

Oh, for the "kikar" tree!

by Manohar Singh Gill

My grandfather loved "datuns". Along with sugarcane chewing, they were the best recipe for strong sparkling teeth. There was a pleasant ritual attached to their chewing. Grandfather would get up at dawn, clear his throat a bit, and then saunter off into the green fields. Somewhere along the way he would break a "kikar" twig and, chewing it in leisurely fashion, would go about his morning business.

The bath would be at a well in the fields, where some conscientious farmer was watering his crops early in the morning. My grandfather's favourite "datun" was "kikar," but "neem" and "flahi", and even "tahli", had their own good points.

As one moved into the cities one lost the memories and flavours of the village. We grew up on Binaca "geet-

malas". The early morning brushing, before school and office, was a nuisance, to be rushed through quickly.

Chaudhry Sahib has, however, changed all that. When I staggered into the bathroom a few mornings ago I found no tooth-paste or soap. They had been locked up. When I pleaded with my wife she answered: "Soap and tooth-paste is for once a week from now onwards. In any case, why don't you go for a walk and find yours-if a 'datun'. The walk will do you some good."

"But I have to go to office," I pleaded. "Where is the time for this silly 'datun' hunting?"

She was adamant. "What was good for your grandfather should surely be good for you", was her determined line of argument.

Reluctantly, I trudged out towards the Sukhna lake. The city planners of Chandigarh, unfortunately, favour only flowering trees. These are no good for "datuns". At the far end of the golf course, with great difficulty, I finally located a mangy "kikar". It did not look like it would last very long, for half the citizens of Chandigarh were clawing at it like goats at a bush in the desert. I came back disappointed.

For once, there was no coffee for breakfast, and my wife had thoughtfully wheeled my cycle out. It needed new tyres and a punctured patch or two. But she thought I could have all that fixed. In her view if the Chinese could cycle to office, so could I.

She herself was busy negotiating with the milk and grocery men. To one she

was trying to pawn her transistor, and to the other she promised Beatles and Mohammad Ali records every week. I did not regret her decision, for I never did like Western music. She seemed to have driven a good bargain with the grocer, for apart from promising to maintain the supply of atta and dal, he graciously agreed to throw in a weekly chocolate or two for the kids.

Notwithstanding all this, I personally see much reason in the manner in which the Budget axe has fallen. But the ultimate comment on the nature of the Budgets over the past 30 years and this one was provided by a teacher colleague of my wife. Arriving at the school in a scooter rickshaw in the morning, and having paid a rupee extra, she exclaimed: "Does the Budget happen every year? I never heard of one before."