

## Highway “Robbery”

-V. Shiva Kumar, AD, APPA

“A case of Highway Robbery occurred on 22-05-98 at about 22-00 hours at Tungapalli Ammavari Temple, Machavaram village, Krishna District where in four unknown offenders wearing pants shirts and shorts, covered faces with cloth, beneath the eyes, speaking Telugu, armed with iron rod and knife, came in a numberless car, over took the car of complainant Kyanam Nagaraju, the clerk of a paddy commission agent of Koduru village, waylaid the car, broke the head light of the car, beat the complainant and the driver of the car and snatched the cash bag containing Rs. 1,00,000/- cash, took the car to the mud road near the temple of Tungapalli Ammavaru, Machavaram , tied the complainant with ropes and skulked away with the robbed amount of Rs.1,00,000/-.”

This is the gist of FIR in Cr.No.66/98 u/s.394 IPC of Koduru Police Station of Krishna District.

Three aspects of investigation are discussed.

1. The investigation of the case in the background of the circumstances prevailing at that point of time
2. The importance of simple **clues** in a case and how, when the clues are pursued quickly and with vigour, grave property offences, which make most of police officers nervous and tense, can be detected.
3. Professional and ethical dilemmas in investigation of cases.

The case was reported in Koduru Police Station in Avanigadda Sub-division of Krishna District. Avanigadda Sub-division earned notoriety for its political sensitivity and factious crime. Any crime, whether bodily offence or property offence, will be enveloped with political overtones and generates enormous pressure on senior officers as well as sub-ordinates. In addition, the incident was reported soon after the well-known burglary in Kanaka Durga Temple in Vijayawada. The temple incident had already hurt the sentiments of many people not only in Krishna District but also in Andhra Pradesh. The present incident reported in the same district had further aggravated the scenario and put all the concerned police officers on tenterhooks. It was a very challenging situation. The reputations of police officers were at stake.

The case was reported at about 22-00 hours and as sub divisional police officer, before rushing to the scene I informed the SP, identified the places for checking vehicles, organized vehicle checking in my area and requested the SP to instruct the concerned to organize similar checking in their respective areas.

The sub division being very small, had given me enough time to study the crime pattern in the sub-division for last 10 years. That gave me enough confidence to tackle crime in the politically sensitive factious area.

I proceeded to the scene that is located on the highway between Avanigadda and Koduru. **The road at the scene of offence ran from west to east and had a width of 18 feet.** Broken glass pieces of the car headlights were found on the road. **On northern side of the road thorny bushes and vacant private lands and on the southern side of the road a feeding channel running from west to east were situated.** I found the Inspector and other police officers along with the injured complainant at the scene.

It was very dark and absence of streetlights made it very difficult to observe the scene minutely. I secured searchlights and persistently observed the scene for nearly three hours. All the officers became restless but I did not give up the exercise of observing the scene in the middle of the night. The effort was made because of two clues.

- i) **No case of robbery or dacoity was reported in that area in the last 10 years because that area had only one entry route and the same route was to be used for exit as well.**
- ii) **The road was 18 feet wide at the scene of offence. Any car could not have taken over the ambassador car of the complainant because of a number of deep potholes and the adjoining feeding channel located on the southern side of the road.**

These two clues were enough to suspect the complainant himself. The sub-ordinate officers were instructed to take the complainant to the hospital but not to interrogate him as the effort at that point of time would turnout to be futile as the political parties were supporting the version of complainant. But we were keen to examine the complainant at the earliest and recover the property since the property lost was cash and it becomes very difficult to recover cash if time is lost.

The doctor was requested to keep the complainant as in-patient till the early hours by which time the political pressure would come down.

We were successful in our effort and next morning on the pretext of recording the statement of complainant we brought him to Koduru Police Station and thoroughly **interrogated him continuously for 18 hours**. At the end of 18<sup>th</sup> hour the complainant confessed that he along with six friends hatched a plan to knock away **Rs.6** Lakhs received from the rice merchants of Gudivada and accordingly his friends came in another car and at the alleged scene of offence they got down from their vehicle, broke the headlights of the complainant's car and injured the complainant to simulate a professional offence.

Soon, the case was altered to 395 IPC. The other issue that was to be tackled at that time was the recovery of Rs.6 Lakhs as against Rs.1 Lakh reported earlier. [The exact amount lost was not reported because of reasons best known to the master of the complainant!]. The huge amount that was lost made us tense.

The aspect of dilemmas- the joy of detecting the case vaporized immediately as Rs. 6 Lakhs cash had to be recovered. The efforts were not given up. We lost no time in forming special parties and dispatching them to different places. All our efforts proved successful and we recovered nearly Rs.5.6 Lakhs. It was a thrilling experience but we had to face the dilemmas – one professional and other ethical.

The recovery of Rs.5.6 Lakhs would really improve the recovery percentage of both the sub-division and as well as the district. But showing recovery of Rs.5.6 Lakhs would prove fatal to the case and the chance of the master of the complainant getting back his money would be minimal. It was a very tempting situation but ethically it was a dilemma.

The issue was discussed threadbare with superior officers and it was decided to handover Rs.4.6 Lakhs to the master of the complainant and Rs.1 Lakh was shown as property in the case.

Though the case finally ended in acquittal on 16-03-2000, police earned lot of good will from the public that, in the long run, strengthens police public relations.