

On Sniffing Snuff

Often we take many things with a pinch of salt. In fact, our diet is absolutely incomplete without it. But unlike others, my father takes everything with a pinch of snuff. As an unstopped snuff taker, my father's output at the workplace is high. When he feels a little sick or his health is not fine, he does not opt for *Chyavanprash* or other such nonsense (According to my father), instead he takes a pinch of snuff.

A tiny box of snuff is what he takes to the office along with his routine Tiffin box and office bag. After lunch, my father's friends gather around for a pinch of snuff which is also called '*podl*'. Those suffering from cold go not to the hospital but come to my father for a pinch which gives them a couple of sneezes. But for a novice, a sniff of snuff is enough for a sneeze, but for a seasoned snuff taker like my father will sit calm and composed even after stuffing a nose full.

At last, my mother threw the box into the dustbin. She feigned ignorance at first. But when he beseeched her, she told him the truth and turned her back. My father just went through the dustbin and found the box. He says, that he can live without oxygen, but not without the exhilarating powder.

I have heard my grandma saying that my grandfather used to prepare snuff at home with the finest variety of tobacco-powdered, mixed with ghee and other herbal leaves. When used to prepare snuff, the aroma spread far and wide. And slowly by evening, his friends one by one used to gather in the veranda of the house to taste a pinch of the home made snuff.

This habit caught my father during his bachelor days. Its still vivid in his memory the days before his marriage when his stock of snuff had ran out. He just casually mentioned it to somebody nearby. The news somehow reached his would be father-in-law i.e. my grandfather who sent emissaries to all distant corners of the town to get a big box of snuff of my father's favorite brand within minutes lest he displease his future son-in-law.

A snuff taker generally cannot resist the temptation of asking for a pinch of snuff the moment he sees somebody taking it. There is a saying in Tamil which means that if you accept snuff from somebody free, you cannot atone for the sin even if you visit *Kashi*. Well, so much for the snuff story, my father's coming this way.

- Sujata Iyer
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