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Memoirs of MILANers

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Connecting the dots of my career: From Classification to Cognitive Sciences to Corporate Management

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My entry into the LIS profession (as is the case with most of us) was NOT by design. The only thing that perhaps connected me to the world of libraries was my love for books—and in a way got me into and out of a tricky situation during my interview for admission to the B.Lib.Sc Course.

I still remember that day of my interview for admission in July 1973 when I was facing the panel chaired by Professor P K Patil, Head of the Department and University Librarian. He asked me "Why do you want to do the Library Science course? " I responded, "Because I love books." He retorted good-humouredly —"then you would not be a good librarian, as you would not like to lend books!" He asked me to name the last book that I had read and went on to grill me about the instances in the same book. I learnt the art of interviewing that day—as an interviewee, be able to defend every answer you offer and as an interviewer, how to do a great interview without much preparation! And that has helped me a lot, as I need to interview a lot these days—recruiting students/staff for the two educational institutions that I currently head.

The initial weeks of my LIS student days were quite traumatic because of the loss of a very dear friend (especially since we both had joined B.Lib.Sc with the idea of being together) and also because I found the LIS subjects to be simplistic and not intellectually challenging. Almost everyday I would go back home, moan and tell my mother that I am quitting. And my dear and clever mother would plead—just one more day, give it a try and you might find it interesting. Finally it was our educational tour that changed me. After visiting some good libraries and making some very good friends (special mention goes to Uma and Vijaya), I stopped whining!

Ranganathan's books (I read all of them—Five Laws of Library Science and Prolegomena to Library Classification were my favourites though) finally got me hooked to LIS. My favourite subject was "classification" as I found it to be intellectually intriguing and thus began enjoying my LIS journey. Classification taught me significant facets of information science and management—logic, principles, and philosophy. From a young age, my mother had intoned the importance of logic (she is a BA in Logic). Studying Classification in LIS reinforced the importance of Logic and helped my transition to programming and information management.

I had lots of fun learning classification from Prof. Pangannayya From the futility of Procrustean Approach to Facet Analysis to Ontology, I owe it all to Classification.

Students of that vintage cannot forget the "when I was in Chicago" refrain of Professor Patil. In the bargain we learnt the two different pronunciations of Chicago! We not only learnt physical planning (how important a janitor's closet is and how in India we do not pay attention to the same) but also English Literature from Professor Subramanyam— who introduced us to Milton and his famous quote "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." Another important lesson that I learnt in life is from Professor Nagappa who embodied "humility is NOT a weakness but a strength."

Winning the first rank and Gold Medal sealed my fate and future with LIS. So from a reluctant student, I turned into an avid professional studying almost all the rules of AACR 1967 during my M.Lib. Sc. My master's thesis on "Corporate Authorship" helped me discover the "academic" in me. Professor Raghavan, my guide for the master's thesis after reviewing my final chapter of the thesis gave back the draft with hardly any correction and suggestions. And when I nervously asked, he said it is perfect and needs no improvement— transforming me from a timid academic apprentice to a budding researcher. It was my master's thesis that laid the foundation for my academic journey. The endorsement of my work on corporate authorship was when ISBD requested for a copy and I thank Sunder Singh (student of my first batch) who helped key in the entire thesis to be sent to ISBD.

My career began in January 1976, when I joined the MyDLIS as a temporary lecturer and thus heralding my entry into the beautiful world of academia. When I look back, two things stand out — despite my young age and inexperience, I was never treated as a novice in MyDLIS; on the other hand charged with many tasks and responsibilities—from

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developing the new curriculum for the semester program that was launched in 1976 to organising big academic events such as the Conference of Commonwealth University Librarians (South Pacific region), Mysore, 17-20 March 1980 and ILA Golden Jubilee Conference in 1983. These opportunities helped me discover and build my organising abilities. Professor Patil made me (then a young-28-year-old-lecturer) the Rapporteur General of the ILA National Conference much to the chagrin of many senior ILA office bearers! Though my association with Professor Patil started off stormily when I joined MyDLIS in 1976, it grew into a cordial relationship of mutual admiration and respect within a year. I doff my hat

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to Professor Patil for his magnanimity in setting aside old prejudices and biases.

My PhD research into "Relevance and Information Communication" was a period of intense scholarship

and helped me bring to bear everything that I had learnt from Physics to Philosophy into discovering the paradigms in information science to develop my thesis on the notion of information and study how cognitive styles affect relevance decision making. Exploring the phenomenon of "cognitive styles" took me to the wonderful field of cognitive sciences and expanded my horizon of information sciences to help develop an unbounded perspective of information—beyond the container centric view.

I am grateful to my PhD guide, Professor Khan, for giving me the freedom to explore the different directions of research following my very unconventional and unstructured approach to study the phenomenon of "relevance"; especially given his diagrammatically apposite systematic style. I was fortunate to have in Professor Khan, a research supervisor who had complete confidence in my competency and gave me the freedom to pursue my line of research. This unbounded and unbridled academic freedom sparked and sustained my exploratory approach to study everything in life. I am indebted to him for helping me discover and establish my scholarship.

It was once again Professor Khan, as the chairman of the Department who gave me complete freedom to establish the MyDLIS Computer Laboratory (a luxury those days!), way back in 1987 through a university grant of 1.5 lakhs for the removal of obsolescence in scientific equipment. By giving me a free hand in establishing the MyDLIS Computer Lab, Professor Khan practiced what is taught in management schools today—Google's famous 80-20 policy spurring innovation and entrepreneurship incubation.

My specialisation in computer applications through my stint as a "On-The-Job-Trainee" in Israel's Office of Scientific Information in 1979, IGSS in the College of Librarianship, Wales in 1981, and the Post Graduate Diploma in Computer Applications in 1987, led me to the then emerging domain of digital libraries in the early 1990s. The sponsored research projects, international linkages

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established during my Fulbright days as a visiting professor at the Department of Computer Science at Virginia Tech in 2000-2001, and my review article with Ed Fox on "Digital Libraries" in the Annual Review of Information Science and Technology (2003) catapulted me to the international arena. Though I never worked in a library, the Vidyanidhi Digital Library Project at MyDLIS honed my skills as a project manager and develop management practices. Vidyanidhi expanded my repertoire of knowledge and skill sets and gave me the platform to launch myself as an educational entrepreneur.

The tipping point of my career was organising ICADL 2001 under the aegis of MyDLIS, testing my leadership skills and organisational abilities in the aftermath of 9/11 and set me on a parallel career path of becoming an edupreneur leading to the establishment of ISiM (the International School of Information Management) as the first I-School in India in 2005 and later MYRA School of Business in 2012.

My Alma Mater MyDLIS—you seeded my academic career and more. I salute you—MA THUJE SALAAM.