

Courage and Confidence—Gifts from MyDLIS

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In April 1986, India Today published a half page story titled – *Information Shops Keying Up*, profiling our Company and me. It was a story in the context of emerging digital information revolution driven by pre-Internet online. When the reporter who interviewed me asked about my educational background, I told him that I am a Librarian by profession. He said (incredulously) – “*How did you come to be in this business!*” I said -- this is the kind of stuff I was trained to do in our library school. Even today I consider that moment as a certificate of pride, I received from MyDLIS. This pride and the confidence I gained have been the driving factors of my professional and business life.

An Inspiring Beginning : My First Job

I guess it all started with my first job at Poornaprajna College in Udupi immediately after passing out of MyDLIS in 1972. Every bit of my experience here relates to my learning at MyDLIS. Let me narrate two instances: 1. how I managed to get my first job, which I consider my best even today out of my four jobs before I started Informatics; 2. a program that I came up with to catch the public attention to the library in the campus.

The Interview and After

The day before I had my interview in Poornaprajna, I was curious to see the library to get an idea of what kind of a library it was. My college library in Tumkur was the only library-like place I had

experienced before joining MyDLIS. It was the least inviting place in our college campus then. While entering MyDLIS, I was haunted by the kind of jobs I might get as a librarian which I thought may

not come anywhere near my father’s dream of his son becoming a Gazetted officer! I had joined MyDLIS as the only option left to pursue higher education then. I could not afford to miss it as I had secured the seat in the third-list despite securing distinction in B.Sc.



I was really attracted to the library building at Poornaprajna and began daydreaming, as if I had already got the job - *how nice it would be to start my career as a Librarian here!* It was a new library building in a large college campus designed by Prof. Pangannayya—my teacher in MyDLIS and my predecessor at Poornaprajna. It was Prof. Pangannayya who had encouraged me to go to Poornaprajna with some good tips for negotiating in the interview in terms of professional grade salaries offered in those days for the college librarians. Next day, when I walked into the place of interview and looked at half-a-dozen senior candidates in the lounge, I was not so sure of occupying the new library building as its



first librarian! However, the interview was exciting and I remember even to this day the confidence I displayed. At the end, I brought up the question about salary grade. Ananda Rao—a fondly revered Librarian in the region, in the interview panel was surprised and said I would get whatever scale as per the rule. I told the Principal that there were two scales –175-450 and 250-500, and I would like to get the latter. Principal, a bit puzzled, asked me to justify. My answer was - I have a professional qualification, hence I should be given this scale. I further argued that since a demonstrator in the science lab with just a B.Sc. was given 200-450 scale, I cannot accept the scale of 175-450. Principal smiled and said, we will consider.

I was happy but wanted to be sure that I was going to get the job. Before leaving for my village I knocked at the door of the Principal’s house. He was surprised to see me. Pleading pardon for showing up at his residence without prior permission, I told him that I wanted to know whether I was selected. I even told him that I was keen to join his library as I liked the building designed by my teacher, although I had already got a job offer in Tumkur closer to my home. Principal said that my name was first in the panel of shortlisted three names, and I would get the orders in two weeks if the Chairman of the Trust selects my name. I left happy that I was first in the list. When I got the orders almost six weeks later, I was shocked that I was given the lower scale. Pangannayya advised me to meet the Principal again and insist on the higher scale as promised. I met the Principal and expressed my displeasure and intent to join only if I am offered higher scale. After some polite but firm assertions and pursations, I was assured that

I would get what I was demanding. Next day when I got the order with the salary scale revised, my excitement knew no bounds. *Perseverance pays, if one is willing to take the risk.*

Reference Service as a Game

Preparations for the annual day celebration of the college were on. Several programs were being organized in sports, music etc., with prizes for

My boss, Prof. B S Ramakrishna told me on the very first day *“We have nothing like a big library here. Do not get disheartened. Go to all the faculty, pick up the books they have, catalogue them and leave them back with them. Meet them regularly, ask them what information they want and help them to get.* Perhaps Ramakrishna knew that a good catalogue makes a good library, does not matter where the books are. This understanding is so true for a Digital Library eco system.

students . My friend from the Physical Education was the most visible man in the campus as most of these activities were planned by him. I started wondering why there was no program involving the library. I asked the Principal for a slot for the library in annual day competition programs. His suggestion was to give prizes to those who have borrowed highest number of books. It was difficult as the two card circulation system in the library did not maintain that data. I was given the freedom to figure out what I can do. In MyDLIS we were always taught that a librarian’s job is to provide information or help users to find the right information. Reference Service was one area that had caught my imagination while studying at MyDLIS. The information service centric approach of the library that we were drilled about as students was exciting and yet intriguing as people came to library mostly to borrow books and ask for a book that they could not find in the shelf. I thought of

a game for students - select and display all major reference sources in the library; prepare a list of questions that could be answered through these reference books; ask participating students to find the source and the page having the answer for a question. I called this “Where to Find the Answer?” I was so happy when the prizes were announced and distributed at the annual day celebration calling “Where to Find Information” as a program of the Library. M V Kamath, the then illustrious editor of Illustrated Weekly was the chief guest of the function. In his speech he singled out the Library’s program and called it innovative. I was elated.

Fifteen months of my first job at Poornaprajana and Dr. Narayana Rao, the Principal of the college who was my first boss are deeply etched in my memory. He was a towering personality in the region and an Oxford scholar. The confidence I gained at Poornaprajana, thanks to MyDLIS learning, set the foundation for my later adventures.

L-World to I- Universe

I was lucky with my later jobs too. The next job at the Centre for Information Processing (CIP), in the Department of Electrical Communication Engineering (ECE), Indian Institute of Science helped me in transiting to a different domain of the library world. There was hardly any library at CIP-ECE as any kind of challenge to manage. My boss, Prof. B S Ramakrishna told me on the very first day “*We have nothing like a big library here. Do not get disheartened. Go to all the faculty, pick up the books they have, catalogue them and leave them back with them. Meet them regularly, ask them what information they want and help them to get*”. Perhaps Ramakrishna knew that a good catalogue makes a good library, does not

matter where the books are. This understanding is so true for a Digital Library eco system. Here I was literally a pure information service provider well on the lines of what MyDLIS wanted its students to specialize in. CIP was a defence project on acoustics and digital signal processing. Interacting with the scientists here was an interesting discovery for me that information of all kinds is measurable once converted into electrical signals. Here begins the story of information theory (expounded by

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Shanon) which is connected with the LIS world too but less explored by the LIS world.

Later in my next Job at the Smith Kline & French (now Glaxo SmithKline) I did very much the same except that it was a more organized effort directed more by institutional interest of the company than the typical individual interests of scientists in IISc. Research in pharma industry is information intensive. Smith Kline gave me an insight into the commercialization possibilities of information as a commodity or service. I recollect an interaction with the VP of Marketing, in the initial days to understand what I could do as his Librarian. I was trying to explain to him an SDI kind of an alert service, which I could develop on products that are his marketing focus. Nayak, his Market Research Manager sitting with him responded -- *Sathyannarayana, to provide him the kind of service you are talking about you will have to sit in the seat of Mr. Ferris for two years!* I felt let down, but realised



how important the domain knowledge is to win the confidence to offer the kind of information service we had learnt at MyDLIS. Information needs are intrinsic to users' work and hence to their domain. My work at HMT later was nothing much to write about due to my short stint there. But I had lots of professional colleagues at HMT including Keshav, my classmate at MyDLIS. B S Ramanand, my boss at HMT, was a very caring and kind hearted LIS professional. He was apprehensive about my plans to quit my job to start on my own. But he encouraged me a lot saying - *Do not quit until you find your ground firmly in whatever you want to do.* All these three jobs groomed me for the last job of re-positioning myself from the "L" world to the "I" Universe. I could take courage to start an information company in the late 70s with two friends as an enterprise which is now a public limited company called Informatics India Ltd.

Life and Times at MyDLIS

Our time in MyDLIS can be described as the world of Library Science with a slant to Information. It was still the Department of Library Science. We were in the main-frame age of computers then. But, we were given enough confidence to project and present ourselves as Information Scientists. I particularly enjoyed the social perspective strongly etched by Prof. Khan through his Library and Society course. MyDLIS is the place where my extra-curricular learning also started. Two things helped me here. First, I got an opportunity to work in the library while studying. It was something I badly needed to support myself and my studies in

Mysore. Thanks to Prof. Patil who gave a patient hearing to my need and gave me a chance to work in the library. Sixty Rupees that I could earn every month was a great support that I ever remember. This helped me gain work experience in all areas of the library from accessioning to reference service. I remember with pride that Mysore University Library had an independent Department for Reference & Documentation with a Senior Librarian (Mr. Lakshminarayana) heading that, something that is sadly missing now. Second, MyDLIS physically located in the Library building helped me spend more time in the library and explore.

One year moved very fast in MyDLIS. It was a very friendly place as the young teachers - Raghavan and Pangannayya, made us feel as if they are our friends. Educational tour was a great experience. It was both a vacation and vocational experience of knowing how major libraries in the country worked. I must remember two of my friends who are no more (Keshav and Gopaldaswami) who were a big support for me all through. I was the youngest in the group of twenty four students dominated by girls. Three of us - Kalyani, Jayashri and I passed in distinction. The classmates that we are still in touch are - Rajendra Kumar, Nissar Ahamad, Patwardhan, T N Prakash, and Manjunath.

I entered MyDLIS unsure about my future career and with a thought that I may have to do something else after working for two or three years. When I left, I was sure that this was my profession whichever way I position. Thank you MyDLIS for carving my career path in a profession that I have come to love to be in.