

## A DAY WITH INDIAN ARMY

It was the morning of 23rd February 2003, we started from Dibrugarh to Guwahati on our way back from the Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh. After filling the fuel our white Gypsy speeding towards home. It was just 30 km from Dibrugarh where the 28th Regiment of the Indian Army stopped our vehicle. I initially thought that it is a routine checking of the vehicle but soon realized the difference. No, we were fortunate not to be tortured by the kind (!) military personnel. Yes, because well-mannered and educated officer of the camp Lieutenant (Lt). Dhananjay was questioning us. Being in an unexpected/inexperienced situation my junior friends Abhijit and Uttam were about to feel their pants wet. Well, what was the problem with us?

We were at a loss. Not getting anything in the beginning. But understood slowly. The Regiment HQ has been fed with information that we are having sophisticated equipments like GPS, communication systems and arms and ammunition and perhaps what not! As the questioning proceeded on all these fronts, doubts in my dark mind were at some light. In the camp all our belongings were checked from the socks to under wares. The vehicle was checked down to nuts and bolts leaving no space and gaps that can carry the suspected articles. All the stones were turned to find something in the vehicle and our belonging.

The Lt. himself was coordinating the search and even went underneath the vehicle to sniff out any unusual. As there was nothing in the vehicle and in our belongings that would have broken the rules of the land then the Lt became more specific. He asked, where are the two GPS that we were using. I was surprised at the accuracy of the information as we were having two Garmin GPS. Well, understanding the situation I did not hide anything about the GPS (Usually while carrying a GPS I try to hide that from the military people). Well, I gave my GPS to Lt. and told that the other one is of Abdul Wakid in Dibrugarh University. I thought that that was it. I appealed to the Lt to let us go if all were over, as we had to drive a long way home. It was already 3 hours in the camp. After talking to the Colonel in the HQ of the Regiment, the Lt took us to the HQ. Oh my God! What the hell would be that waiting for us?

OK, I was confident as we did nothing wrong during our trip and thought that it would be a good opportunity to meet the Colonel. We drove 40 km up to Dibrugarh to the Regiment HQ. Major (Mj) Dharamvir Singh and Mj Yashpal as well as Col S S Dalal separately asked several questions to us again. Abdul Wakid was brought later to the HQ. The interrogation (!) was usual and became extraordinarily normal as I talked to the officers. Interestingly, they knew about the Bombay Natural History Society and Salim Ali. We were having documents and reports of BNHS as we were on a survey of threatened birds funded by BNHS. The situations got more eased as we were even joking in between. One of the Major joked that Bombay is the right place for 'birdwatching' than Arunachal. I did not agree, and he elaborated what he meant those pretty "GIRLS" in Mumbai.

It was the same agonizing story at the HQ with our vehicle and the belongings in continuence. But was much more elaborate manner with the vehicle. Specialists from Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and military workshop were invited to do a through checkup of the vehicle. A few to mention: Seats were removed; all gaps were checked from air cleaner to the silencer, petrol tank to the engine, roof to the chassis and what not. To add more the tyres were removed to clear their doubts. Can't believe - Right? Me neither! Seven officers and more than 20 jawans of the regiment were engaged in the operation.

Our GPS were taken and maps were prepared immediately and laid over toposheet to find any unusual readings. Thank God, I always avoid taking a GR near any Army hubs or on important bridges. (Please remember this if you use a GPS) The Brigadier kept calling from time to time to take stalk of the situation. What a mess? Shall not the Army offer a prize to the informer? It was already seven valuable hours and the apologies started coming from the

officers for all this mess. The Colonel and Majors were insisting for the lunch with them as a courtesy treatment to the 'scientists' harassed unnecessarily. We denied but they were insisting (We were very hungry though). It was just like the closest friend or family members meeting after a long time. We agreed and had a good lunch in Army style.

Finally we were allowed to leave (after 8 long hours) the odd place that we do not intend to visit again except to meet the new friends for hi/hello. We left Dibrugarh with resentment for the harassment and of course pleasure of getting our GPS back and as well making of new friends in an unusual style. I pressed the throttle of the vehicle faster and faster. Reached Bokakhat (Kaziranga) in the night to find a bed for the night. Certainly exhausted quite a bit after such a long and tedious field trip. Hold on please. Let me tell you what my nasty "RAW" brain was doing all the eight hours other than answering the questions of the officers and observing the situations. Let me tell you.

I analyzed all the events through out our 14-day trip and tried to find out who might have provided the Army with such wrong information about us. No, not from a source to whom we did not talk or met. Must be some one who knows us and observed us using "two GPS". Yes, Yes, I found that out. Believe me, I bet it was someone whom I know for the last ten years and a friend (!) of mine, working for the army as an informer. A professional skill he developed with us (being involved in Aaranyak) and finally tested on us!!! What a way to excel and improve rapport with the Army?? How do I know that the said individual passed on wrong information to the Military? Simple, he was the only one who saw us using two GPS at a time, knew about our night halting plan in Dibrugarh (so army were waiting for us since morning only) and few other clues, all leads to him. Can I wish a bright career of such a friend? Shame on this friendship. We reached Guwahati a day later. Gave a courtesy call to the Colonel and both the Major. I thanked for their polite and kind behaviour (as we deserve).

By,  
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