

A Life Amidst Books

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*Pictures are windows to any lands,
But a book is a door that ready stands
To him who will open and go outside
Where the rivers and plains are free and wide.
Pictures are windows, through which we look,
But the door of the world is just a book.*

-Annette Wynne

The Journey....

I am one of those favoured few, whose profession is also their passion. I hail from Mysore and completed my school education from Nanjangud, a pilgrim town famous for its Shiva temple on the banks of river Kapila. From the non-descript town of Nanjangud, located 22 Kms away from Mysore to Cuttack, the Culture Capital of Odisha, it has been an inspiring journey, interspersed with innumerable libraries and Knowledge Centers.

Never had I imagined that my spending long hours in the only local Municipal Reading Room at Nanjangud during my school days would eventually lead me to the library profession. Books always fascinated me since my childhood and I could draw solace and strength through books and was able to cope with the loss of my mother, at an early age. I had exhausted all the limited reading available at home, viz Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata in Kannada and was always yearning to read more...

The Reading room of the local library was my favourite retreat. I was introduced to a few

English newspapers and magazines like Readers' Digest, Bhavan's Journal etc., there. My association with the reading room fuelled my appetite for learning and going through the editorials of Frank Moraes of Indian Express, G K Reddy of Hindu, R K Karanjia's blistering attacks in Blitz was an invigorating experience. Learning stimulates and gives nourishment to our hearts, minds, and souls. It keeps us fresh and Vigorous.



In my small town Nanjangud, there were very few opportunities to learn more besides the school curriculum. However, I was lucky to study Sanskrit at the Samskrit Patashala and also Hindi to an extent. The Samskrit Pathashala's teachings from Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha, Dandin's Avanti Sundari Katha and Swapna Vasavadatta by Bhasa influenced me to pursue Sanskrit studies as a second language up to my degree level. The passion for reading gained momentum with the vast collection of books at my maternal uncle's house in Bangalore whenever I visited them during summer holidays. Works of Tolstoy, Chekov, Maxim Gorky (translations in Kannada) and of other authors kept me constant company and remained a source of great delight. Visits to the Libraries of USIS, British Council, the Institute of World Culture and Ramakrishna Mission



in Bangalore, made an indelible impression on me apart from enriching my knowledge.

Transition from Kannada medium at the School level to English medium in intermediate (PUC) proved a formidable task, but I sailed through the difficulties fairly well, thanks to the habit of reading English dailies at the young age and regular use of Oxford Dictionary. Living in the small town, or lack of resources never deterred me and I was able to access good reading material through the courtesy of friends and well-wishers.

Commuting daily by train from Nanjangud to Mysore, I completed my graduation in Science from Sharada Vilas College and post-graduate degree in library Science from the University of Mysore. While returning from the college, there were many days I used to miss the train to Nanjangud, and spend time looking at the books on the pavement bookshops or visiting the city Public library in Mysore. Visits to The famous Maharaja's Library, Oriental Research Library, and the Mysore University Library instilled in me deeper appreciation for books.

I graduated from the 1968-69 batch from MyDLIS (Department of library Science of the University of Mysore). Our department had organized a study tour of reputed libraries in India which proved an eye opener and provided much insight into the functioning of libraries. We were exposed to diverse libraries which infused in us the concepts of creativity and customer service which helped us to explore avenues to enhance reading habits amongst people of all age groups and coming from all cross sections of the society.

On Libraries and Knowledge Centers

My first foray into the library profession began in 1969, as Librarian, Govt. College, Mangalore, then part of the University of Mysore, which is now a part of Mangalore University. The library had an impressive collection of over 45000 books and catered to the requirement of a large number of students. I received much encouragement from the principal and staff and was able to encourage students to make good use of the library, by adding new books, re-organizing the collections and organizing exhibitions on special occasions like Gandhi Jayanti etc.

Working from Project stage to the Plant stage was a great learning experience. Interacting with senior management, senior executives from Human Resources, R&D, and Works Departments taught me invaluable lessons in organizing Libraries, Knowledge Centers and Documentation Centers at various locations like Training, Works, Hospital, and Town Divisions etc.

Providentially, it has been my rare privilege to be associated with setting up of Libraries and Knowledge Centers in the green field as a turnkey project. The task requires high degree of imagination, vision, knowledge, skills, hard work, resource mobilization, execution, adherence to systems and procedures, alignment to the organizational objectives, capability building and a sound teamwork.

Working in the Technical Information Center, Bharat Electronics Ltd, in Bangalore from 1970 to 1977, provided me with the requisite experience, for documentation work, customer service and publications.

“The world of work changes quickly. The skills that make you successful today probably would not be the same forever. This means that whatever

your specialty, it is at the risk of being outdated soon. You do not need a crystal ball to see what skills you will need in the future. Instead, actively seek out opportunities that allow you to develop new skills, gain different experiences, and expand your networks”

While working in Bharat Electronics Ltd, I studied German Language at the Max-Mueller Bhavan, Goethe institute, Bangalore and completed 4 year Diploma in German, which played a pivotal role in my posting as German Translator and Officer-in-Charge, Library in Bharat Heavy Electrical Ltd, Bangalore (BHEL) in 1978. I also completed a one-year Certificate course in French from Allianz de France, Bangalore.

My career path transported me from the comfort zone of Bangalore to the sultry Salem, to join Steel Authority of India, Salem Steel Project as a Library Officer in 1978. Working from Project stage to the Plant stage was a great learning experience. Interacting with senior management, senior executives from Human Resources, R&D, and Works Departments taught me invaluable lessons in organizing Libraries, Knowledge Centers and Documentation Centers at various locations like Training, Works, Hospital, and Town Divisions etc.

Innovative Customer Service like Current Contents from latest issues of journals, important articles on management and technical subjects, updating of Indian and Foreign Standards, Tender documents, Detailed Project Reports, Foreign Tour Reports, indexing of Collaboration Documents, Publications, Knowledge sharing activities won much acclaim from employees and senior management.

Let many libraries bloom!

My career path took a steady progression as I joined Tata Steel in 1982 as Assistant Manager in its Information Department and eventually

elevated to the position of Senior Divisional Manager and Head, Information Department. My long association with the Steel Company for nearly two decades, witnessed an unprecedented growth of libraries, Knowledge Centers across the organization and its sister companies. *“The soul of the library lies in its quality of service and its responsiveness to its users.”*

Today, you not only must read extensively in your own field to reach the top and to be successful, but also need to read extensively in other fields as well. The modernization programmes, technology upgradation, change management, knowledge management initiatives in Tata Steel spurred the need for knowledge intensification and knowledge sharing amongst employees at all levels. Quality Circles, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Delight, Knowledge Sharing, ASPIRE Campaigns and other Employee development activities focused extensively on employee learning. The success of the Information Department owes its credit to the enlightened vision, commitment to the philosophy of a learning organization and unstinted encouragement from the top management and a dedicated team.

Setting up of Knowledge Centers/Kiosks at the shop floor— a unique approach helped employees and workers access knowledge at their work areas. Knowledge Centers at the Blast Furnaces, Coke Ovens, Rolling Mills, Maintenance Department, Power Engineering, Tubes Division, etc. received enthusiastic response from the workers and employees. This knowledge revolution was contagious and Knowledge Centers spread across the organization and across different Tata companies and geographies.

Community Service

More than establishing Knowledge Centers, what mattered at the core was the spirit of service and



awakening the passion of reading amongst the young. Knowledge Centers served as vibrant family centers, instead of passive repositories of books.

Creativity was unleashed, as a new dimension to the library activities was added, with the setting up of an Internet Hall, having many computers. It opened doors to the young and elderly people, helped them access mails and also encouraged them to develop their computer skills. The spirit of youth, enthusiasm, energy and love for books took Information Department to astounding heights of popularity. It was a sheer joy to see families visiting the library on Sunday mornings prelude to their shopping plans. A separate children section was a major center of attraction to children and parents alike. High degree of social commitment, rich patronage by top management, steady growth of collections and user-friendly services, customer-care helped SNTI library carve a niche and find its place as a brand in the minds and hearts of employees and the people of Jamshedpur.

It was an incredible journey, patronized by top management of Tata Steel and ably supported by a self-motivated team. The principal architect for creation of Knowledge Centers in Tata Steel was Dr. J J Irani, the then Managing Director. It was a proud moment in the annals of Information Department, when Mr. Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata Group, inaugurated the Knowledge Center at Noamundi.

Rewards and Recognition

Recognition and honours followed as I embarked on the knowledge journey. Dr. J J Irani, MD, Tata Steel had advised me to modernize XLRI library. I was associated with the revamping of the Jamshedpur Women's College Library, Govt. College Library at

Mango, NML library, Jamshedpur. I was made the Convener for the only Public Library in Jamshedpur by the Deputy Commissioner, Jamshedpur and was responsible for its modernisation and upgradation of its services.

The toughest setback I had to face was the untimely and sad demise of my wife in 1997. As a single parent,

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bringing up my two sons, who were very young, was a challenging task. My children grew up spending most part of their free time in the library.

Attitude affects everything you do, both personally and professionally. There is nothing anyone can do to prevent you from reaching your potential; the challenge is for you to identify your dream, develop the skills to get there, and exhibit character and leadership.

As the saying goes "*Surround yourself with good people who balance out your weaknesses with their strengths.*" I could surmount my limitations and grow as a person, I am today, and the invaluable association with the senior management, executives, intellectuals, and technical professionals has largely influenced in shaping my personality. It was a joyous journey filled with memorable experience enabling me to grow professionally, personally and spiritually.

An exhilarating association with AIADA

My early separation with Tata Steel in 2002 put me in a dilemma of leaving Jamshedpur but providence came to my rescue with the offer from the Govt. of Jharkhand for setting up of a Knowledge Center

in the Adityapur Industrial Area Development Authority. (AIADA). From the Corporate world to the corridors of the Government, the journey progressed as I joined as a consultant in AIADA, Ministry of Industries, Govt. of Jharkhand in June 2002. The success of Knowledge Center in AIADA led me to develop a well-equipped Knowledge Center at Indo-Danish Tool Room under the Ministry of Small-Scale Industries and present a project report for modernizing the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College under the Ministry of Health, Govt. of Jharkhand.

Adieu, Jamshedpur and welcome JSL Stainless Ltd:

Jamshedpur had been my home for nearly 23 years and it was a painful parting, when I had to leave the Steel City in 2005, to accept an offer as a Consultant (Knowledge Center) from JSL Stainless Ltd, Hissar.

The concept of reaching knowledge to the shop-floor through Knowledge Kiosks has gained momentum and knowledge resources are widely shared by all units across the organization. Knowledge Center's reach has been extended to meet the information needs of other units located in Gurgaon, New Delhi, and Indonesia. Close synergy has been developed with other Knowledge Centers in Jindal Organizations to facilitate better knowledge sharing. Innovative services include Thought for the Day, Current Awareness Service, publications like Article Alert, Knowledge Update, Book of the Week and Selective

Dissemination of Information. As part of Corporate Social Responsibility, Knowledge Center has set up a library facility at Gram Ramayan near Hissar.

Rendezvous with Ravenshaw Knowledge Center, Cuttack

“To every man there comes... that special moment when he will be figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a special thing unique to him... What a tragedy if that moment finds him unprepared or unqualified for that work which could have been his finest hour.” (Winston Churchill)

True to the above statement, when I was offered the challenging task of modernizing legendary Kanika Library of Ravenshaw University, I couldn't resist and accept the assignment of Director,

More than establishing knowledge centers, what mattered at the core is the spirit of service and awakening the passion of reading amongst the young. Knowledge Centers served as vibrant family centers, instead of passive repositories of books.

Ranvenshaw Knowledge Center with all humility. To adapt itself to meet the changing technological trends, and blending the past to meet the future needs, Ravenshaw Knowledge Center (RKC), has been set up as a nucleus of the Kanika library.

Goals are tools for focusing your life, taking responsibility and getting you to take action. Achieving goals is just part of what is really important --- the quality of life you experience, the person you become, and the difference you make in the lives of others as you pursue and achieve your goals. The journey continues...