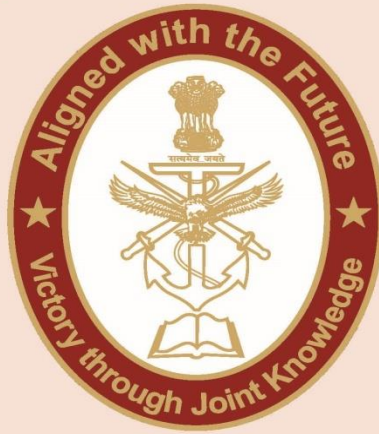


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

ABLE AND CANE
(928/40395)



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THEME HEADING

This story is dedicated to those selfless officers who work in various appointments in the unit and outside. You will find them as QM, Adm Company Commander, MCO, OC transit camps, GLOs, NCC officers, reemployed etc etc. They occupy less “glamorous” posts but serve with a dedication and sincerity that is stirring and worthy of emulation.

They do small little things that make the services distinguished. For no rewards nor any recognition.

Only for their pride in the uniform.
They are The Brar(s) of the Indian Army.

*And Adam had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to **CAIN**.*

“With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man,” she said.

*Later she gave birth to Cain’s brother **ABEL**.*

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, while Cain was a tiller of the soil. So in the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruit of the soil as an offering to the LORD, while Abel brought the best portions of the firstborn of his flock.

And the LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but He had no regard for Cain and his offering. So Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell.

*“Why are you angry,” said the LORD to Cain, “and **why has your countenance fallen**? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you refuse to do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires you, but you must master it.”*

Then Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

And the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I do not know!” he answered. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

“What have you done?” replied the LORD.

Cain and Abel (Hebrews 11:4)

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Brar and I were adjutants of the neighbouring battalions. Our comparison almost ended there. We were good friends though. How much of friendship, was to be put to test in Time. It always was that way.

Whilst there was little to write home about me, except that I was in the good books of powers that be and what one could call a career guy. I minded my business and did what was expected, generally by the Rule book. That was easy.

Brar was boisterous and an over friendly officer, which some people called out as being loud. He always had an air of positivity and humour about him, which sometimes exceeded others’ confines. Later I was to realize that the confines people laid down were actually their own limitations. Brar could care nonetheless. He was always He.

Most of Everyone else was happy about him.

He would sit in his chair and attended to everyone who came to him in the office. He would put away the files and immediately focus on his visitors.” If people have come all the way to meet you, meet them immediately”, he would say. He was a good listener and more importantly, made people feel that he could be talked to. Few People came with irresolvable problems and some with solvable ones. Even those of whose irresolvable problems that he did not solve, were still happy with him, when they went back.

“You see, just that they need somebody to talk to. They too know that their problems are irresolvable”, Brar would explain to me.

Brar would often get calls for favours. He never refused any. I remember he gave three carpenters simultaneously to various seekers. I wondered how that was possible when there were only two carpenters authorized in a unit.

“You see, Balan, The third was a black smith.” He would wink at me.” I gave him a carpentry tool box and told him to tell that he was new and not very proficient”. No wonder that nobody went disappointed, with Brar.

The formation head quarters would demand for Havildars (three stripers), very regularly, for various garrison duties. When the Havildars ran out, Brar would call the guy next up and gave him a “three stripe” to pin up.

“Who would know? They are not going to check his record. The sight of the stripes would settle all Issues”, Brar would quip.

Once there was an Officer requirement from higher formation, for a courier duty to a distant location that needed an overnight travel. It was already a tight situation in the unit as boxing competition was on and we had to give referees and other officials, in addition to the other current responsibilities. I refused outright. The demand fell on Brar. He accepted the responsibility immediately.

I knew that he had no other officers to spare. Despite being Adjutants, we were referees too. I wondered as to how Brar would pull it off. Brar would wink, as was his won't. I had to wait to know.

When the boxing competition started, Brar was one of the first referees in. He told me that he is volunteering to take my place as the referee in the second bout too. I was alarmed when In the course of the Second bout, Brar collapsed in the ring. “Dehydration”, he whispered out, loud enough to be heard. He was immediately evacuated on a stretcher to the MI room.

I thought that, this way, Brar had easily evaded any queries and admonishment that would come up for non detailment of the Officer courier. How wrong was I?

Brar was sitting in the train as the courier in charge within an hour, after placating the Doctor in the MI Room.

Brar's ingenuity was at play every time.

Once I received a call from a Brigadier. I was being invited to his place for dinner. I thanked the Brigadier profusely and asked if I could bring my wife along? There was a longish silence from the Brigadier, and he asked me to confirm if I was married. He said sheepishly that Brar had referred me to him as an eligible groom for his niece.

I was livid and confronted Brar.” Relax, Balan. He asked me for details of an eligible *mallu* officer but never mentioned that it was in marriage!”

I still don’t know as to how Brar placated the Brigadier.

In the officer mess parties, managing lights was an issue in those times of power cut and inadequate generators. Excessive lighting put a load on the already fragile system. Petromax (pressurized paraffin lamp) was a very viable alternative. In one of the Brigade parties in his mess, Brar diligently rehearsed the petromax “bearers” prior to the party, just in case of the event of a power failure. They would come marching in with digging heels, in smart uniforms and fanning out as they came in unison. It was impressive like a parade.

“Why, waste time? The lights may never go out”, I remarked. Brar was nonchalant and non committal.

The party progressed smoothly without a hitch. Brar was up and about. Everybody seemed happy. I could not resist reminding Brar again; “Those Petromaxes?”

He looked at me. “Balan, nothing goes waste”

He immediately summoned the mess Havildar. He whispered to him.”The lights will fail at 9 o’ clock sharp, so be prepared”. The mess Havildar was impressed and immediately ran around to organize the “Petromax drill”.

At 9 o’clock, presto, the lights failed.

There was a synchronized boo or wail that generally accompany the light failures in the Army. Academy training, I presume.

Somebody (It’s always the 2iC, I suppose) called out in exasperated desperation.

“Braaar...”

Not even seconds were lost. In came marching the “Thampi” petromax bearers, heeling and fanning out as they came in, to everybody’s relief. The lights spread to the far corners, lighting up every place and everybody’s faces. The CO gave a smile to the 2iC, the mouth widening so much that

he could have eaten a full banana sideways. He looked at the 2iC in rare appreciation. The 2iC was relieved so much and was so grateful that he would have probably got his daughter married to Brar. Then and there.

“Mark of an Excellent Unit, all contingencies well rehearsed.” remarked the brigade commander. Everybody nodded in unison and murmured words of reluctant appreciation.

The CO’s smile got wider. He was beaming. The probability of *Meow or Second-er-bad* was exponentially increased.

The 2iC was choked and almost about to faint out of sheer relief.

Brar was nonchalant and cool.

Most of the rest were brimming with sheer jealousy.

I was impressed with Brar’s impeccable forecast of the impending power failure and simultaneously jealous of his sweeping achievement. He held the moment in time. He deserved it though, I had to admit grudgingly.

“How did you know that power was to fail at 9’o clock sharp?”, I quizzed Brar at the bar, in the interlude that was always on offering, when seniors went for the dinner and time was still left for juniors to garner a drink before getting to relish the remnant chicken necks.

Brar sipped his drink, with vigor, smiling at the Barman.

“I did not”, he replied pleasantly.

“Then! Sheer coincidence?” I blurted.

He swirled around the bar stool and looked at me.

“I switched off the Mains!!”

O well, what the hell, my jaws dropped!!

“I cannot fail the amount of preparations that we made. It had to be demonstrated and appreciated.” Brar drew long at his drink and accosted me to the dining table.

Once at another party in the brigade mess, we were guzzling away the chicken, compelled by quantity than any quality.” It is awful in taste.” Brar opined conclusively. He summoned the mess Havildar.” The cook needs to improve”, he admonished the mess Havildar, visibly annoyed.

“Sahib”, the Mess NCO quietly broke in,” The recipe was given by the Commander’s wife”.

Brar paused in brief to review the situation immediately, with the now grossly revised inputs. He was nonchalant.

“Ok, No issues. I will call you again”, Brar said dismissively.

I was waiting.

Brar veered around to locate himself so as to stand behind the Commanders wife, back to back, as if unseen.

“Who made this Chicken? Call the Mess Havildar”, Brar barked aloud, His voice reverberating and resonating all around the Dining hall.

Everybody fell silent. Expectation was pregnant, awaiting deliverance.

The bugle had been blown. Beating the Retreat was far gone out as an escape route...

In came the mess Havildar again.

“Who is the cook who prepared the Chicken?” Brar barked again.

The Commander’s wife froze, in situ.

There was pin drop silence. It was unknown territory, hither to uncharted. Brar paused for effect.

“It is excellent!! I have not eaten this good a recipe preparation in a decade”,

Brar went on.

Blood rushed back in and the Commander’s wife’s face shade became self radiating pink, shades improving in passage of time.

“Cook ko do peg, mere taraf se - make it a bottle”, Brar was expansively generous.

Commander’s wife’s face attained further radiant shades of pink.

“Sahib, Ye to Commander Madame ki recipe, Hei”, the mess havildar stated briefly.

“Where is Commander Madam?” Brar was turning around.

Commander’s wife was at the pinkest of her happiness in a decade;

Commander too was infectiously so happier.

“Give me the recipe Ma’am, Just give it”, Brar was not letting the surging effervescence to coagulate, any soon.

Commander’s wife could only manage to mutter, demurring.

Brar’s CO went on to *Meow*, instead of *Second-er-bad*.

It was unreasonable to say that Brar was any less affectionate to the lesser mortals. In fact, if any he was more. He lent money from his pocket to the needy and distressed Jawans, in those days of penury. He gave leave to everyone who asked and also to those who did not ask. He gave lift to Jawans and their wives to go and back from the hospitals, in his vehicle even if he had to walk. He shared his food with them. He always patted any soldier who came near him and reached out to those who stayed away, and always smiled at them. When he was on parade and not supposed to smile, His eyes smiled. He was almost always with the Jawans, an act there, a word here. His spirit was infectious.

When he was around, His Jawans felt that somehow everything would be ok. He spent most of his time serving others. Never asked anything in return. Even to those who were not good or fair to him, he would not hesitate for a moment, to do a good turn. This was rare. The precincts of his soul were always succinctly bright and shiny for all and one.

“Balan, we have two powers. The power of giving; and The power of Forgiving”, he would often say to me.

It rung in my ears forever.

In the course of intermittent interludes of time we moved in different directions in different career paths. Initially we were in touch through calls and greetings. Slowly the distance grew as is the case in the services. Not totally forgotten, but less oft remembered.

Decades later, I was going to assume an important assignment in Delhi. Obviously there was many people to see me off, and I guessed that many would be there to welcome too.

The power of Cane.

In a railway station en route that had a bigger time stop, I glanced out. There was a flurry of activity and soon I saw a uniformed officer get in with a couple of followers to accompany him. The dark window shades ensured that the Officer did not see me. They were boarding a person in a wheel

chair. They had managed a plank to facilitate the roll into the bogey. That was very ingenious and out of the inventory. They passed through my compartment and I noticed that the passenger had an artificial limb. Must be a battle casualty. I watched as the entourage passed by through the corridor.

But later I was surprised at the call of my name suffixed by 'Sir'. I turned around to see an officer weathered in time standing in front with the two followers.

"I have a hamper for you". His eyes were smiling.

I could not recognize the officer, but I made a smart guess that he was the MCO.

I looked at the name tab.

It said "Brar". It was quite a popular Punjabi name.

I looked at the face again, which was blistered by the vagaries of service, tanned and rugged by its rigors. The uniform was slightly faded and frayed, but could not be faulted. I looked in to the eyes again. The shine and sparkle was unmistakable. The eyes shone.

"Brar Sir", I shouted out.

We hugged each other. It was over two decades.

In the brief time that we had, we exchanged the past in fast forwards.

Brar looked at his watch. I told him there were five minutes still left for the train to start.

"Excuse me Sir", he interrupted, "But I have something important to attend to". He excused himself, with the promise of being in touch again.

"The battle casualty?" I queried.

Brar Smiled. He did not answer.

The smile was the answer.

Brar hurried off to attend to the battle casualty, looking back once, to hold my eyes for a brief moment. My guilt exhaled as a sigh.

He and hundreds of others like him were the strength of our Army. Upon their steadfast dedication and humane fiber was enmeshed the undying spirit that bound Our Army. Self less and **Able**.

“Why Hath My Countenance Fallen?” I asked myself.

I leaned back. The **Cane** in my hand, suddenly felt very heavy and unwieldy. I put it away.

“What Have I done?”

Both Able and Cane were me and my Alter ego.

I then re promised myself, to be the keeper of my brothers.

DISCLAIMERS:-

1. The story, all names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this article are fictitious and are extended imaginations of the writer and bears No identification with actual persons (living or deceased or in a state of Comma). Resemblances, that you may so imagine, if any, are purely coincidental and may have arisen from collateral pangs of unconscious and furrowed guilt.

2. Consumption of alcohol may be injurious to health (though I personally have no scientific evidence to support such claims).

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