories and playgrounds etc., even at that time.

Now, I am settled in Secunderabad after retirement. I am an active member of our Alumni Association, based at Hyderabad with membership strength of nearly

700. At that time the engineering course was of 5 years duration. We studied during 1962-67.

Back to the college and hostels. The college, which was very famous even at that time in Andhra Pradesh, had about 600 boys and two girl students. These two girl students (one is one year senior to us and the other

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our class mate) are settled at Hyderabad and both are members of our Alumni Association! Both have done very well professionally and retired in very good positions in government organisations.

1962 was the year we cannot forget. It was the year of the Indo-China border war. We lost many of our brave soldiers in the war and also many thousand square kilometres of area to China. We were woken up from slumber. The modernisation of our armed forces had started immediately.

Each student of our engineering college contributed ten rupees towards the National Defence Fund. We all felt very sad for the humiliation suffered by our armed forces at the hands of the Chinese army.

Prime Minister Nehru wanted every citizen, particularly the youth, to undergo some sort of military training. As a part of this pro-



gramme, NCC was made compulsory in all colleges. We were very glad to join NCC and undergo some sort of para-military training very sincerely and seriously.

Our lecturers and professors were real 'Gurus'. They used to teach with total dedication and devotion to their profession. Because of them only most of the students of this college were able to reach top positions of eminence in the field of their specialisation not only in India but abroad also.

Our college was about 5 kilometres from the town, adjacent to the then Bangalore road and the only mode of transport to town were the horse-drawn carts called 'Jatkas' in Telugu (we all know and seen the

horse-drawn cart driven by Hema Malini in the film *Sholay*). A jatka is the same cart with the only difference being that it is driven or the horse is controlled by a male owner.

### **Musicians among engineers**

Sometimes, we used to ask the owner of the Jatka to take a back seat and take control of the horse till we reached the outskirts of the town. It was great fun driving a Jatka. The Jatka fellow used to charge about two-and-a-half rupees for 5 people.

The other source of travel to town was a rented bicycle from a small cycle shop in the campus. The rent was two Annas (one eighth of a Rupee) for a to and fro trip to town

lasting a few hours as we used to rent the bicycles for going to a movie in the town.

We had a small post office with a post master and a postman named Jabbar. We used to get Money Orders from home to pay the hostel charges etc., every month. Jabbar knew which student was available at which classroom at any given time to hand over the money.

Our batch in first year had lot of talented musicians. D.J. Srihari used to play Ghatam. Ravindra Naik used to play the Hawaiian guitar and Wilson was fantastic on Harmonica. Rajagopal was a master on the Banjo. Henry Paul was superb on harmonium. Another of our classmates, let us call him 'B', used to sing very well.

Chidambaram, a student of neighbouring polytechnic college used to play the Tabla to complete the orchestra.

We had a hockey ground just inside the old hostel and in the nearby sportsroom there was a gramophone with a number of records of all classical songs of that time including Hindi songs of Mohammad Rafi in addition to famous Telugu songs.

### Talented singer

'B' and Rajagopal used to spend the time in the evenings in this room selecting the records to be played so that all the students who were playing and others can listen to the songs on a loud speaker and enjoy the evening.

One of our assistant professors, Sri Ramakrishna Mouli used to select and buy the records.

We excelled in sports also and were inter collegiate champions in many games.

We had ragging in those days also. It was not so bad or sadistic as it is nowadays. It was used by the seniors to get acquainted with the freshers and sort of adopt and guide them in academic matters and the discipline

and respect to the teachers was of the highest order in the campus.

Many of the teaching staff used to stay in the staff quarters in the campus. They used to go around the hostel rooms in the evenings and clear doubts in subjects for students.

15 August was the last day for ragging and 23 August was observed as "Fresher's Day".

Our music team of 'B', Srihari, Rajagopal, Ravindra Naik, Henry Paul, Wilson and Chidambaram gave a music performance including vocal by 'B' on Fresher's Day in the beautiful auditorium located in the main college building. This auditorium was used for meetings and for Annual Day celebrations.

I remember once our chief minister Sri. Kasu Brahmananda Reddy was the chief guest on an Annual Day and on another Annual Day it was the Maestro Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna who was the chief guest and gave a fantastic vocal performance.

I remember that famous Telugu cinema actors Ramana Reddy and Balaiah also visited our college.

In addition to NCC, we all excelled at games. Years rolled on. We all passed out in 1967. 'B' had left

college after first year as he became seriously ill around the end of the academic year and also his heart was somewhere else, not in Engineering at that time.

Later on, 'B' became famous and, in 2011, received one of the highest civilian honours bestowed by the Government of India on individuals for excellence.

We used to meet him whenever he was in our city. Even though he did not complete engineering along with us, he is very fond of his classmates and always yearned to meet them whenever possible. We used to meet at some hotel or other for a few hours as he is a busy man in his profession.

### Humble person

Even though he became famous nationally and internationally, he was very simple and humble and mingled with us as we used to do so during our college days whenever he used to come to our city of Hyderabad.

We used to invite him to our Alumni get togethers which used to take place twice an year.

During our college days, there were no cell phones, no two-wheelers and no cars. We used to walk from hostel to college and back. Sometimes we used to walk to town in small groups of five or six boys.

We generally used to go to town to watch movies in one of the three theatres, preferably on a Saturday night and come back to hostels around midnight after watching the second show. The second show used to commence around 9:30 pm. Of course the other two modes of transport, that is, the Jataka and Bicycle were always handy.

We used to watch the movies of Dev Anand, Shammi Kapoor, ANR, NTR, and even Jayalalitha. She acted as heroine in some hit Telugu movies. She was very young at that time and beautiful and was a superb actress. We all know her as the chief minister of Tamil Nadu now.

For one of our get togethers we



SP Balasubrahmanyam being awarded Padma Bhushana by Prez Pratibha Patil.

invited 'B' as a special guest of honour. He said he is nothing special and no guest of honour. He will join us as a friend and as an ex classmate only. He said that he felt very happy amongst old friends.

We said okay. He attended our meeting and narrated a very interesting incident which happened during our first year (1962-63) in which he was directly involved. The following is what he said in his own words-

"I think it was September 1962. One Saturday evening I rented a bicycle and went to the town. I parked and locked the bicycle at the movie theatre near clock tower (called Raghuv eer talkies) and went in to watch the second show. After the movie, I came to the hostel in a Jatka along with some other friends who also had gone to watch the same movie.

### The forgotten bicycle

The next day was a Sunday. I attended college as usual on Monday. I was in my room when the cycle shop owner, one Ahmed came to me in the evening and asked, 'Ayya where is the cycle you have taken on Saturday?' I was stunned. Now, I remembered I had forgotten the bicycle at the cinema hall on Saturday. I started sweating. If the bicycle is lost I will have to pay Rs200/- to the shop owner. That was a huge amount in those days and I will have to face the music in front of my parents. Immediately, I explained the matter to my roommate and we rushed to the theatre in a Jatka.

I felt greatly relieved when I found the bicycle parked in the theatre premises in the same spot where I had left it. I gladly paid the two rupees demanded by the theatre attendant as rent for three days. We came back to hostel immediately and handed over the bicycle to the owner of the cycle shop who was waiting anxiously for me."



He narrated some more interesting episodes of our college days. He said his only regret in life was that he could not become an engineer like us. But we told him he became great in his own way. There were seniors as well as our juniors at college, in the get together. They all enjoyed his narratives.

Our batch people always felt proud that 'B' was our classmate in the engineering college.

### Disclosing identity

Now who is "B"? He is none other than the famous singer Sri S.P.

**He was honoured with 'Padma Bhushan' by Government of India in 2011. We invited him as the chief guest in the get together in February 2011 to felicitate him after getting the Padma Bhushan.**

Balasubrahmanyam. He sang more than 40,000 songs for films in many languages including Hindi.

Very recently (in May 2016), we had a reunion of our batch mates at Bangalore, courtesy one of our classmates who is a very big industrialist in the Garden City. Balu, as we fondly call him, came down from Chennai for the reunion and spent a whole day with his friends and their families.

There is one thing every youngster can learn after seeing Balu Garu. He is a very simple, humble and a soft spoken person. He always encourages young and budding singers, corrects their mistakes and wishes them well.

He was honoured with 'Padma Bhushan' by Government of India in 2011. We invited him as the chief guest in the get together in February 2011 to felicitate him after getting the Padma Bhushan. No need to say the hall was overflowing with members on this occasion.

Even in this meeting Balu Garu was happy to meet his old friends as a classmate rather than as an eminent singer honoured with Padma Bhushan ('Garu' in Telugu is the equivalent of 'Ji' in Hindi).

The ladies particularly went up to him, exchanged greetings and had photos shot with him as mementos. Balu Garu gladly obliged all of them posing for photos with them. He greeted all of them with folded hands(Namaste).

Our batch people always feel proud that Balu Garu was our classmate in the engineering college and still a friend.

We (the batch mates of 1962-67) always gave great importance to our friendship which is of nearly 55 years!

We enjoy meeting our classmates along with the families even now.

"Making a friend is an act of grace. Having a friend is a gift. Keeping a friend is a virtue. Being a friend is an honour." ■