

June 21, 1997

A TOAST TO KRISHEN AND TARA

When the word began to filter out of New Delhi some months ago that Krishen Sibal would soon be on the move again, not to take Lahore as he was prone to do, but this time to carry on all the way to England and the U.S., many people along the proposed route began to stir, rushing to stake out claims to his time and company.

Not so, alas, Ogden and Nat. Rendered overconfident by their long association with Krishen over years, their attitude was reminiscent of that of Sir Francis Drake who, when nervously reminded that the Spanish Armada was already in plain view, remarked that there was still plenty of time to finish his bowling on the green and beat the Spaniards too. Alas, how naive we were ! Drake's solution did not work for us at all. Instead we found that we had been outbid at every turn, and Krishen's schedule fully preempted by a host of ardent admirers with heavier artillery than ours.

So now all we seem to be allowed to offer is an all too brief visit to this quaint West Virginia Hill Station, amusing in its presumption, with its modest Dak Bungalow. To be sure, the plumbing here may be a bit more modern than it was in some Dak Bungalows I have known, but we have no servants at all ! I ring for Thambi, but in vain. He seems to have disappeared. What can one do ? The world turns upside down.

Of one thing I am sure, however. Nowhere on his tour of England and the U.S. will Krishen's presence be more honored and welcomed and appreciated than right here. We cannot offer him Sir Iqbal Ahmed's hundred tents and five elephants that we had at Kichha in 1960-61. Still less the private railway car laid on for us between Delhi, Agra and Lucknow. That car may still be running, but alas not between Wardensville, Moorefield and Lost River.

Krishen and I first met on a sunny day in May, 1959, when his Jeep rolled up before Fonseca's Guesthouse in New Delhi and took me for a spin in the wild country then around Delhi. He was a young Brigadier assigned as Military Secretary to Krishna Menon, reportedly because he was thought to be the only officer in the Indian Army who could get along with Krishna Menon. In any case, that meeting in 1959, in the Indian setting of those wonderful times, began for me three of the happiest years of my life. With the inseparable friendship of Krishen and Tara I truly found my home away from home in India. Always at Krishen's right hand was Tara. A distinguished former officer of the Indian foreign service, she was wise and witty, sparkling and warm, tolerant but formidable in defense of principle. Above all, always a lovely and dear friend. How we wish she were with us tonight.

Time destroys everything, but not while memory remains. Come what may, what has been will never be forgotten. So, may I propose a rising toast to Krishen and Tara Sibal!

*Ogden Williamson*