

The Chemistry of AISMA

THE HISTORY? THE STORY ? IT'S THE CHEMISTRY OF AISMA! (By G.Rajan, Ex.GS/SR & Ex.CVP/AISMA) The Station Masters of Indian Railways and AISMA have come a long way. The date of appointment of the author is 12.03.1968 and so he has a right to say that this literature is purely on that single line. And my pleasure lies in the fact that I was lucky enough to be with AISMA from day one and also lucky enough to see the sunshine and the Tsunami soaked struggles of AISMA & the Station Masters in close quarters. The view of the struggles was not from the gallery but from within the ropes. The four decades association with the mighty ONLY CADRE CARE led to the inevitable boxing with the crazy bureaucracy-my eternal strength being the charismatic leader Com.P.SivanPilla. Even as I recall my memorable occasions with Com.Pilla I am inclined to recall without any inhibition or shame how he was able to influence a man who was born and brought up in a society where it was against rhythm to sit in front of elders and talk loud (let alone express dissent against the decision of father, mother or any elder in the clan) into a trade unionist. The first time I shouted "Zindabad Zindabad AISMA Zindabad", I could not believe my own ears that it was coming from me. Still unbelievable was the sight of me holding the AISMA banner in print the next day. It's all down the memory lane now. I recall my earliest encounter with the ghosts that gave me courage to fight with the Railway bureau-ghosts that use to visit my stations in the name of night inspection in the later days of my service. Immediately on joining Railways during the seventies, I was posted to a station called Sampige Road (SPGR), in Mysore division. The Station Master in charge of the station was a great man, in the conventional manner in his own way and if I was able to stand up against any onslaught during my career it came from the discipline he had instilled in me. But the ghosts had an unbeatable track record in that station. As I was posted as ASM and took charge, the outgoing ASM whispered in my ears that apart from the self-possessed SM in charge, there was a ghost which was in charge of the station during nights. Being raw and unfamiliar to the field I asked the man escaping, "What do you mean?" The lucky man said, "This station is possessed by a Ghost." I said, "Is it harmful?" He said, "Not so beastly, it's considerate. It doesn't hurt much." I said, "Please, no more anxiety and suspense. Let me know everything." He said, "The ghost behaves funny. My advice is-Don't sleep on the table while on night duties." I said, "I don't get you. Why the ghost should be unhappy and what it does." He said, "If you sleep on the table the ghost will put you on the floor next morning." Envyng the ASM who was escaping from the scary but unseen, I bid him adieu. After a few months he met me at Mysore when I had gone to the Divisional Head Quarters to seek a transfer. He was all smiles and asked me, "How friendly you are with the ghost?" I said, "Not bad. I decided to outwit the ghost and slept on the floor." He said, "Really great and what happened?" I said, "The ghost kept the table on me." I am sure many SMs could have interacted with better (and bitter as well) ghosts in their career as Station Masters. I remember another station, Viduraswatha (VVA) in Bangalore - Dharmavaram section. The senior SM of my previous station handed over me the transfer order. I asked him, "Who will be my colleagues?" The answer made me see stars, "Lot of snakes." He was true dawned on me when I joined VVA. Station to quarters and quarters to station during taking over and handing over duty was a nightmare even in the day time. You have to crawl through them successfully to take over charge and you should be blessed with a long life to reach your quarters alive after relieved from duty by the other man. On one such occasion on entering the quarters after a night stint I found a six footer python cozily curled up in my bed. That was the last time I did any duty at VVA. From nightmares to day lights. Years much later, during late eighties I was waiting at the exit gate in the Bangalore Airport. It was around 0930 hours or 1000 hours. Finally the flight from Cochin landed. I was extremely happy and thrilled when Com.P.SivanPilla walked out from the inner lounge. He had flown in from Cochin to attend one of our GBs at Bangalore and I had the opportunity to drive him as my pillion rider to RR Kalyanamandapam, near Bangalore City Railway station. A great enigma and ever living inspiration that we are all indebted to for ever. Another great occasion I cherish in my life. Com.T.C.Govindaswamy landed at Bangalore to proceed to Mysore to sign his pension settlement papers consequent on the honorable High court of Kerala setting aside the removal of Com.T.C.G. I had the honour to drive him down to Mysore for the ever memorable occasion of signing the pension and other settlement related papers. Two great men for the AISMA CLAN. Both the personalities were haunted and hunted down by the Railway bureaucracy. But they soared into more and more fame and status. That's AISMA! I don't mind declaring in an unsophisticated fashion like that to drive home the point and exhibit the pleasure we all derive in expressing our feelings towards our amazing leaders. Time for me to be back to Sampige Road and my first unforgettable official mentor-SM in charge of SPGR. It was 12 hours drill (or grill) - 0700 hours to 1900 hours my mentor doing the job for six days in a week and I was destined with 1900-0700 hours for six nights in a week. Both were allotted and had EAR marked (?) quarters. But he was the father of half a dozen in conformity with those days "ism" and I was a bachelor. Indeed he was a thorough gentleman in his own style. Every day he would arrive by a down train from GUBBI (GBB-18 KMs away from SPGR) and take over duty from me at 0700 hours. As soon as he took over he would hand over a bag full of vegetables bought for me from GBB since only things available at SPGR were ghosts apart from the station staff as I told you earlier. He was more or like a father to me despite the sour thumb that I would let you know bit later. He used to bring me the paper, magazine and my favorite author's book-Hadley Chase. I use to wonder why I was not allowed to stay at GBB, the Taluk headquarters where all basic necessities were available. The answer was easy to come from my mentor. "At least one SM should be available to Meet emergencies." I believed him because, in my opinion THE SMS HAVE BEEN ALWAYS MORE LOYAL THAN THE KINGS, to put it gingerly. Here comes the sour point. When the in charge and my mentor used to be friendly in a fatherly way, it was iron hand when it came to duty and discipline. If I had an idea to travel to Bangalore (which was around 60 KMs from SPGR) to

see a movie in (in) famous Sangam theatre on my rest day, well, I needed his permission to leave the HQ, SPGR. Don't be too intelligent to say, "He was leaving the HQ every day to go to his home at GBB." As I said it was his and our belief that at least one SM should be available at the HQ to take care of the emergencies. I too believed all those craps. Again I would like to be still more close to reality of today's SMS era. I take you to "MY TODAY", our mobile web page and the SMS message I saw in my mobile on 01.02.2010. It read as: "AISMAN-Roster copy of MAS-JTJ required urgently for RLC case (intensive with REST) PM 2/2/2010. SMs on duty send it to Branch Secretaries positively-Poov. This and more are happening and happening. How much distance you and I have travelled from my SPGR MENTOR DAYS? Literally speaking the fittest personality to answer this distance based question is our versatile leader, Com.M.Ramani. What is the total distance he has covered to bring all the SMs of IR under one banner of AISMA? I salute this gentle man who lost his health to keep AISMA healthy. Get the distance from him when he attends the GB of PGT division on 25.02.2010. Don't you think AISMA and SMs have come a long way? But believe it or not, IT HAS NOT BEEN A CAKE WALK OR A CAT WALK? True commitment, dedication and sacrifice of every one of the rank and file and in particular our unparalleled and unmatched leaders. Their skilled maneuvering is something unheard in the trade union history of Indian Railways. Indeed AISMA and the Station Masers of IR have come a long way even as I recall my Malagur (like Malgudi) days of 12 hours/365 DAYS nonstop stint with nausea. From 12 hours we have not only romped into 8 hours roster in most of the stations we are heading for 6 hours Intensive Roster. Don't think it is not possible. You are going to see it happening - Stick to your only point-If your DPO roster does not identify the period of inaction in the roster I firmly believe you are entitled for Intensive Roster (the only classification where there is no concept of period of inaction.) You have a right to ask your DPO: "Gentleman, identify the period of inaction in my 1000-2100/2100-0700 hours roster." Many of my comrades in Bangalore feel unhappy with me at times. Their grouse is, "Comrade G.R will forget all the SMs around if he runs into any Driver (Loco Pilot)." That's true because I believe the first category that deserves Intensive Roster in Indian Railways is Loco Pilots and unfortunately even today they are nowhere close to it. No wonder that lead to my uninterrupted interaction with Loco Pilots' Associations. The foremost thing I used to tell them was that their priority should be to achieve Intensive Roster for their comrades. I know it is one of their dream demand and one day or other they would achieve it. I use to admire their commitment to tackle some of their issues. I take you for a ride on their riddles now. In this regard a couple of incidents come before me. The citation is not for underestimating any one of us or our sincerity but purely for academic interest. Almost a decade back there was some dispute with regard to attaching the Loco (SR 4.32 (i)) in PGT Division of SR-if my memory is right at Shoranur or Ernakulam. It was taken up very seriously by LPs' Association resulting in LPs reporting sick. Many trains suffered heavy detention. During 2007 or 2008, the DME/MYS of SWR decided to open a new Depot for LPs at Chickajur-a junction in MYS Division where a dozen Operating staff along with SMs and other station staff work not to mention the Gangmen, Electrical staff, S&T staff, and Commercial Staff. But the LPs' Association of MYS division went on a lightning strike at Harihar(HRR) by reporting sick on the plea that there was no adequate educational and medical facilities available notwithstanding other basic amenities. What one needs to consider is that the station was a junction with not less than 40 staff working already there. While the Sr.DME/MYS retreated from the plan immediately, as a show of strength he issued unlawful and illegal SF 5s against a few LPs who reported sick. The author had the opportunity to act as Defence Helper for two LPs of HRR/MYS Division. But the greatest tragedy and my persisting disappointment is that even in the third millennium none knows what the working hours of a LP is. It can be anything between 8 hours to 14 hours to suit the requirements of Sr.DME. The catch 22 here is that many LPs wish to believe that the stretched duty hours is to suit the requirements of Sr.DOM showering the benefit to the mechanical officer knowing pretty well both could be from the same batch originating from the same Baroda benches. I am at compulsions to remember the then Sr.DME/SBC, Shri. Govind Kumar who won laurels and Board Awards at the sweat of LPs of SBC division. As I steer you for the landing, some of you may be feeling dizzy due to the zoom in & out, twists and turns, dip & dim you have been sailing all through. But the jumpy uneven ride will invariably give you an insight into our success operations. Snake & ladder to centralized head quarters! 365days/24/12/8 hours to 6 hours roster with rest!! One man show to additional SM in the station!!! We all love it. I close it with my starting line and with a finishing touch- The Station Masters of Indian Railways and AISMA have come a long way. And I am sure they will land in moon soon. **That's the chemistry of AISMA.**

About the Author

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Source: <http://www.aisma.in>