



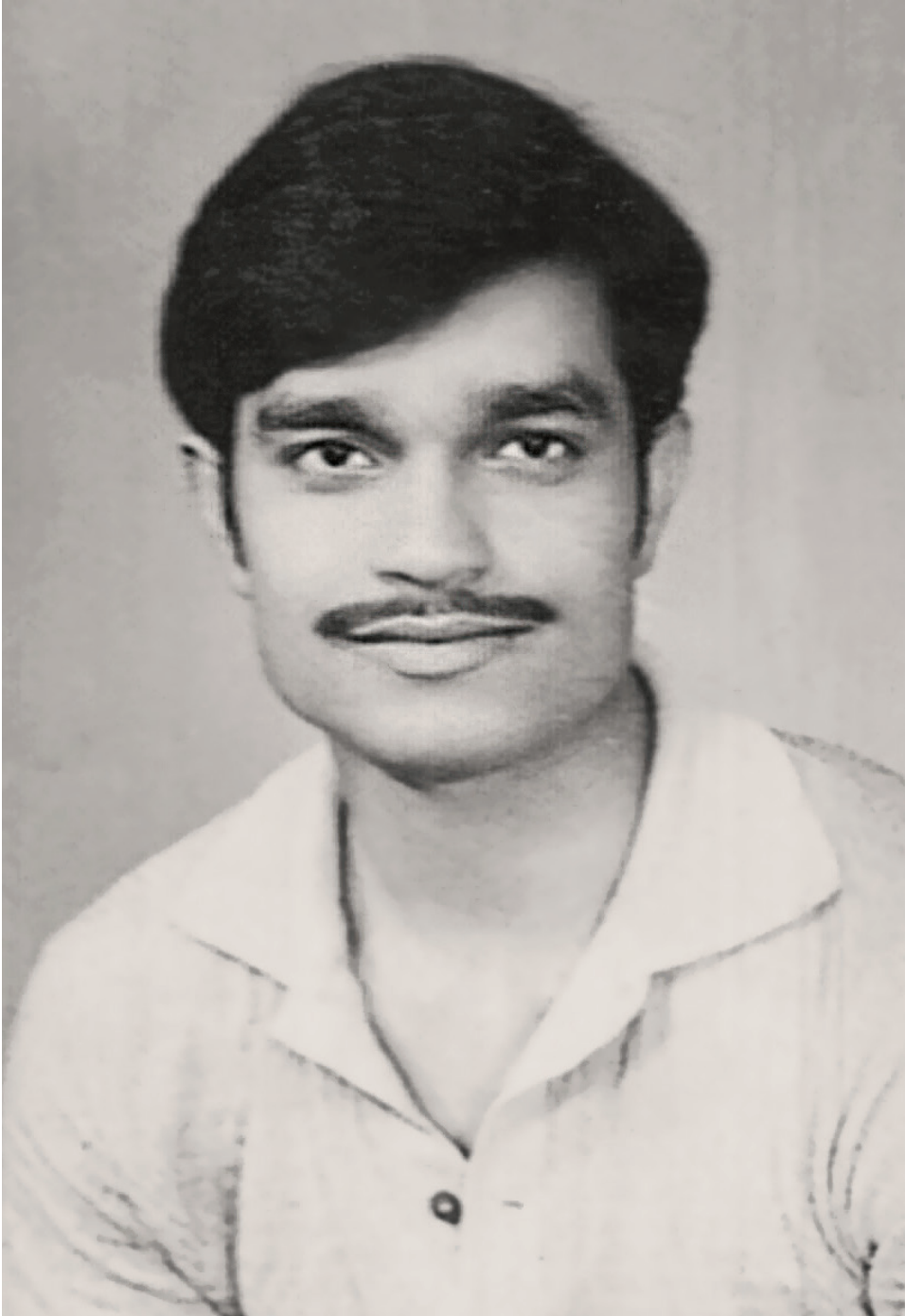
KRISHNA MURARI GUPTA.
LIFE STORIES FROM THE
BACKSTAGE OF POLITICS
AND BUSINESS.

CHINGARI

J O Y C H A U D H U R I

Once upon a time in Jamshedpur, when you heard the chant, “Loh nagari ki ek chingari; Krishna Murari, Krishna Murari”, you knew it was either time to shut down the town or the people had won another concession from the higher powers. This was a man who began his life selling clothes on the footpath of Steel City. He'd battled muscle power, money power and political power to carve out his own destiny.

This is his story.



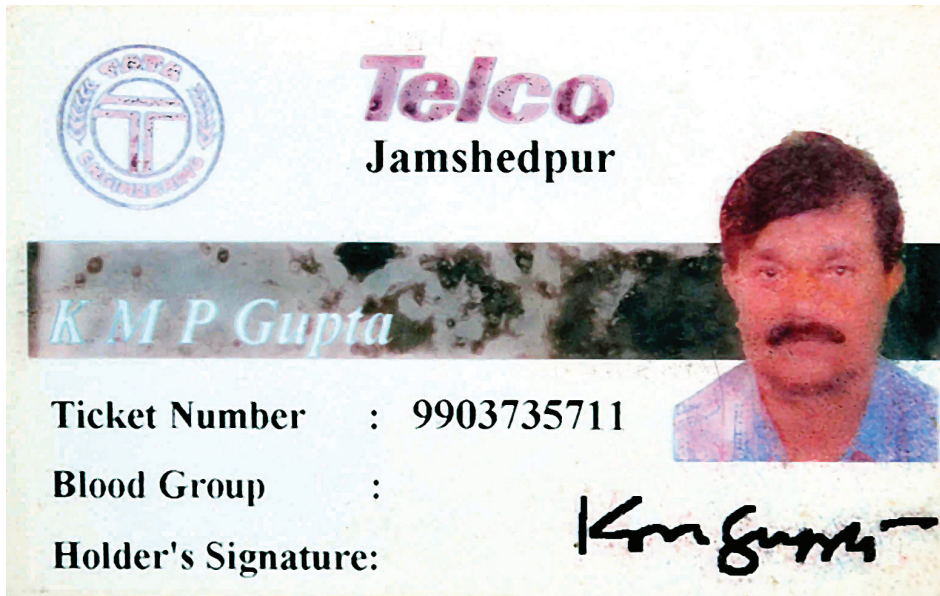
THE APPOINTMENT

MURARI WANTED TO leap up, scream like Shammi Kapoor and break out in dance with a full orchestra playing in beat to his dancing feet. He felt like running out on the street and hugging everyone. His heart was beating with the ferocity of a locomotive engine, but he couldn't move. His body was paralysed. The letter in his hand confirmed his appointment as an Inspector in Telco's quality assurance department at a monthly salary of Rs 151. It was a door to a better and secure future. In 1969, when a bottle of Coca Cola cost just 50 paise, a balcony ticket in a movie theatre was Rs 1.75 and petrol was 60 paise a litre, this was a good salary. After all the sacrifices his father had made, the old man would be happy that it was not in vain. He would be so proud of him.

Murari wished his mother too were here to witness this. Though she had passed away 10 years ago, Murari could still remember her face, the smell of her hair, the cadence of her voice as she called out to him and the tinkling sound of the bangles in her arms. Murari knew how proud his mother would be. He was now Shri. Krishna Murari Gupta, Quality Control Inspector, Telco.

It was four years ago that Murari had first applied for a job in Jamshedpur in response to an ad for a trade apprentice at Tisco. He was selected for the written test but failed to clear it. Not one to easily give up, Murari enrolled at the local employment centre in Jamshedpur, undaunted by the fact that it was a job reserved for the locals of the city. He had given his friend's uncle's address as his proof of domicile. Six months later, he had received a notice that there were 60 positions open for quality control inspectors

at Telco. Murari had immediately taken the train to Jamshedpur



The Telco company identity card of Krishna Murari Gupta.

for the interview. When the results came out, Murari stood 17th, which meant that he was in line for the job. But it was not to be. The Telco officer declared that only the first 10 candidates would be immediately offered a job. The rest would be called upon as and when a vacancy came up.

A few months later, another vacancy did come up in Telco. Murari again hopped onto a train to Jamshedpur for an interview with the workshop superintendent, where he would eventually work if he got the job. The superintendent was a Tamilian called Swamy, an old hand at Telco. Within the first minute of meeting Swamy, Murari realised that he was in trouble. Murari's knowledge of English was limited to his classroom lessons in his Hindi-medium school. On the other hand, Swamy's knowledge of Hindi was limited to a smattering of words that he had picked up on the shop floor. A brusque and no-nonsense man, Swamy whipped out a vernier caliper from his drawer as Murari sat down in the chair opposite him.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked Murari, waving the instrument in front of him.

Of course Murari knew what it was. There was just one instrument

in college that the teacher would show the students to teach them how it worked. Though Murari, or in fact any of the students, never got to touch it, they knew the theory behind it.

"Vernier caliper, sir," Murari replied.

"Excellent, Murari. Now set it to 2.5mm," he said, offering the instrument to the young man.

This was the first time that Murari had ever held a vernier caliper in his hands. While he theoretically knew how it worked, he had never used it. He tried to remember what his teachers had told him and set the instrument. When he handed the tool back to Swamy, the superintendent looked at it and declared, "That's 20.5mm. I'd asked you to set it to 2.5mm. But never mind. Let's see if your theoretical knowledge is better than your technical skills."

Murari waited nervously for Swamy's question.

"Tell me, Murari, what is 'least count'?"

"*Dravyamaan*, sir," he answered. His Hindi-medium education and the stress of the moment meant that he couldn't recall the English word 'mass'.

"*Dravyamaan*?" Swamy asked.

"Yes, *dravyamaan*," Murari repeated. He had just caught the superintendent's weakness and knew that he had to go for the jugular if he had to get this job. The Tamilian's unfamiliarity with Hindi in this prominently Hindi-speaking belt had put him at a disadvantage.

"It is the correct answer, Mr Swamy. I went to a Hindi-medium school and what you are talking about is *dravyamaan*," Murari replied, pressing home the point.

"Okay, fine, Murari, you have passed," Swamy declared.

Rather than expose his lack of understanding Hindi, Swamy had elected to take a quick way out and pass Murari. Even if Murari had given a wrong answer, Swamy would not have known any better. This ability to quickly assess a person's weakness and strength would help Murari immensely in the days to come. Some people had excellent oratory skills, but Murari had the ability to sniff out a solution. And it was this ability that one day made Krishna Murari Gupta the Quality Control Inspector at Telco's gearbox department.

This was December 1969. A new decade was unfolding in front of this 20-year-old boy. Krishna Murari Gupta's future was pregnant with promise. Life could now start. Unknown to him, this dream would come crumbling down just seven months later.

BORN TO STRUGGLE

KRISHNA MURARI GUPTA was born to Matuk Dhari Lal and Rampati Devi on July 20, 1949, in Patna's Tripolia Hospital. Krishna was born after three daughters and many prayers by his parents for a son. A year later, Rampati Devi gave birth to another son, whom they named Arjun. Soon after his birth, the family fell into bad times and had to sell off their agricultural land in the village and shift to Patna to survive. Krishna's father took to selling clothes from a small shop to feed his family. And then Krishna fell ill. He was two-years old.

Dr Mahmood Shah, the family doctor, prescribed some medicines and sent Krishna home. The medicines had no effect and when the fever had not abated after a few days, Dr Shah referred him to a reputed doctor in the city. It seemed that Krishna had contracted typhoid, pneumonia and chicken pox all together and even the second doctor threw up his hands as Krishna's health continued to sink. Matuk Dhari quickly went through his meagre savings, taking the boy to the city's best doctors, but Krishna's condition continued to deteriorate. The little boy was comatose most of the time and had turned into a bag of bones. Everyone was convinced that it was a losing battle, but Matuk Dhari Lal was not about to give up on his son's life. He had run out of cards and, in desperation, he returned to Dr Shah. The doctor gave Murari an injection, some more medicines and told Matuk Dhari that the only other thing left to do was pray.

It's difficult to say if it was due to the doctor's medicine or his mother's prayers that Krishna turned the corner. Miraculously, the emancipated boy started putting on weight and regaining his energy. Within a few days, he was back on his feet, running around the house and getting into trouble. Krishna had won his first battle. His father's