



## LIGHT MOMENTS IN ENGINEERING

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One of my classmates called C.G. (not centre of gravity) used to emphasize the hardship in the training and profession of engineering through his much-repeated phrase - "wood-cutting is our subsistence, pieces of brick are our pillows" (translated). While such a grim representation of an engineer might be the generally accepted view, in my experience, however, all those days of study were full of jokes and humour. Here I have tried to reconstruct a few of those boisterous moments. Since the situation and the way of telling something constitute the main thrust of any joke, I have also provided with a few of my own sketches (inept though), for those who missed the incidents.

**Episode 1 :** One of my friends in the engineering college used to sleep almost the whole day (don't take it for granted that it was myself) . So he did not even care to fold up the mosquito-net any time during the day. Apart from responding to a few basic necessities of life, he was almost always found in bed under that eternal net. One day a few of his friends, in order to teach him a good lesson, made a big hole in his mosquito-net. They thought that he would be too lazy to sew it and thus the multitude of mosquitos, obtaining their entry through that hole like a Nazi regiment, would drive him out into the outside world. After a few hours, when they came back to his room to enjoy the finale of their sadistic scheme, somebody splashed a bucket of ice-cold water on their boiling expectation. First they discovered him in his usual state of deep 'meditation' and then they found out his masterpiece of engineering. He had not even tried to repair the hole, rather he had made another hole on the opposite side of the net and connected them by a cylindrical piece of paper, made by rolling up a long drawing-sheet. Mosquitos did enter through the original hole, but travelling through the excellent thoroughfare, came out at the other end : he was thus safe and sound asleep. The raggers bowed their heads and put a notice on the mosquito-net : "DO NOT DISTURB. GENIUS AT SLEEP".

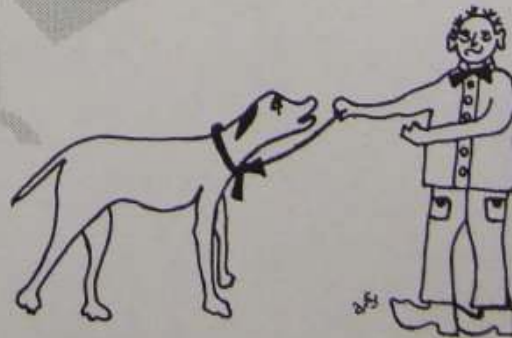


Episode 2 :

Ganapati , a first year engineering student, loved a stray dog and used to call it Bhola. He used to take the dog wherever he went and think very highly of its intellectual capabilities. Such an incident was most unusual in a normal Indian hostel, and very quickly both of them became quite famous. Some people started teasing him by calling him Bhola, his dog's name. One day Ganapati got furious at this insult and told them that they really should not call him in such an

impolite way. The students apologized and promised to be more polite in future. From the next day they thus started calling the dog Ganapati instead.

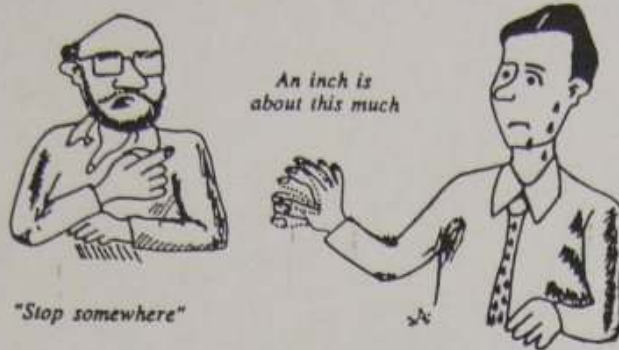
**Episode 3 :** It was a very tense atmosphere. The student currently being thoroughly interviewed was sweating in agony : getting the degree in engineering ultimately depended on his performance in that oral exam. He had obviously made some blatant mistake in a calculation related to Workshop Technology. Being clutched inside the Jaws of 'why's and 'how's', his credibility was spiralling down with increasingly more stupid answers. At last one of the interviewers lost his patience and shouted at him - "Show me how long you think an inch is". He was already shaking and the distance between his thumb and the fore-finger, in his desperate attempt to give an estimate of an inch, started fluctuating rapidly



Ganapati and Bhola : interchangeable names



between its two extreme limits. The person who asked the question was speechless, while another cool-headed Professor asked the student politely, "My dear boy, an inch is really a fixed piece of length, you should try to stop your fingers *somewhere*."



**Episode 4 :** A Forging class. Attentive students. You can hear only the breathing of the bellows pumping air into the furnaces and the sound of the hammers trying to shape some pieces of red-hot iron, taking advantage of their temporary softness. The teacher on duty, who used to think that every hole on this earth is meant for lubrication, was moving round the lab and inspecting the performances of his students. He suddenly stopped near one of them and got disgusted at the naivety with which the student was striking with his hammer. Casting a contemptuous

look, he said - "That's not the way a blacksmith works". He took the hammer away from the embarrassed student's hands and in an obvious attempt to demonstrate the right usage of the instrument, pulled it near his head and hit the iron piece with all his strength. As a result of the huge blow, the red-hot portion at the tip of the iron piece acquired 'escape velocity' and flung high into the air. There were whispers and sniggers here and there. Without showing any embarrassment, however, the teacher retorted, "Did you see now if you strike in such a way what a nasty accident may happen?"

**Episode 5 :** A sumptuous dinner at the end of a term. Most of the students were thoroughly drunk, many of them were moving in the metaphysical plane. For example, one of them came near the door of his own room, holding another fellow's key in his hand, and found that the key-hole had vanished from the door! A philosophy-prone MBA did observe the incident vaguely and advised him not "to confuse between illusion, delusion and hallucination at these crucial moments of life". Another student sat down in the middle of the highway running between the two parts of the Institute, thinking that he was sitting comfortably in his own toilet. One of my closest friends woke me up in the middle of the night just to convince me that he was not drunk. As a token gesture of profound sanity, before departing, he placed my room-mate's smelling pair of socks on the top of my mosquito-net, saying "I always told you to keep things in proper places".

But these were all going normal (hope from this comment you don't misinterpret about my state of consciousness), when suddenly I found a large group of people moving round a tree and shouting at regular intervals - "Leto, come down", "Leto, come down". Leto - I immediately looked more carefully and discovered a monkey-sort-of something hanging from the tip of a tall tree. I rushed to the spot and shouted "Ai Letoda, come down." Leto murmured - "I can't find the ladder". I wondered how he had managed to reach the top and asked, "Why did you climb up the tree?" A faint reply descended through the quiet layers of light and shade - "Wanted to be closer to the moon, I would like to hold it". I asked, "Could you do that?" "No, a piece of cloud has covered my sight". By that time that MBA had reached there; he commented - "Going to the moon? Unless you pull your hanging leg inside the rocket immediately, you may fall prey to gravity". Leto shouted - "Talking about relativity? Einstein is completely wrong"; and then he became romantic - "Coming here I find hopes, like mirages, always retreat further, the closer you tend to". Others, who were trying to lick the shadows cast on the ground by the moonlight, remarked loathfully - "Hah, Leto's bolts are completely out of their nuts today".



"I want to hold the moon"

**Episode 6 :** After attending an 'overhead' technical talk, we were taking dinner at Gradpad. Towards its end, suddenly a group of chirping girls, sitting around a table, burst into a paroxysm of laughter, while falling to each other's shoulders. I remarked, "I thought a flock of parrots suddenly started to fly together". Amaresh looked at me with a faint curve of suggestive smile under his moustache. I felt he was taunting me for my biased reaction. So I asked him - "Well, what did *you* think?" He replied - "It was as if a pair of wild cats (he said 'Hulo Bedal', which I cannot translate) were fighting over a tin roof". I realized why there are two poles on this earth. But anyway, next day during lunchtime, I was describing this incident to my other friends, when almost coincidentally, another group of girls produced exactly the same sort of queer sound. Akira asked - "What do you think now - parrots or cats?" Frank replied - "I think both. First the cats fought, which then scared the parrots away". The poles did not seem to me that far apart now.

**Episode 7 :** I had a carpentry class at 10 am. And even at 11 o'clock I was still on my way to the university, being squeezed inside a late, overcrowded train. I was kept busy in positioning my unfortunate head, a liability sticking out of my neck, in all possible directions according to other fellow-passengers' wishes. I was sweating in heat as well as in tension - it was very important to attend the class. Suddenly I felt an itchy sensation. At first I tried to ignore it, because otherwise I had to take the trouble of bringing down my hand through the most densely packed mass of Homo sapiens. The itching, however, increased continuously and at one moment I had to reach for my leg desperately. However, the initial scratching seemed not to work and I had to scratch even more violently. This time I realized the reason of the apparent malfunctioning of my sensory organs, as the person standing next to me, almost burst into anger - "Hei, who is the bastard tickling on my thigh?"

Anyway I reached the class when two-thirds of its allocated time was over. I had to spend another one-sixth to convince our teacher that I should be permitted to work. That day we were supposed to make a 'Dove-tail joint' (don't be fascinated by its artistic name, I don't enjoy any more the dove having a tail at its end). I took a piece of wood, fixed it hastily inside a vice and, for the first time, started to use the jack-plane to produce a plane surface. Have you ever observed a professional carpenter planing your windows or doors? The skin of the wood peels off so easily and obediently in their hands that you would almost think it is made of butter. However, the wood did not favour me at all. After some time of exhausting planing I realized that the far-side of the wooden piece was unduly thinner than the near-side. So what? - I went to the other side and tried to rectify the mistake: this time the other side became thinner. So the jack-plane moved from the north to south and south to north alternatively till the final bell went off, by which time the whole piece of wood was exhausted! We were supposed to submit the unfinished workpieces to be completed in the next session. How could I submit my piece of empty space lying between the two jaws of the vice? So I took a fresh piece of wood (which was no simple task) and submitted that as my unfinished work-piece! I was, of course, rebuked but so far as I recollect the 'finished product' was not much different from that.



*One side of the wooden piece became unduly thinner*

