



S.RAMKUMAR



STRANDOM

Live. Learn. Change.



STYNDOM

S. Ramkumar



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Intergenerational Knowledge

Dream Space Publication is grateful for the opportunity to work with Prof. Ramkumar on this STRANDOM book. It's our great honor to do this intergenerational knowledge transformation through this publication. The lived and work experience of Prof. Ramkumar will be a great source of knowledge and inspiration to so many young people who are seeking a path for personal and social transformation in the digital era.

STRANDOM is a very unique collection of short essays from Dr. Ramkumar's life experiences in the digital youth lens. This has been exquisitely described the reality of millennials and bringing the consciousness of a family. This book is a lamp to realize the love of parents, especially the love of father and grandparents. It rewinds the past to note down the stern love and emotions, we as a teenager at many times missed to realize that from our parents. The readers can position themselves as a youth, parents, and grandparents while going through this journey of STRANDOM. He has emphasized that the world of "Technology" how listening, sharing, caring as a simple act of kindness means a lot and how to actually stay connected even with and without social media.

The book critically questions how the conventional education system has shifted its priorities from learning to scoring marks in exams. It also emphasizes why people should set bigger goals and take more risks in their lives. This book encourages young people to become job creators rather than being job seekers and taste the entrepreneurial journey in their own fields. Prof. Ramkumar compassionately came forward to share his personal and professional experiences gained from India and abroad by meeting young people from all walks of life. His faith, goodness, and hope for the future are well expressed in simple and commendable language.

We highly appreciate the tireless efforts of editors, reviewers, graphic designers, illustrators, printer and coordinators of this project. This book in your hand/electronic device because of their creative and hard labor. We hope you enjoy reading the STRANDOM and join us on the journey of youth-led social change!

-Dream Space Publications

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Foreword

This book containing a collection of 30 thoughts, which spreads to different themes of life (and also interconnected) is an extremely interesting collection which helps people to position and perceive their way forward in the fast changing life patterns of today. It is rare to find these kind of books which provide explanations and solutions to issues addressed in it. What is more important is that the outlook the author presents through these are all positive, rational and pragmatic. He strongly holds on to the importance of values and principles in our lives: in family, society, education, and professions, especially in a digital era which is fast sweeping the globe we live in. It is pertinent to add this is exactly the need of the hour.

The author narrates the connectivity of the present world which sometimes reduces the face to face human interaction owing to the use of technologies. Technology per se is neutral it's the users who need to build an ethics of its use for development.

"The personal space of "listening, sharing and caring" should never be allowed to be purchased by a piece of technology. Creating congeniality in the family is a responsibility to preserve the order and function of the family in the future."

In the present world of stress and problems, he suggests not to view or see the issues "problems" but view them as temporary complexities that need to be clarified.

"The ultimate aim of education, formal in schools and colleges, non-formal at home and in society, should be to help in exploring and understanding life better; this will give the required "clarity in complexity"

In view of his being an experienced and successful educator (teacher and researcher) with more than three decades of experiences, his thoughts on University rankings in India, teachers and students are original and thought provoking. The tips that he gives in these sections are especially valuable to teachers whether they are employed in schools or in the universities and equally to the students enabling them to understand their roles to optimistically contribute more effectively to the society.

“Be prepared for the cycle of “Learn-Unlearn-Relearn” continuously for a successful life”, beyond the college or University degree is a pointer to real purpose of education.

Prof. Ramkumar had visibly expressed his moments of guidance, with focus on learning that will help in building our personality from many experiences in his life as from his father, from his guide in the United Kingdom, what he received from his grandmother to name a few. Many of the reminiscences are sure to bring back our memories of great minds who had guided us from our childhood till now. He highlights the increasing need for the present generation of how in the changing situation the medical graduates and other professionals have to orient towards honing their entrepreneurship skills with a mind of service and creativity.

His section on “Talking to teenagers” is again another insight which parents and children may equally enjoy reading and can try apply in their life. This will be more interesting to read once you connect with the “Success of Listening”

“Mentor them without their knowing. That’s an art of parenting. “A bundle of advice” at this age may not be well received. The best way is to “be with their ideas, and transform them if necessary”. Walk that extra mile along with their ideas.”

Lots of philosophical thoughts on God, time and events, leadership, missed opportunities and good for a better life (“Live that moment of “the miss”, and you are sure to be worthy of the world in the future”) and the retirement reminders given by a senior bureaucrat are all worth catching the complete attention of the reader.

Reading this book I am sure would result in a transformation in the readers in their way of thinking, the way they would like to position themselves in their lives, forming an opinion on issues, developing a philosophy in life and above all creating confidence in themselves in whatever they do.

Being an ardent reader of books, the author has mentioned some of the books that has helped him in precipitating his thoughts.

I would strongly recommend this book to all readers who are passionate of understanding what we are and how we need to move ahead in life - the book is for teachers, students, management professionals, mothers and fathers among others!

I would be eagerly waiting for the 2nd part of STRANDOM and wish the readers a wonderful time with the stray and random thoughts that make a lot of meaning and have a lot of value.



(Dr. J. RADHAKRISHNAN, IAS)

About the author



Sukumaran Ramkumar is an academician with more than 35 years of experience in teaching, research and outreach programmes . After graduating in Veterinary Sciences from Thrissur, Kerala , he did his PhD and post doctoral in Extension Sciences from the University of Reading UK in 1995. From 2011 onwards he is actively involved in entrepreneurship development programmes and is also the Director of Entrepreneurship Development Cell of Government of Puducherry. Prof. Ramkumar is a much loved and well renowned teacher since he first began teaching in 1986. He is a prolific reader who has a passion for influential writing.

This book called STRANDOM (“stray” and “random” thoughts) is the first volume of selected collection of inspirational and original thoughts on moving forward in life. At present he is the Dean of Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Veterinary Education and Research (RIVER), Puducherry where he has been a faculty since 1996.

About STRANDOM

Strandom is a word coined from “stray” and “random” thoughts. It’s a compilation of selected reflections on topics that are relevant, and exist with, and within us.

This is an attempt to understand ‘Life’ a little more, amidst the present, through different ways, for making it more meaningful, happy and useful for us and others.

The weekly postings that were read by many over the last few years, and the suggestions of compiling it to a book has made this happen. The unveiling experiences of the journey of life, the anecdotes and the learning from the class-rooms and life-rooms, personalities and events we come across, and the repeated retreats to books – all helped in this.

Living better and fuller in a given or “to be given” situation decides on “how best” we can move ahead successfully. Strandom attempts to throw light, in an ever growing “assorted world”.

New tenets of living becomes imperative with fast changing scenario in every field of the world we share. New methods of life cannot eschew the proven values of humanity.

The strandom are mentioned under various themes (though originally they were scrambled without an order on themes): situations, events, concepts, people..it’s for anyone. But probably the youth has a special advantage since they are front runners to lead and change the evolving world. I personally feel they can add perspectives to our daily lives and hence to the ever fast changing society, by stretching our thoughts.

I haven’t found a repository of human knowledge as like in my father, who draws meaningful experience of more than nine decades! The conversations with him are always exciting, opening new realms of discussions, and his acceptance of my thoughts added to my confidence.

I need to mention the efforts taken by Ms Meera Srikant and Ms Sunitha Prasad in helping to edit these to this form. Miss Sornambika Kirubasankar and Edison.K has etched the sketches for the strandom along with one picture by Kumari Amulya Rajkumar and Kumari Lakshmi Vinod. I am indebted to many readers who have given their valuable comments and suggestions on my postings, sparing their time in reading what I wrote. My thanks are to Dr. Siva Mathiyazhagan and the Dream House Publications, who were keen to take this up for publication.

The support given by my wife Dr. Vidyaa, and daughter Dr. Kaavya was sensibly significant.

Strandom, I suppose will take you astray, to further thoughts of knowledge and practice. It's a process of fusion and fission!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Ramkumar', with a horizontal line underneath.

(S. Ramkumar)

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TECHNOLOGY

Minding the Smart Phones

From 18th century Aladdin's lamp to 21st century smart phones, the journey is in translating the tales to technology. Interestingly, as many in the world possess this magic lamp today, that needs only 'a' touch to deliver wishes. Issues that the mobile phones raise in a society are myriad.

The advent of technology is rapid, revolutionary and unstoppable. When the television made its entry into homes and institutions in India in the 1980s, it slowly started rewriting the potential of information and entertainment. It started as a magnet that made family members huddle together to watch programmes. This reach widened when programmes and soap operas multiplied and the choices of channels increased, delivering across the globe via cable TV and dish antennae. As competition to control the remote of the TVs became the norm, many homes started welcoming TVs in every room.

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The computers became popular in common educational institutions in India in the mid-1990s. The fast pace of its penetration is evident by its ubiquitous presence in institutions and homes, with various updated models (based on memory and speed) and the laptops and notepads entering the social system. Along with them, mobile phones and the present smart phones/Androids also made their way in. Compared to the PCs and TVs, smart phones are more a personal possession, that is transforming to a technology appendage of the humans.

The iPhone emerged in 2007, with Steve Jobs declaring at that time that in one device "we will have the world's best media player, world's best telephone and world's best way to get to the web - all three in one." This might look simple now, but a decade ago, it was a daring revolutionary techno advancement of bringing the world onto a palm size device. As Friedman (Thank you for being late, 2016) puts it: a whole group of companies emerged in 2007. Together, these new companies and innovations have reshaped how people and machines communicate, create, collaborate and think.

Technology creates tectonic tides on any social fabric, as it can connect people, events, practices, ideas, feelings, emotions and what not, within a short time. The magic lamp of this century - the smart phone - opens with *abracadabra* (the password) and a touch. There is no need for a ring like the one Aladdin had to rub the lamp to ask for a wish. As it delivers the desires at a personal level, a great onus lies with the people who use this Technology on Palm (ToP) that connects them to their wishes faster than a wink. Eric Beinhocker distinguishes the evolution of technologies as “physical technologies” - stones, tools, bullock-drawn ploughs, microchips and the “social technologies” - the rule of law, regulations etc. Both these co evolve. Cutting the discussion short, he suggests that “our physical technologies can get way ahead of the ability of our social technologies to manage them.”



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The smart phone, a physical technology with all its advantages, often creates social stresses too. The sweeping scenario is making individuals to compete with the speed of innovations to position their “identity”. We aren’t born with our identity – far from it - but we are born with a range of abilities and tendencies. (Verhaghe, 2014: What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society).

Identity is always a construct that derives from an interaction between the identity holder and the wider environment. Its core is formed by a coherent

set of norms and values, the larger narrative of a particular culture. When they change, we too evolve in the direction of the new narrative with the new norms and values: Verhaghe, 2014. The smart phone is one of the latest technologies that is making people reinvent themselves - as father, mother, teacher, brother, friend, teacher, son, daughter, sister, grandparents...- to fit into the new norms and values. This is what I mentioned earlier - "Technology creates tectonic tides on any social fabric, as it can connect people, events, practices, ideas, feelings, emotions and what not, within a short time." This is a societal re-fabrication exercise that's on. Adapt to the changes rather than worry about what we have come through and what it is now. None can stop the techno tide; we need to ride it.

A smart phone brings the world, confidence, entertainment and information to the user at his/her will. Aladdin couldn't have wished for more, since he did not know more than what he knew to ask in the 18th century. Today the information highway is loaded with traffic for any user irrespective of the age or education of the user. They can ask for innumerable options by just a touch.

The wish, the desire and the need have to be carefully looked into before it's touched in the 'ToPI' Indiscriminate and innumerable options exist; the ability to discriminate and limit the wishes can change you to the Aladdin with the phone.

To end with an example:

We used to sit at home on the floor, legs crossed, a few years back and had home cooked food.

Then we sat on a stool and ate on a small table or desk - home-cooked food.

Then we ate on a dining table – home-cooked food.

Then we ate on the dining table the hotel food bought by our parents.

Then we all ate hotel food delivered by the hotel at home.

Now we eat food delivered by Swiggy from hotels to our homes.

Now we sink into a couch, eat the Swiggy food with eyes divided between the TV and the 'smartie' in our hand.

The 'smartie' leads us away into a personal world even in a crowd. All we need to manage are the wishes and connect with the near to arrive at our "Identity".

The Cell Phone in the Family

As cell phones become an integral part of everyday life the nature of interactions between individuals undergo changes. This is more evident and intense in a family unit under a home. The quintessence of “listening, sharing and caring” - the foundation bricks of family – is also getting influenced by this technology. Some thoughts on a few situations that are becoming common in families are shared. Accordingly, a new order of Family is evolving. Creating congeniality is about responsible use of cell phones in a family, and adjusting to the use of cell phone by another member.

The setting - a home. Family - a relationship that sustains by “listening, sharing and caring”.

The advent of technology has ensured that a cell phone or TV is an active added member of the family, taking time away from personal interactions between members, shifting largely to impersonal notations. People drive two wheelers in busy streets with the phone sandwiched between their ear and shoulder, as if the acrobatics is an unavoidable emergency, but for which existence would be in peril! That’s an attitude. Beware of the same attitude seeping into homes too!

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Two decades ago the common TV was a new member in the family and viewed in the common room. In a way, it used to pull the members around the TV, though choices of shows slowly crept up as an issue. With more channels coming up, the idea has turned disruptive, introducing more TVs into homes.

Now every member has an additional member to his or her name - the smart phone. As a one point edutainment tool, it is stunning the masses by its potential and is omnipresent. What difference does it make or can make to a family?

The personal bond between family members is quite important. They are experienced through the personal notations of emotions. They strengthen the trust and cohesion among members. Whether it's smiling, laughing or shouting, you are sure to have a response from the other side (not responding is also a response!). With the active presence of the third techno-member (the cell phone), the nature of these responses is changing. Each member is attached to the appendage of the smart phone and workstations mushroom inside a home. Sometimes the family members in a room sit, chat or talk on the phone, often without communicating or not-so-effectively communicating between themselves. This would sometimes confuse the recipient of the communication. (S) he may not be getting the responses as they should. This results in annoyance, worrying and anxiety... for the other family member(s). People tend to be rude!

The tech invasion

Some common situations in a present day home wherein the tech-member puts the knotty knots.

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A dialogue between husband and wife or child and parents.

Wife: "I told you."

Husband: "No, you didn't tell me."

Probably (s)he would have told him! But he would not have received the message because of being in the virtual world with the tech-member, and so would not have "listened' actively.

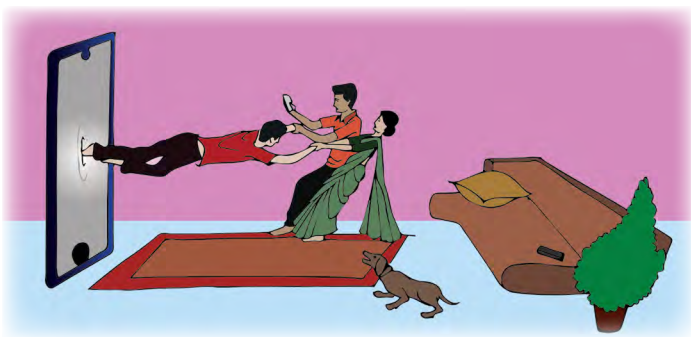
If this dialogue is extended with arguments and counter arguments, it's not going to be congenial. The tech-member (the cell phone) has the final laugh!

Prayer at home, which used to be in a serene subtle and silent environment (irrespective of religion!), now happens amidst distracting sounds. We need to start learning to pray amidst the sounds of music from a Radio or TV around.

"I forgot"

Many commitments to self, family and society slip by when we dive deep into the virtual world of “friends”, “likes”, ‘shares”, ‘images’ and “videos” which gushes incessantly in a cell phone. A cell phone is a battleground of facts and fiction. This virtual world should be conscientiously connected so as not to be deceived! Involvement with the cell phone should not become a reason for forgetting many routine commitments.

Day-to-day management gets sunk in the excessive attention to the tech-member. Repetitive “I forgot” is not congenial from the perspective of “other’ member(s) of the family. Over a period of time, this can lead to a lighter degree of insensitivity, which can affect the “caring, sharing, and listening” factors of a home.



Food connects a family. Whoever cooks, it’s important that the elements of pleasant emotions are also added as ingredients. The person may have to keep the cell phone away while cooking and serving. Imagine, 20 years ago, before the tech invasion, mothers or grandmothers cooked, served and persuaded you to have more food. This “heart in food” is losing its shine with the advent of the tech-members. (The discussion about Swiggy and Zomato is Not Applicable here!)

Children enter a world of amazing games and other programmes on the phone. They remain connected to their games while eating, drinking, running, meeting people and so on. More than the games, the nature of the medium , the cell phone, keeps them hooked. This affects the quality of personal interactions of growing children with other individuals.

Elders too may get involved in TV and intensively with the cell phone, thus reducing the quality time spent with the children. Some prefer the children to learn (or do homework) as fast as possible so that they can get back to the “virtual connected world” at the earliest. These result in eagerness and impatience in some elders/parents to see what they want. They want children to do things on their terms. The personal notations start changing!

Like computers changed the function of an office system, smart phones are game changers in the family. It's good as far as we are aware of this so that family relations in future are not entirely built upon the availability or functioning of smart phones.

The fast advent of technologies over the last few decades has created the present mix (segments) of generation from a technology perspective. The heterogeneous segmented generation (Gen) in the present day consists of Google/smart phone Gen, Pre Google/cell phone Gen, MTV Gen, Doordarshan Gen, Pre TV Gen, Radio Gen (Please see the section on ‘ Success of Listening’ pp 89-90) Expectations from interactions of the different segments could be largely different. Positioning of congeniality is often based on the types of segments that interact. The “right” and “wrong” are defined differently by people within and between the “segments”.

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The cell phone is like a “Genie” let free. So long as we control the Genie, it's fine; if the Genie starts controlling us, we will be shortly seeing a new family order and society, which many of us may comment as being not congenial.

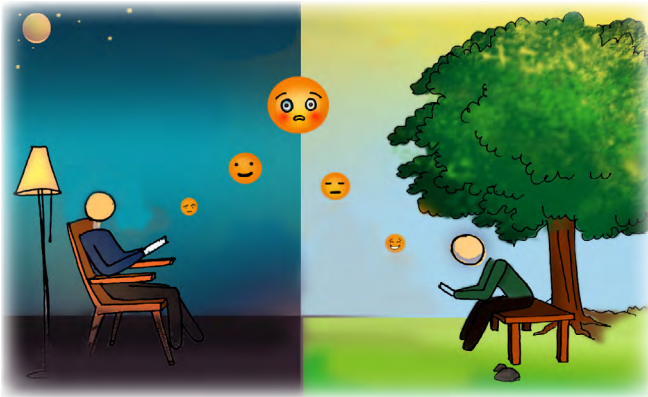
The personal space of “listening, sharing and caring” should never be allowed to be purchased by a piece of technology. Creating congeniality in the family is a responsibility to preserve the order and function of the family in the future.

Connect with Care

Over civilizations of human existence, communication has been a key element of progress. From sounds and gestures, this has moved to language and then to pictures, symbols and letters. Now we are in the WhatsApp (WA) era, which is growing fast to even replace the communication by word. This is a vast area of discussion. Some preliminary thoughts!

Communication is an amazing phenomenon that helps humans to share thoughts, ideas, feelings, facts, emotions and what not -- all of which can be scientifically termed "messages". It's a matter-energy exchange that involves the head and the heart of the individuals concerned, which in itself depends on myriad factors. The ultimate aim is to converge on and share the messages to move forward in life. Communication without verbal exchanges (also called non-verbal communication) is more dominant, and is in fact considered to be more honest and a voluntary expression!

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The present day of communication can be classified into a pre and post-WhatsApp(WA) timeline (leave FB and Google aside for a minute). This

communication through WA is bringing in a new language of message exchanges based on the 26 English Alphabets (of course other languages are in the picture too!) and a number of emojis...and other different emoticons as given by WA. Compared to SMS, it gives more life to the exchanges, adds more emotions and links the people in a clearer fashion as deciphered from the symbols/letters/pictures similar to the Egyptian hieroglyphics. In fact, it adds more non-verbal elements to the exchange compared to SMS. This tends to make it more effective, connected and lively.

26 Reading a message and making a meaning of it can be challenging, sometimes for a third person, whereas it's not so in an SMS. The context of communication has a greater mileage in WA: since it can make people interact at a more personal and intimate level, adds empathy, sharing is more emotional rather than academic, and can indicate moods -- all these make people experience WA, rather, do WA. Care needs to be taken especially when messages are being send to many (which is common) at the same time. This becomes more so for the pre-WA generation, who approaches it with some apprehension and anxiety. Consider two post-WA generation youngsters messaging; they are psychologically tuned to the same wavelength of understanding the emotions, accepting it and moving ahead. It need not be so if it's between a "postWA senior person" and "preWA junior person". There is a lot to be learned regarding the ethics of usage, especially the intention, content and personality, of the communicators of WA so. Alternatively, WA can also help in identifying the personality of individuals.

Like in any technology, the use of WA is tremendous, the scope depends on the people who are involved, and the output based on the tuning of the sender and receiver (so to say, difficult for a third person to pluck one sentence and interpret, especially the intent of the message). The use of WA is being discussed widely, interestingly sometimes as you find more WA "workstations in home" (father mother and son/daughter WhatsApping!), getting connected to a wonderful world, but maybe missing a wonderful world of interaction between family members. (as discussed in 'The Cell Phone in the Family')

But then technology always comes at a cost – social, economic or cultural!

WA (and new arrivals of Twitter & Instagram..) is replacing communication in a larger sense with its scope of multi-connectedness, speed, intimacy, creativity, concern and hidden empathy.

Connect with care. Care for the connected.

PROBLEMS

Dealing with the Daily Problems

The one message to be learnt and shared is: “Success in life depends on our ability to develop clarity in complexity.” Sequencing ourselves to ever-changing scenes of life in the best way possible! That’s when we improve our faculty to view the complexity (or a problem) with a clearer mind.

What do you want to learn and teach (if at all) in life?

“The ability to achieve clarity in complex situations.”

Life is a series of situations, complex in its own ways (some prefer to call this complexity as problems). Every situation is unique and dynamic, steering and clearing to the next situation. And complexity (situation or problem as we want to see) may transpose as we advance in time, age and experience. The key is to enhance the ability to find that “transparent, bright and clear spot” amidst the “cloudy frame”.

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Clarity is a product of “endurance, perseverance and balanced emotions” in a situation of complexity and/or chaos. The issues of complexity are different at different stages: for a child, teen, youth, middle aged and the senior citizens.

It is important to learn and teach about the “complexities as part of life”, “exploring clarity as a solution to deal them” and “never as a process of worry to brood on”.

Learn and teach others (especially the youngsters) on the principles of facing life in adversities (or complexities).

Fix the dithering. Learn to take decisions. We can’t avoid complexities; even if we want to, situations are inevitable and they will not avoid us. The best way is to have a mind set to address them. Think clearly before taking a

decision: if the mind is agitated, pause to regain composure and then look at the problem afresh.

Life is as what you are to life; it's what we make it -- a concept that may not be so comprehensible for children and youth. The simple message should be to understand your abilities and aspirations and work well through life. Life will discover you.

Some people say how life has been unfair to them with lots of worries and challenges. The concern looks genuine. However, it's also important to reflect on the abilities given to us by life to address these complexities. We need to learn or be taught, and teach this capacity to others. That helps us to steer through life in difficult or complex situations. Rationality needs to be redeemed in life.



The cloud of worry, anxiety and anger affects clarity, creating a delusion of dead end. Do not believe in dead ends, they are the passing phases through the temporary dark tunnels, always opening to the daylight waiting just round the corner. Look beyond the clouds; you can discern the light at the end of the tunnel.

Life is joyful, but joy cannot be experienced unless sorrow is known. But then, the sorrow (if seen as a complexity) has to be viewed as a part of life, understood and addressed to come out and move forward.

Try to see the complexity as an outsider, as a third person. Viewing from outside gives better insights of comprehending certain universal truths

applied to our situations. It helps to get separate strands of solutions from the otherwise coagulated complexity.

Losing the near and dear is a sorrow; parting with kith and kin can cause gloom; strained relationships are stressful – all these are examples of the compulsory packages of life.

What is to be understood by us, and explained to the next generation, is that all these will happen in life. Losing, parting, straining.... Clarity is the ability to cope with these and that decides the success. We need to accept these, and move through these complexities with endurance and determination (in one way, it is emotional intelligence). This ability helps us to sail smoothly from one shore of the sea to another. This boat's sail is made of "values and beliefs" that we strongly uphold, aimed at the good of the globe.

Building the ability to create clarity in a situation (a self-driven quality) is often influenced by the people and examples around us (family, friends, teachers, media...). To listen to those that will add clarity and to weed out the ones that perpetrate complexity, is a message of life that we need to heed from early years.

The ultimate aim of education, formal in schools and colleges, non-formal at home and in society, should be to help in exploring and understanding life better; this will give the required "clarity in complexity"

Turbulent Feelings

One way of balancing life is “finding ways with emotions” as we pass through. Life prepares us with a chronological age (determined by the date of birth); and an omnipresent, emotional age from infancy to old age. There are various theories of emotions from different perspectives, viz., psychological, philosophical, sociological and so on. The purpose of this article is not to look into those, but to deduce how life grooms us to be emotionally mature and prepared (if at all!). This can help us tide over the tough turbulences in life.

As infants we have expressed emotions – unlimited, true, straight and unfiltered; the expressions of joy or despair; pain or pleasure, anger or aggression that are vividly reflected on the face or the movements of body. As we grow up, the emotions, though the same, get limited, sometimes untrue, and filtered to suit contexts (situations), people and one’s own state of mind.

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The famous philosopher Descartes (1596-1650) suggested six primary categories for passions - wonder, love, hate, desire, joy and sorrow - which he calls as passive states of the soul. Paul Ekman classified six emotions – anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. Many number of combinations

of emotions with these categories is possible. They are far more in number and nature than the “emojis” that we depend on in the technology age.

If we look at our past and the present, we will realize that learning to manage the emotions is crucial for steering our life to the unknown shore of life! Our life, from infancy, childhood, teenage to youth and old age (the classification can be different for each of us) is spent on emotions and managing them. The first years up to youth are a gainful period, learning to filter emotions and expressing them, often controlled by parents and teachers. The energy and youth are spent in search of directions in life, finding identity – all add to this learning. The later years make us gradually fit to express our emotions.

As we advance in age, we need to gain greater emotional maturity. We start losing people we care for, face conflicts that need to be resolved, deal with health issues, need to groom growing relationships, think about the meaning of life, handle shocks, disbeliefs and so on. This is amidst the gains and gaiety we have in work, family and society. But then, over the first three decades, life should have prepared us for the “emotional seasoning”. Emotions exist, but we learn to manage them.

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Cogito ergo sum: I think therefore I am. As we age, we start thinking (if not early), exploring, understanding and assessing our definition of life (which gets modified too). We may get hurt by an unexpected situation or comments that make us sad. But we may not cry. (We learnt not to cry for a chocolate when we are 30, as we did when we were 3 years old.). The emotional outlet is then based on you, others and the situation. This is natural “emotional seasoning” that life has given us to prepare as we advance in life. Life gives us the emotions, and the age and experience to manage them! We learn the choice of expressing happiness, dislike, pain, pleasure, sorrow and joy-discreetly over time. This is the “emotional balance sheet” you carry with you always that balances life.

EDUCATION

Universities in the first 200 Global ranking: An Indian perspective

One of the major concerns often discussed, is that Indian Universities generally do not get ranked among the top 200 Global Universities.

Point 2 – Clearly, we need to improve the quality at different levels within and outside the Universities.

Point 1 – More importantly, India was left with the consequences of the long years of colonial rule. The development that India made in different fields from 1947 to 2018 is remarkable, though one can argue it could have been better.

The ranking of Indian Universities as against the Universities of developed nations needs to be viewed based on the Indian context, from what we inherited (good and bad) and how we addressed these in the field of Education. If we add a few more yardsticks such as the entry of underprivileged, women, the poor and the rural people, then the Universities of India will have to be ranked higher. The performance of any University is linked to the structure and function of the society it exists in.

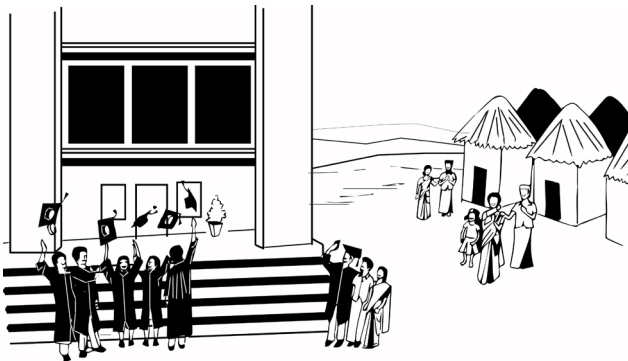
If the two concerns are taken care of, I am sure that many of our higher educational institutes/universities would be among the top 100 of the world. The yardsticks make the various steps of the ladder.

Mind the steps!

After my address to PG students of Arts & Sciences at Bangalore University in their Senate Hall in 2013 on the challenges faced by higher education sector, a student asked as to why Indian Universities are not counted among the top 200 of the world. This triggered a long and insightful debate.

Educationists and policy makers have been suggesting methods for Indian Universities/Institutes to improve their ranking. This article attempts to capture the context of education in India to understand the “unseen” and often “invisible” good outputs of education, lost amidst the attempts to be considered a winner in the global rank race.

There is a lot of room for improvement in quality of Higher Education institutions, which many are trying to achieve. These improvements inside a University are context-based, dependent on the society in which they function. Media reports reveal their increasing relevance in the present times. What ails our educational institutions (nurturing institution of excellence is a slow and painstaking process) in Business Line July, 24th 2018 by Dilip Ahuja and the thoughts of Raghuram Rajan, an academician and former RBI Governor, in the Business Line on July 25, 2018 are just two examples to quote.



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Mr. Rajan mentions that we need to revolutionize education and that “India could make huge strides in education. Raw material in the form of children were available in plenty and good quality. They could be moulded. Despite the problems of malnutrition, poor school and collegiate education, the raw material was useable and fresh. Even if they get a moderate education, you can still do great things with them.” He proceeded to give creative ideas for this.

Refer to my point 2 earlier: Universities need to make lot of qualitative charges in areas such as the pedagogy, performance indices, content,

interdisciplinary researches, attitude to science and society, need-based research, reformed examination systems etc., to be in the forefront of the Global University Rankings.

However, I feel that not ranking high in a list of Universities that is charted based on internationally set yardstick of higher education should not be a cause for concern; no doubt, it can be a motive to address point one!

For e.g., The “Times Higher Education World Ranking of Universities” has designed the performance indicators of Teaching (30%), Research (30%), Citation (30%), International Outlook (7.5%) and Industry Income (2.5%)—refer www.TimesHigherEducation.com. Each of these is calculated with different criteria. For instance, Teaching has components of staff to student ratio, doctorate to bachelors’ ratio and Institutional income. The implications of these have different degrees of importance in different countries.

India is unique in different ways. The fabric of the Indian Society is rich in its years of culture and diversity; unique in its socio-economic platform on equalities; modelled as the largest successful democracy; and, above all, the second most populous nation of the globe. The development of every society (at a macro level) and identity of every individual in a society (micro level) are dependent on the “baggage of the culture and civilization history” it carries. Education has a lot to do with fitting into the setting, culture or heritage.

“Education is the perfecting of life - the enrichment of the individual by the heritage of the race. Let this vital process of transmission and absorption be interrupted for half a century, and civilization would end, our grandchildren would be more primitive than savages,” Will Durant: 2014 “Fallen Leaves: Last Words on Life, Love War and God”.

This vision is an example for the macro level identity.

Swami Vivekananda’s advice, “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man”, is relevant and simple in making us realize the “micro level” identity of individuals.

Very few countries can claim the historical heritage that India has. This is a very broad area of discussion. To make it as simple (which in reality is as complex as the Universe which Stephen Hawking was astonished to explore and reveal), we can start from a portion of history that suits the discussion on ranking of Universities.

India was ruled by the British (leaving the long history of the pre-British Indian era, which have contributed the Nalanda and Takshasila to the world, Gurukul system, community schools etc.) and in 1947, we were left with a “colonized education system” of more than 200 years. The great visionary leaders of Indian Independence, in their attempt to rebuild India, have toiled a great deal for the growth and development (from a socio-economic perspective) of our nation. Education had a vital role in it. The context included the “wealth of the culture and civilization” like caste, religion, class, tribe – ultimately we wanted inclusion of the poor and the downtrodden (to address poverty and adopt democracy) in nation building. Gandhian thought of “compulsory school education” aimed at inclusive development (and nutrition), was a concept from a visionary who knew how best education could help India develop, especially after the British rule.

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Education played and plays a vital role in this take off from 1947.

Minoo Masani, in his book *Our India in 1941*, narrates the great richness and diversity of India amidst 16.1% of literacy. We moved from this to 74% literacy in 2011. As Amartya Sen says: “Illiteracy and innumeracy are major deprivations – profound “unfreedom” as their own. Not to be able to read, write and count makes a person less free to have control over one’s life.” British rule left us with that illiteracy in 1947.

Adam Szirmai (1997) in his book *Education and Development: the Dynamics of Socio Economic Development, An Introduction*, observes that Education tends to be academically oriented and has little relationships with the life situations of most students.

I shall share a few points of Amartya Sen (devoid of his stylistic explanation!) to support my thoughts.

This is from his article (one among the many he wrote on development issues specific to India) on Sunlight and Other Fears: the Importance of School Education in The Country of First Boys (2015), where he asks, 'What's the point of going to school?'

a. Basic education can be very important in helping people get jobs and have gainful employment.

b. Schooling is not only an educational occasion, it is also a "social opportunity" to come out of one's home, and to meet others, who come from different families, have dissimilar values and have knowledge of disparate walks of life.

c. When their ability to understand and invoke their legal rights can be very limited.

d. Illiteracy can also muffle the political voice of the underdog and thus contribute directly to their insecurity.

e. The respect and regard for women's well-being is strongly influenced by such variables as women's ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership rights, and to have literacy and be educated participants in decisions within and outside the family. (This has direct connection to reduced mortality rates and positive health building in family too.)

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How many of the top ranked Global Universities (majority in the so called developed countries) have gone through a similar process of Nation building as given in the Indian context?

From 1947 to 2018, India has consistently progressed in all the "a" to "e" factors as mentioned above by Amartya Sen (though one can arguably ask for more efficient outcomes) for which education was pivotal. The ones who have gone through school education - many of them underprivileged; girls and boys, poor & rich; rural & urban - enter colleges. This is one of our important yardsticks on progress of education: the number of universities and colleges after independence and the students enrolled in them.

As mentioned in the beginning of point 2, Raghuram rightly says, “The raw materials in the form of children were availableand they could be moulded.”

We could achieve that with the vision and implementation of reforms in the education sector from Shri Jawaharlal Nehru to Shri Narendra Modi.

India is showing development in terms of socio-economic parameters though challenges vary as decades change.

What did the British rule leave us with?

1. An examination system rather than an Education system.

The Hunter Commission constituted by the UK Parliament direction in 1882 has observed that there is no education system in India but only examination system. Students are being prepared for examinations to get a degree certificate to get a job and the prestige in society. The Kothari Commission report of 1952 endorsed the views. The education system in the UK (during colonial rule in India) gave importance to character building and overall personality development to face real life situations, while in India it was based on getting a certificate for getting a job.

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2. Macaulay introduced English education in India in 1835 and this system created a class of anglicized Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and the Indians. Though years have passed by, Miniya Chatterji in her book ‘Indian Instincts: Essays on Freedom and Equality in India’ (2018) discusses the feeling of some of the Indian parents even today: “...the generation that does not speak English wants their children to do so. Education is an asset that has changed fortunes-parents who have not had any know its value and push their children towards it.” And Macaulay prevails!

3. British Higher education system did little to promote analytical capabilities or creative thinking and certainly no independence of mind. It produced a group of graduates with a better than basic knowledge in English, inadequate in ninety percent of the cases to hold one’s own with an English man, but adequate to get a clerical position in the lower rungs of Government

service(Shashi Tharoor-2016‘An Era of Darkness: the British Empire in India’, p 223).

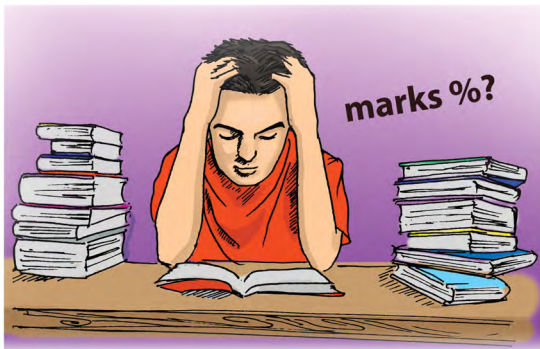
Therefore, before dismissing the Indian Universities offhand for not featuring among the Top 200, we must first measure its success based on the Indian indices and context.

Tethered Education

As we move through time, crossing events, becoming a symbol of the future, called history, one thing that remains constant is the examination system.

The essence of education as a process to help learners -- to control life, enjoy life and ultimately to understand life (Will Durrant, *Fallen Leaves*)-- is largely replaced by the changing priority of scoring well in examinations. This has defaced the beautiful concept of education, which is now tied to the stub of examination. It revolves around that.

46 Education, especially higher education, is an opportunity that a learner searches for and indulges in purposefully. A person chooses higher education for the purpose of learning and exploring (that is why we have Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) for all subjects, be it history, physics, biotechnology, English or history). However in our educational systems, getting a degree or diploma is linked with finding jobs – in fact, we pursue a degree or diploma only to get a job. Nothing wrong in that, but learning is often hindered by thoughts of job and examinations.



We have forgotten what curiosity and originality are. Richard Gerver (a

school headmaster), in his book *Change*, mentions how curious a child is from the time (s)he starts speaking, asking why, how, what when and so on. Once the child is admitted in the school, you can observe that after a few years, the number of questions the child raises is less or nil. He has learned to be “uniform” with the class, sacrificing his or her “diverse” talents, which the examination system does not encourage. Rousseau says that “education comes to us from nature, from men or other things.” He is regarding nature as equivalent to an endowment – the inherited dispositions and capacities of the individual. All great educationists from Socrates, Loyola, Freebel to Dewey endorse a similar new. The Bhagavad Gita is a typical example of confronting a problem with the management solutions offered by Lord Krishna. Arjuna, though, doesn’t get a certificate for that!, and the teachings of divine Jesus is another example of enlightening through words of wisdom.

Read the above observations with that of Thomas Friedman (*Thank You for Being Late*, 2016): “We entered a world (around 2007) where connectivity was fast, free, easy for you and ubiquitous and handling complexity became fast, free and easy for you, and invisible.” This points to the need for synthesizing the Zeitgeisten summaries of education though different ages to the phantasmagorical technology-era we live in now. It is important to have a method of evaluation other than examination in this fast changing technological world to liberate the mind of learners to focus on the joy of learning rather the pains and anxiety of examination. The children are so conditioned from 1st standard to this unpleasant experience of examination, which takes away the joy and fun of real education.

(What could be a new pattern of evaluation for a happy learning... to be continued when time permits!)

Shifting Focus from Subject to the Student

Students make great teachers! Teachers need to teach the students the subject, and not the subject to the students.

I feel Education as facilitating the ability to see the bright, ever growing banyan tree of wisdom from the inner corridors of knowledge. The role of a teacher is the key in shaping the children to be the best citizens of a Nation. The art and science of Teaching are also undergoing fast changes with the advent of technology. Teachers have to cope with that as fast as possible. Teaching in 2018, I see, is “to nurture individuality and diversity amidst uniformity in a class”- that’s a formidable challenge. To connect with every student, to mould the heterogeneous to the best they can be. In teaching, students are more important than the subjects taught. Subjects need to be

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handled for the understanding matching the nature of the students listening. A good teacher is not keen to show his/her mastery of the subject (teachers are already selected for their job on their ability of/knowledge on the subject), but the focus is on student-first, so that the learners horizon of knowledge is linked to think and decide. This mindset makes the difference.

As Dr A P J Abdul Kalam puts it, “I have met 18 million youth, and each wants to be unique”. A great onus lies with the teacher to find out, nurture and accomplish the uniqueness of the student.

“The basis for the future of education must lie in schools and inspiring teachers. The human mind is an incredible thing. It can conceive of the magnificence of the heavens and the intricacies of the basic components of matter. Yet for each mind to achieve its full potential, it needs a spark... The spark of enquiry and wonder. Often that spark comes from a teacher,” Stephen Hawking, 2018: Brief Answers to the Big Questions.

STUDENT

The First Day in a College

What should students focus on during their undergraduate studies, regardless of the stream of study? This is based on my address to the 25th batch of undergraduate students of Veterinary and Animal Sciences as the Dean, Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Veterinary Education and Research (RIVER), on 12 September, 2018.

Congratulations.

You are the fortunate few who could get entry into a profession that is one among the best a student can dream of. That too, in Puducherry, a landscape with unparalleled history and heritage; and, in one of the best Institutes, RIVER: green, serene and beautiful. What more can you ask for!

We may find three categories of students in this lot today.

- a. A few who opted for some other course but couldn't get it; and so, are a little worried
- b. A few who have opted for another course; couldn't get it; but are okay with any course, including this
- c. Students who were passionate about veterinary science and are happy to make it. (This number is increasing over the years, 60 per cent of the admission nowadays)

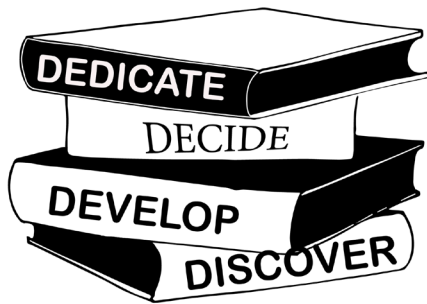
With around 40 years of affiliation to this profession and in the field of education, and having had the opportunity to serve in different positions inside and outside our Nation, I am yet to find a profession that gives a diversity of opportunities to aspiring students. It is not the profession, it's you who have to decide as to how and what you want to do in this noble profession. Sky is the limit. So, please keep the "bag of worries" outside the campus.

Enter with a determined and clear mind. This is a Campus meant to build great minds.

Over the next five-and-a-half years, our Campus (which includes the committed faculty/mentors and other professionals) aims at the following 4Ds:

1. Discover: Travelling through the portals of this Institution and the 18 Departments helps you to explore yourself; understand your abilities and aspire for what suits you best in life and professionally.

2. Develop: Use the years of your stay to study well and improve your competence : (a) to have the foundation skills and knowledge in the profession, and (b) in soft skills such as communication, technologies of relevance, getting connected to society, social commitment and confidence building.



3. Decide: During the last year of your education here, decide what you really want to do and how to do it. See that what you decide matches your personality and aspirations, and also the point of reference. Travel, reading (books and materials other than the course material) and limited research experiences will help you to broaden your outlook of the world and find your place.

4. Dedicate: The second D focuses on skills and knowledge in the subject. Dedication aims at building the “attitude”. This attitude helps to dedicate yourself to your family, the society, the Nation and, above all, to the profession. The first three Ds mould the fourth and the most important D.

My learning from Life (briefly):

1. Don't think of JOBS on day-one of the course. Think of the 4 Ds and become a responsible and great human being. Enjoy the education and focus on jobs during the later years when you are competent to discover yourself. You will find your path as you complete the course or the path will find you!

2. Be the best wherever you go. Any profession is great and noble. What we want to do with the profession is left to us.

3. Believe in yourself, and the world believes in you (the 4Ds help you to believe and build confidence).

4. Success is not a chance – it's a passion fuelled by enthusiasm and driven by dedication.

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5. Be disciplined. Discipline doesn't mean curtailing freedom. Discipline is “responsible freedom”- the freedom that helps you build yourself into the best citizen.

6. Don't worry about your lack of proficiency in English. Work on it and improve it. You will succeed.

7. Eat well. Health is primary. You need energy and health to be exemplary students and to be dedicated veterinarians.

8. Learn from mistakes. Improve yourself.

9. Participate in all activities possible: a. they bring the world to the Campus and, b. help you to bring out your talents and abilities - in arts, sports, village visits, working with field veterinarians, water and wildlife conservation, Swachh Bharath, climate change, red-ribbon, farmers' issues,

and many more. A good graduate should know what's happening in the world.

10. Look up at the alumni - an amazing group of dedicated veterinarians performing brilliantly in Puducherry, nationally and globally in various capacities. Our first batch was admitted in 1994.

I wish you all the best to build the foundation of learning for a great life and profession.

Expectations from a Student

Use your student days to learn about yourself and your capacities in addition to mastering the curriculum. Understanding you – your abilities and strengths - is important since your success in life depends on matching these abilities to the subject you are studying and will be offering your service in.

I consider the following 4Cs as the vital factors that will shape a student's success and usefulness to the Society and the Nation.

1.Competence: It changes depending on the undergraduate course you have chosen.

1.1 Professional skills: For e.g., in Veterinary Science the student who graduates after the five and half years course should be competent from day one, as stipulated by the Veterinary Council of India. Similar types of competencies one expected from AICTE, MCI and the other professional bodies.

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1.2 Social skills: Irrespective of the courses, the students should develop skills that help in understanding, analysing and approaching social issues.

1.3 Soft skills: Students should have the ability to communicate well – be it spoken or written. Basic language abilities in English, in addition to the mother-tongue or other languages, facing an interview, writing a CV and confidence are essential to make a mark.

2.Compassion: Understanding clients, patients or people for whom (s) he has to work. The empathy and realisation of the conditions and problems of the society help us to deliver services in a wholesome manner, making education meaningful. It takes us one step towards wisdom.

3.Creativity: Whatever may be the subject of study, students need to

learn to innovate and improvise. Once they receive the certificate and start working, they realise that they have to adapt and modify their approach and thinking. College should be the place where they should get experience for that. They should reinvent curiosity (in case they have forgotten it), which takes them through originality and finally creativity.

4.Connectivity. The present day order is connectivity. Just as our globe rotates around its axis, connectivity is the axis around which our life revolves. Instant Information is the key mantra of the human civilization of the present day. Whether it's the internet, social media or WhatsApp, connect wisely.

Technology is neutral; it is the people who use them who distort it. Creating connections lets you become more useful to the society.



We have a dominant examination system compared to the education system, which needs to be respected. However, if you do not score well, please don't think it is the end of the world. Don't start worrying. Instead, find out why you score low and try to address it the next time. There is always a good next time, provided you don't get stressed and worried.

Believe in yourself and that will surely lead to confidence.

The degree certificate that you receive is testimony of your mastery over the subject that you have studied. It's a license to enter into the real world, where real learning starts.

Be prepared for the cycle of "Learn-Unlearn-Relearn" continuously for a successful life.

TEACHER

Research Guide in UK

Recently I received a letter from Prof. Maurice Rolls who was my PhD Guide in the University of Reading, UK (1991-1994). He retired two decades ago and has settled in Wales. I met him last in 2002, in Reading. Not connected with email or smart phone, my only way of reaching to him is the post. This letter, after many years, was very heart-warming, revealing his love as a teacher for a student when he mentioned in the letter of “happy memories of studying with you!’ A great teacher, researcher, administrator and an extension worker, he is also an amazing painter. Recollecting one incident among many!

It was almost the end of autumn in 1994 in the UK, and winter has already announced its arrival. In my research room in one of the old buildings of the famous International and Rural Development Department (IRDD) of the University of Reading (which is now embedded in the School of Agriculture Policy and Development -SAPD - with a new building), I was working on the final assemblage of the thesis document that had to be submitted and defended for my PhD, a research journey which started in 1991! The days of 1994 autumn were satisfying as they indicated an end to my PhD work, arriving at some meaningful conclusions based on my research attempts. However, it was a bit chaotic, pulling papers of all sorts to assort, identify and arrange with impeccable accuracy! Added to that was the thought of convincing the unknown examiners on my study to be offered a Doctor of Philosophy.

I heard a gentle knock, and on opening, saw Professor Rolls, my guide, with his classic stinky smile, and soft but firm voice asking me, “Ram, can we take a stroll outside?” As a senior Professor, and that too a traditional British Educationist, Maurice has always been a role model for me. I pulled on my winter jacket and we went out to be wrapped up by the chilling cold and the early darkness at 4 pm. Maurice took short strides, as was his wont, punctuating them with short, simple sentences. “Now that you have

completed your research study and documented it, we are planning to have your defence viva,” he whispered as we walked. “We have three choices for you as the external examiners: one is Burt Swanson (a well know Extensionist from the US), Niels Røling (another extension scientist from Wageningen) or John Howell, the Director of Overseas Development Institute (ODI, London).” I have read, referred and studied many of their works since my research started in Reading. Readers who have an exposure to Extension science (as agriculture, veterinary, dairy, gender studies, welfare, home science, development studies background) may be familiar with these names.

One theme of Extension that spun off globally during that period (late 1980s into 90s) was the ‘Systems Approaches to Studying Extension Science’, with Wageningen (The Netherlands) and Reading Schools (UK) being the premier proponents. The Wageningen School had lots of useful



and interesting theories including the “actor-oriented approach”, largely a sociological approach to development (Long et al being the major proponents) and the Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems (the AKIS) for which Niels was one of the foremost advocates. This is for the readers who are not aware of Extension science! The Reading School had useful studies on Agricultural Information Systems, the AIS (with Maurice Rolls and Gwynn Jones), earlier to these. There were active scientific discussions and debates between these two schools on the relevance and utility of approaches. It was

exactly around this time that I walked into the Reading School in 1991 with my ambitious interest of profound research in the University, that too to associate with one of the tall leaders of AIS, Prof. Rolls!

The six months of my reviewing the amazing wealth of reading materials in the University and the Department Library, with the occasional nods from Maurice, seasoned me to put up a third theory of “Actor-Oriented Information Systems Approach” at the philosophical level which had practical application. It was a bold step of taking over the theories mentioned and building on them. Maurice was with me, though apparently silent.

As I tried deciphering the algorithms of my research problem over the three years (1991 to 1994), Maurice used to give consultations, wherein he preferred to listen a lot, endorsing the views and airing his doubts. Maurice had never been argumentative or loud in his views or expressions. But he expressed firm beliefs with pleasure or displeasure, if any, in his facial expressions – all with soft words.

As we walked along the pathway of the Whiteknights Lake, he continued, “Mr Swanson, who agreed to be the examiner considering your new approach, couldn’t make it since he had an unavoidable meeting at Rome at FAO. And finally, Mr Howell, the Director-ODI, will be coming.” Rolls also said that he, as the main guide, will not be in the Examiners’ board. In fact he was the only one, other than me, who knew the in and out of my work for the last three years, with some strong debates happening between us. Now, as we walked penetrating the wintry mist, I realised that he was a little tensed about my defence, as the Guide, and advised me not to worry about anything. “You have a sound thesis - just explain.” This was a bouquet of confidence he gave me. I came to know later that he was concerned about my worrying about the formal thesis-defence, though I had given many seminars and meetings on this earlier. As we walked in to the department, which was warm, he shook hands and conveyed his best wishes. The fifteen minutes of stroll with him had been one of the lifetime experiences that I love - one, because he selected the best stalwarts of Extension as my examiner; and two, he gave me the confidence that I could defend my work to any expert. It gave me the strength not only for that Viva, but also taught me how as a teacher I could help researchers

emotionally at a time they needed it the most.

Handhold the learners to fulfil the purpose of learning. Help achieve the best. The learners need not necessarily know that you have been handholding them!

Epilogue: The thesis was commented well by the Board and the University of Reading was kind enough to offer me a postdoctoral bursary (the first of its kind!) to undertake a study on Hillside Forest Information System in Sri Lanka based on our theory of AIS.

Nap in the Class Room

Sleeping, snoozing and yawning in a classroom are not pleasant for the teacher when he or she is lecturing. The immediate thought the teacher has is that his/her class is boring for the students, and it's not a happy feeling. A teacher takes pain to organize and share the contents sincerely within a limited time to the learners. However there is more to it, which a teacher needs to realise, relax, find and sort out. These thoughts are based on my experiences and the terminologies used are my humble constructs.

The pleasure of teaching is often paused on seeing a student doze in a the class, jerking awake suddenly, which irritates the teacher and provokes them to warn, shout or mock the student. The teacher does so under the assumption that the nap is an indicator of the interest (s)he has in the class.



Simply, the teacher feels his/her class is boring and hence the student sleeps. It's true that the onus is on the teacher to treat the subject well and make it interesting for the students through his/her pedagogical innovations on a class-to-class basis. However, that may not be the only reason for the

nap. This acceptance and understanding helps the teacher to compose himself and rationally think as to why this happens with some students on some days. If someone is sleepy, it's because the body needs the sleep, and this happens even if the student consciously fights the urge to sleep.

Understanding that it's a normal physiological process which the students are sometimes unable to get a grip on will help a teacher to calm down.

Some factors that cause the nap/sleep in the classroom: (just a few examples):

From a student's perspective

- a. Health problems (suffering from some conditions, diseases, on medicines etc)
- b. Being awake late at night (for studies or entertainment)
- c. Skipping meals
- d. Waking up earlier than usual
- e. Tired after some physical activities or mental stress

From a teacher's perspective:

- a. Students unable to follow what is taught
- b. The active involvement of teacher during the class time
- c. Use of dynamic media to increase the "life" of a lecture

From a Classroom perspective:

- a. The cool comfort of a class room, especially the AC in hot weather
- b. The cosy comfort of a chair and a desk

c. Timing of the class (As always early hours of lecture/class are best, say 9am to 11am. The 12 pm to 1pm is a default period when sleep wins, especially after many consecutive lectures. Hence it requires the teacher to be innovative in these “attention deficit hours” compared to the “happy hours of teaching” from 9-11.)

d. The number of students

There are some teachers who can lead students to the mood of sleep just on entering the classroom. The very thought of them can make students sleepy just like a lullaby! The energy, enthusiasm, involvement and participation bring in “liveliness” into a room; teacher has a role in this.

Types of nap:

1. Dozing off: drooping eyelids, unable to control its closure
2. Real nap: closed eyes
3. Owl eyes: students are still, with eyes open, mind shut and napping inside.
4. Swinging heads: heads move left or right
5. Drooping head:
6. Hands on forehead:

Once in a while it happens to everyone. But if it's a phenomenon in every lecture then it's time the teacher probes into the reason? This has to be done in an atmosphere free from shame, ridicule or punishment. Calmly check whether they are ok, and understand the reasons for the sleep (if it is caused by any of the few examples).

Always compose yourself when you have a flash note of the uncontrollable sleep symptom among student(s).

Develop a mind that believes that napping during the class occasionally is natural.

Ask the student to feel free to step outside the class, freshen up and come.

Over a period of time analyse the reason for this and try to address that.

Make classes participatory. After 20 minutes of a straight talk, create a situation of interaction (ask simple questions, read from the notes, opinions on general interesting issues), engage them and draw into discussions.

Assign “instant write-ups” under a class which is simple creative and subjective so that every student has an answer (maybe with a mobile use permitted for 5 minutes)- this can wake them up and involve (not necessarily in all classes!)

Dealing with naps; some takeaways based on experience

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1. The sleep need not necessarily be because the class is boring or it need not be disrespect to the teacher. Please come to terms with this.

2. Never overreact and don't be harsh with the instinct.

3. Ask the student some questions that can make the moments lighter and bring him/her back to the class. Do not mock.

4. Find out the reasons (if a student persistently dozes off) by calling him/her individually: (could be health reasons, tiredness, style of study, sitting through nights, stress ...)

5. Make sure to carry the students with you after 20 to 30 minutes of your lecture. That's when they usually part from you, engage them actively and creatively.

6. Create an atmosphere among the students that in case they feel sleepy and couldn't control, they can get up and, with permission, go out to freshen themselves up. There is no shame in that.

7. Make classes lively, vary the pace, try to bring in diversity in every class. Match the subject taught to your personal capacities. Innovate.

Above all, as teachers, be ready to bear with some occasional naps, and help correct them by creating a confident atmosphere in classrooms.

Let's not be "feared" but "respected".

Moulding to be the Best

On September 5, Teachers Day, dedicating to those great minds that create generations of goodwill.

“If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow.” (John Dewey, American philosopher and psychologist)

Everything teaches us something: situations, people, flora, fauna... what doesn’t? But the contribution of “teachers” in moulding us to be what we are reverberates in the simple ways they impact our daily lives. Good teachers live through, and with, the learners in maybe small but beautiful ways in the way they deal with and dwell on this planet.

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A good teacher is one who becomes an integral part of our life like a legend (the only systematic influence other than the inheritance of genes from parents!). My classmate from school recently chatted from Panama; the first thing he typed was about Ramachandran Sir who taught us geography and about Panama Canal. My friend was so thrilled (and we all were) that his efforts live on: it’s not the subject, but how he delivered. Compared to the present day opportunities of teachers, we are quite sure that he had not been to Panama!

You become a teacher when you realize that students respect you, not fear you. The respect is the realm of a new love - of speaking freely with a teacher - which evolves to the ideal relationship of a teacher growing to become a mentor. “I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn,” says Einstein. Creating conditions include stimulating thinking.

The tools of a teacher are appreciation, compliments, respect, love, care, concern and guidance though the life of the learner. These tools have to be

sensibly applied to raise the confidence and capacities of the students to make them happy in the path of life.

We often remember teachers, and hold them to heart for taking us through tough situations like when students think:

“Marks are low”

Feeling inferior like, “I am not as good as him/her”

“What shall I do in life?”

“I am poor”

“I am not good at this”

“I have problems at home, do I have a future?”

It's not History, Chemistry, Computer Science, English, Medicine, Business or Engineering (i.e., the subjects) that a teacher is vital for, but for the confidence (s)he creates in the learner to deal with life with the above-mentioned tools. It's challenging. In teaching, the subject is only a medium; to create a mind to apply that is the task of the teacher. Teach them to walk alone or together in life.

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“Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time.” (Chinese Proverb)

The present day shows how value education is given less priority in schools. On the other hand, we need to build “committed citizens” (irrespective of knowledge and talent) for building a Nation. As Dr. Abdul Kalam envisions in A Manifesto for Change, “We need to have a creative classroom, creative syllabus and creative teachers. The first two are comparatively easy, but the challenge is how to find creative teachers. Finding such teachers is the hardest task.”

I remember many teachers (and students too!) for the “lessons of life” they taught me rather than the subjects they dealt with. The students are amazing resource in teaching us many things. They remind us of the world that is transitional, lead us to the challenge of debating with ourselves on “right” and “wrong”, change our mind set in perceiving things - all for the better.

Back to teachers, the list for me starts with late Sister Prosperous, who, with her patience probably would have instilled a little something called ‘curiosity’. The list is never ending and can never be complete. But just a few examples of the lessons learnt and subjects taught:

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Amazing were the classes of Shri Panikkar Sir in science, but what I learnt is the way of orderliness on his entry into the class, keeping books on one side of the table neatly, taking time to arrange himself, and his smile.

Prof. W.H. Mackaden, the passionate, and Mrs. Radha Padmanabhan, the elegant (writer of children’s stories) in Malabar Christian College who taught English, were magnets to whom we were drawn for long during the “science dominated” courses - natural raconteurs. The passion for understanding writing and literature is the lesson learnt for life!

In Veterinary College, it’s a long list, worth writing another Strandom!

In University of Reading, UK, again, it’s a long list. Prof. Maurice, my mentor (a serious but genuine teacher) taught me that travelling is learning. Prof Chris Garforth’s lesson about dynamism of decision making without delay is unforgettable. One of the softest feelings is for Late Gwynn Jones from Wales, a real country man reminding me of a straight, innocent grandfather

figure from rural India. It was a pleasure to be with him.

Other than judges, teachers are probably the only people who have the attribute of being neutral - to a group of students of a heterogeneous class at any time. Class, colour, community, creed, gender – nothing matters to a teacher who sees only a learner in every one. All are equal, capable (maybe in different aspects) and beautiful. The onus of identifying, nurturing and creating a generation of “responsible humans” largely lies with teacher, whether it’s in the first standard or during his PhD.

Becoming a Teacher

Making a (wo)man of a child or nation-building, the teacher is the foundation and the means. This is an attempt to crystallize the thoughts on becoming a good teacher, may it be in schools, colleges, institutes or universities.

Preserving the Curiosity

From primary to PhD, the pristine element of a teacher is the same - "Creating and leading a learning environment." However, I feel the responsibility is more so with the school teachers, especially primary and secondary schools. In fact, after the family in which a child is born (the members of which are the first teachers in his or her life), the inquisitiveness of the child is to be kept alive and promoted by the primary teachers, those

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who strengthen the foundation. I remember Mother Prosperous, who was more than a teacher to me when I was in my second standard. I met her after many years after she became the Generalite, and recognized me as the child

who asked questions persistently. I remember her as a patient listener, lovingly trying to explain to a seven-year-old the variety of life, quite incomprehensible at that age.

A Role Model

“The classrooms shape the destiny of a country.” This brings out the role of the teacher inside a classroom. Teachers are responsible for creating the future society, and their job never ends. This demands that the teacher be nothing less than a role model. This requires a great responsibility that brings sense of satisfaction for the teacher. Students learn from what teachers do, not necessarily what they teach. Students learn about the teachers along with what is taught.

Connecting to every student

Every learner (whatever his or her capacity) should feel cared for by the teacher. Classrooms should not be a generic totality of “one teacher” to a “collection of students” (we do not have a collective noun for a group of learners like ‘pack of hounds’ or ‘murder of crows’, which can remind a teacher that each learner is unique with the potential to think and reason); rather, it has to stimulate the feeling of “one teacher” to “each student”. This connectedness to each student is vital to create interest and involvement of students through innovative teaching methods. Every student should feel that the teacher is his or hers!

Teaching Doesn't Happen in a Vacuum.

We are learning something every day and we also have innate knowledge. Teaching is a process of bridging the two sets of knowledge through communication. It should start by understanding and respecting this innate knowledge.

Teaching to prepare for life - the litmus test

A Teacher needs to realize his/her role in a wider context to position himself or herself. Teaching cannot be measured in terms of the books or

compositions corrected, examination papers set or answer books evaluated or the number of hours or periods spent in a class or a laboratory (though all these are needed!). It is the qualitative change that has been brought about among the students in the “learning for life” that decides the result of teaching. The transfer of knowledge about the disciplines or subjects is just one of the tools for effecting this change. Any subject for that matter is important, a tool that should be used in a wider understanding of purpose of education by a teacher. It has a lot to do with fitting into the setting, culture or heritage. “Education is the perfecting of life - the enrichment of the individual by the heritage of the race. Let this vital process of transmission and absorption be interrupted for half a century, and civilization would end, our grandchildren would be more primitive than savages,” Will Durant: 2014 (reprint) *Fallen Leaves: Last Words on Life, Love War and God*. Swami Vivekananda’s advice “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man,” is relevant and simple in making us realize the role of a teacher to bring out the best in a child, which is already there. Any subject we teach is an opportunity for this.

Being a Pansophist

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Comenius, the famous educationist of the 17 century (sometimes named as Father of Modern Education), had his philosophy of “pansophism” that related to education for everyday life and called for a systematic relationship to be developed for all knowledge (as against the conventional encyclopaedic teaching). He advocated teaching in the common or vernacular language of the students rather than in Latin (in those days!), and the establishment of a universal system of education with opportunities that included women and people of all nations. Interestingly, India has one form of this teaching as *Vasudhaiyva Kutumbakom* (the Vedic concept of ‘World is a Family’). Pansophism would make a learner capable of wisdom in any subject and be “able to see any subject in relation to others”. (Robert. R. Rusk: *The Doctrines of the Great Educators*, 1954). Teachers need to attempt at becoming pansophists, at least to the extent possible.

Teacher in the Digital Environment

As teaching undergoes changes, one of the new and powerful entrants to

the field is the “digital environment”. Actual learning happens now, as in earlier times, in family, school and society. But one of the influential factors in all these is the digital teacher. The teachers need to rationalize the application of these for children, giving them the opportunity to experience both the virtual and real. Teachers cannot take this as a matter of convenience or inconvenience. It’s a matter of opportunity; the ultimate aim is making the children fit for a successful life within the technology-led times we live in. The world has been so, applying the teachings of the day - logic, religion, science - from Plato to Dr Abdul Kalam!

Vuja de on “Yes Sir”

How the sheets of the attendance register of students we taught live with us!

Recently, in a get-together, during the exchange of pleasantries, a shy participant came up to me hesitantly and whispered, “I was a student of yours, though you may not remember me, sir.” His face was familiar, though he had come plump, mature and stout. He cordially introduced himself and my brain flicked open.

80 Yes, it was almost 25 years since I called this name (along with many others), regularly for a long period as their course teacher. I could describe his nature, how good he was in some things and how he could have cared more about certain others as a student. He was surprised and asked me delighted at how I still remembered him!

Well, it was spontaneous recollection. I had realised that repeatedly taking attendance was an interactive, meaningful exercise. The moment you call out a name, a wealth of information on certain traits of the students will come flooding the memory. Calling the attendance - often considered a monotonous and official requirement to calculate the minimum percentage to appear for an exam—means a lot more to the teacher.

We respond “Yes Sir” when a teacher calls out our name even as kids! Now many of our children and grandchildren continue the legacy. From Anitha to Maria, Shafy to Venkatesh, Abhiramy to, it is over three decades that this classroom experience has been going on for me.

Marking attendance is a brief but rich opportunity of instant connectivity with the student. The tone (weak, feeble, loud, clear, slow, fast..) of the student, their body language, facial expression (the eyes, especially- sparkling, bright, droopy, expectant, hopeful, frustrated), gestures etc. speak a lot within

a few seconds during that mandatory “Yes sir”.

As McLuhan said, “The medium is the message.” You do this for six months or a year, the name along with the nature imprints itself within you as a part of you for life. Well, as a teacher you have additional observations and opportunities to pick and choose from within them. However, we are blessed with the boon of forgetting, and many are kept in the long term repository memory of life.

But then what you repeated several times lives within you, and instantly refreshes the feeling of familiarity once someone utters the name. It is just like chanting mantras or verses from a favourite book repeatedly.

(1994 Batch) - THE

Attendance Roll of the A. H. E.

Sl. No.	Name	Date					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
2	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
3	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
4	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
5	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
6	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
7	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
8	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
9	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
10	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
11	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
12	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
13	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
14	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
15	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
16	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
17	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
18	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
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28	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
29	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/
30	Abhinav K. Subramanyam	/	/	/	/	/	/

Efforts are going on in many institutions, as a matter of fact, in line with present time, to save the attendance session through electronic mode of marking. Understandably, if you have a large number of students, it has to be addressed.

For me, though, the response of “Yes Sir” to attendance-calls is:

1 an amazing experience of varied beauty as each student responds differently,

2 an immediate perception to their status/mood; and above all, the best one

3 a unique experience to store the names of the wonderful students in your memory, which can be clicked open just by hearing the name.

MEDICAL

Honing Creativity: the ‘Top’ secret

The Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education & Research (JIPMER) Connaissance Address: an abstract

Addressing around 1000 medical graduates from different institutions in JIPMER as a key speaker in CONNAISSANCE 3.0 (Third International Undergraduate Medical Students Conference: April 14, 2019) on “Honing Creativity and Innovations among Medical Students”, the key focus was on facilitating creativity for better evolution as a complete doctor/surgeon. There are surgeons and doctors who are inspirational role models. When creativity meets innovation, it is a beautiful experience.

Though specific to medical education (and professions such as veterinary sciences), it can be applied to any field.

Creativity cannot be taught formally...

...but can be facilitated by designing an appropriate environment.

Curiosity is the foundation for creativity, and the inherent capacity that a new born baby is born with is honed during childhood making him/her inquisitive about the world - the light, the sound and taste – expressed in the form of “Whys” that they ask parents, grandparents or relatives in the initial stages of development.

However, formal education in kindergarten and primary school mould all into “uniform” thinking rather than encourage “diverse” reflections of the curious minds. The “whys” among children tend to decrease as they advance to higher classes. The orientation is strongly conditioned to the decimals of the marks in examinations, rather than allowances of creativity; and many around the child look for measuring her/him based on these numbers (marks!). Added to that is the shaping of the child’s mind to the interests,

aptitude and aspirations of other actors (parents, teachers, friends!).

“From an early age, we are given labels which can so easily define our lives”: Richard Gerver. 2013, ‘Change - learn to love it, learn to lead it’.

The efforts at the graduation level would be to retain and nurture the ability if they are tuned to creativity, or to develop this lost ability, which every individual is born with.

We need to undo/redo this conditioning in medical education to bring out the best of a medical graduate for society and themselves. They need to be encouraged to explore themselves to rediscover, which helps in a holistic and “best of potential delivery” to the society. The programme of *Connaissance 3.0* is such an opportunity to pause and reflect on the passionate abilities we would have otherwise forgotten or kept in the uncared corners of mind.

Nissen, Einstein and the Cellophane

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The following paragraph is a paraphrased version borrowed from the amazing book ‘Under the Knife: The History of Surgery in 28 remarkable operations’ by Arnold Van De Laar (2018).

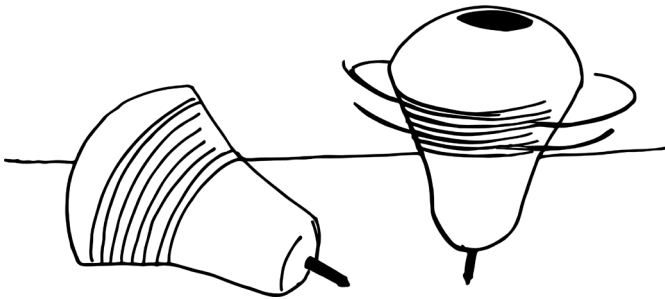
Rudolf Nissen (who fled Germany owing to World War II) is credited with the operation of Nissen fundoplication; he performed the first successful resection of a whole lung (1931) and was the first to perform a complete resection of the oesophagus. Albert Einstein needs no introduction. He left Germany in 1933 for reasons evident to history.

In 1948, when Einstein was 69, he was the most famous patient Nissen could have imagined to treat in the USA. Nissen diagnosed Einstein with AAAA (acute abdominal aortic aneurysm) following X-ray studies since CT scan and ultrasound scan were not developed then (Aneurysm: a weakening of an artery wall that creates a bulge, or distention, of the artery). As Nissen performed the abdominal operation on the greatest scientist of the world, he found an aneurysm of the abdominal aorta the size of a grapefruit.

As the aneurysm was still intact, Nissen applied an experimental method: he wrapped it in cellophane - the same synthetic material used to wrap sweets, bread and envelopes. (Vascular prosthetic surgery was used in the years that followed). "And it required guts to wrap the aneurysm of the greatest scientist of all time " To cut short an interesting and epic story I focus on "guts".

This "guts" is the confidence, what I call as "confluence of competency and compassion" of the surgeon/doctor: the quintessence of medical education. The capacity of common sense, improvisations or innovations, timely and quick reactions and above all the ability to comprehend the whole situation and act firm and fine in the best interest of the patient.

Where does it come from?



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Undoubtedly, from stretching the imagination and being creative. Medical education is a confluence of Competency, Creativity, Connectivity (especially in this Google age!) and Compassion. Competencies are built through the well thought out curriculum for five-and-half-years: the skills, knowledge and mind set. However, the other abilities are to be nurtured and ignited through an ecosystem favouring liberated minds that will synergistically benefit the community, the doctor and, above all, the profession.

Honing creativity

Dare to think!

It's amazing how we can study history, anthropology, arts, architecture

and many more interesting areas of life through medical science. In the talk that followed mine, Dr. Deepak Agrawal (Professor Neurosurgery, AIIMS Delhi, Co-inventor of World's Cheapest Ventilator) interestingly explained on how he could see a plot or design of a human brain in a painting of Michael Angelo. This perspective is creativity. He has helped in transforming the corridors of AIIMS to an art gallery with paintings for the patients and public who visit AIIMS.

This is what creativity does to a doctor, and the reason why creativity and innovation need to complement each other. It's the ability to see the same situation in different perspectives.

And in India, it all needs to be approachable and affordable for the common patient.

The Algorithm of Diagnosis

88 In this technological era, we are moving from the "Sherlock Holmes method" of diagnosis to "artificial intelligence" (AI) methods such as the Magic of Watson's algorithm (IBM).

"Today IBM will feed a medical Watson 3000 images, 200 of which are melanomas and 2800 are not, and Watson then uses its algorithm to start to learn that the melanomas have these colours, topographies and edges. And after looking at tens of thousands of such images and understanding the features they have in common, it can, much quicker than a human, identify particularly cancerous ones. That capability frees up doctors to focus where they are most needed – with the patient." Thomas L. Friedman. 2016. "Thank you for being late: an optimist's guide to thriving in the age of accelerations."

The balance between the technology and the patient helps to retain intuition, empathy and judgment, the vital parameters of a doctor's life. Retaining the personal qualities in the face of strident technologies is a challenge. Creativity is one of the solutions to the sweeping technologies to build on identity!

The key mantra is: Man reins in the machine.

Faculty Orientation

The present generation students are born into the fast track of technologies that decide day to day life.

“Subject and wisdom” wise, we assume the faculty is experienced. But the faculty needs to give a wider and open space for the enhanced capacities of the brilliant students who are a product of the present time and technologies – the Google generation born in to the “smart worlds”. There is a lot about the world that is to be understood from the students!

The lateral learning from different walks of arts and science helps in good innovations. Whether it’s a book, movie, music or maverick - creativity sees innovations when we open up interfaces with these.

The disciplined knowledge of the doctor in tandem with the skills and knowledge from different realms of science and arts opens up new avenues and innovations.

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“Learn – unlearn - relearn” is the key to open the lock of a closed mind.

Innovation Clubs/Café

These can provide spaces for students, staff and others (be it patients or outsiders) to discuss lateral thinking. These can be informal centres of coffee breaks, where ideas are shared and the ones are taken forward through a good innovation facilitation centre.

Epilogue: The ‘Top’ Secret

The secret of the top is to spin it.

A ‘still top’ doesn’t qualify to be called a top. We all have been blessed with a top. The question is how many of us have spun it and how many times!

The Glow of Goodness

Life is run by the never-ending strands of Goodness, much of which we are not aware of as we enjoy and sail through them; some of which we are made aware of when it glows occasionally. These “glows” ensure humanity - the hope and happiness of spreading it further.

This is an excerpt from a situation of surgery focusing on the surgeon and the Glow of Goodness. Ultimately we all thrive on this energy of Goodness - some known and many unknown.



When my daughter (a doctor by profession and nature, and a film story/script writer by passion) coerced me into a long overdue surgery, I had to learn the as yet “unknown indices” and uncertainties of life as a patient. The best thing she did was to identify a surgeon whom she had great regard for in the hospital where she worked. From the time the surgeon unambiguously informed us after a check-up that I needed a surgical intervention in the next week to 10 days, I haven’t been able to study myself as a patient - but I have the impression that I am worrisome as one.

At a time when we have many doctors and surgeons (especially in urban areas), and the option of corporate hospitals to primary health centres, I was impressed by the professional approach of this surgeon. He was more than willing to tolerate my every doubt (which never ended!). He was clearly born for this profession - professional, simple, straight, energetic, reticent but precise and clear in his thoughts and words and, above all, confident in what he was doing.

Pre and post operation, during the several visits that he made, he was caring, listened patiently and was reassuring, holding my hand in the operation theatre just before the procedure and coaxing me to “just relax, sir, we will take care of you.” Such gestures helped me face the difficult time with ease. With a surgeon like him around, I felt genuinely cared for.

To cut to the chase:

When I was discharged a week after the operation, the hospital refused to take any payment from me. My wife, who had been with me during the nights, was surprised. The management said that the surgeon had made it clear that he was doing the surgery “free” for me. When he himself was not collecting his due, the management felt that they should not charge me anything either, (especially since my daughter had been working there for a year and a half and was much liked by her colleagues). I was firm that it wasn't fair. I wasn't paying for just the bill with “money” but acknowledging the care, compassion and concern of many others too.

When the surgeon came on the day of discharge to give us instructions on post-operative care, I asked him, “Doctor, why don't you please accept the surgeon's fee, for all the effort you have taken?” He interrupted, “No, sir, the ‘top-up’ you gave me and my family has still more space to be charged.” I couldn't understand. As I tried convincing him, he stopped me with a smile, “I owe you still, I hope you understand!”

My daughter reminded me of the incident that happened two years ago. Her senior colleague - an efficient and respected lady gynaecologist -- needed a help. Two injured young stray dogs were hurt and abandoned at the gate

of their home and were suffering. Their cries upset not only her but also her young daughters. She felt responsible somehow for it but was helpless to do anything. They were finding it difficult to identify someone who could save, treat and take these dogs away to a secure place. Her concern was genuine. They were constantly disturbed by the painful cries and grumblings of these poor creatures. After talking to her, I understood her concern and worry for the animals (and that made me realize how compassionate and good they were!). I tried all official mechanisms to take the animals away from their home for treatment but it was difficult (which I knew!). Finally, I asked one of my students, a good veterinarian and who is a faculty now, for help and he whole heartedly obliged. He identified an NGO that took the dogs away and treated them.

I had forgotten this incident.

92 The surgeon repeated, “We spent two nights unable to sleep and worrying about the dogs. You went out of the way to help us!” The gynaecologist was his wife. He continued, “What I am doing is my duty of sharing knowledge of medicine and surgery.”

I was too awestruck to respond.

Not money but the Goodness that glows out of the blue that surprises us and spreads sweetness.

It's amazing how we could be carriers of this glow every moment of our life. And how my student, the lady gynaecologist, the surgeon - Dr. P.V. Srinivasan -- the Sisters of Cluny and my daughter could form a loop of this glow that gave this insight to me!

VETERINARY

Veterinarian's Day: A Tribute to the Noble Profession

Today is the World Veterinary Day (April 27). Saluting the profession and remembering the great veterinarians who devoted their lives to the needy.

Dawn or dusk; day or night, at every tick of a clock,
Silent and selfless service in every nook of the world –
be it mountains, midlands or coast –
a dedicated group of professionals devote their service:
the Veterinarians.

Behind the well-being of every dumb creature
is the tale of touch of a veterinarian.

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Farm, field or forest; rain, sun or snow,
dedicated to see the joy of the dumb,
sowing the seeds of one health.
A day doesn't drift sans the touch of a vet.

Drenched in the drain of struggles,
every vet is a powerhouse of possibilities,
The possibilities that dedicate
to the lives of the creatures big and small
The power that brings lives to the dumb,
and livelihoods to millions.

A vet travels through the cumbersome canopies;
Sweating out to fetch new lives to the world,
Finest surgeries to save, in difficult conditions,
The travel into oblivion after the odds.

The selfless, divine and the competent -- opportunity
blessed to the few called the "vets".

"To serve" is the only sign that (s)he puts,
In repeated breaths of life!
The joy of life for a vet is the "thanks" told by the patients,
Which only (s)he can hear and see,
And the smiles that no "smiley" can bring.

FAMILY

Learning from Father

One of the most difficult things is to jot down thoughts on our parents when we are middle-aged. No adjectives can express the infinite care and love. However, I thought of attempting a few lines on the universality of the concept of “father”; though it is subjective for every individual coloured by very personal, fond, glum and glowing moments. I prefer to dwell on the thoughts of a father since I too am living that role!

Those who have their fathers around, live up to their expectations. Others can understand that the father lives with them. Our thoughts and deeds to a great extent are shaped by him. And he guides us for the good.



My father used to tell me how his father told him that “fatherhood” is something that needs to be experienced. Like a river whose water flows only in one direction, the love and affection that flow from the father (parents!) to the children can be experienced only when the children become parents, and this goes on. This realization naturally takes time. Though we feel we love our

parents, the incessant, unlimited and selfless stream of love for the children is the legacy of parenthood that can be passed on only to our children.

As a child I remember my father was very busy with his job (as a teacher, professor and Dean/Director in colleges and universities) and social commitments, but still his presence filled our home even in his physical absence. Similarly I have had the opportunity of knowing the parents of my students for over three decades now. The pulse and feelings of the fathers (parents) are universal. They may have a job or be jobless; rich or poor; had a schooling or not - whatever they maybe, universally, for their children they are amazingly abounding with “guided love” - the guide in them sometimes makes it difficult for the child to accept the father when he turns tough!

My father was a stern man. He was not unfriendly (neither too friendly!) and like most fathers of that generation, he was a parent first (nothing less or more!). In case I needed anything - to play, go out, buy those extra crackers for Diwali, go for a movie (very rarely), I had to reach him through my mother.

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The present day “fathers” including me, aspire to be considered as friends by their children -- nothing wrong in that. Parents (especially father) have a role of making children realize the “value” of anything by keeping it short of abundance! The beauty of life is the enjoyment of contentment with the limited. It teaches the value of non-materialistic, realistic way of living in a society with “limited taking” and “unlimited giving” to the world around us. The present day sees a large number of parents dissatisfied with the facilities of luxury they can provide to their child.

Father (and mother) is an irreplaceable role model for the child, which further expands to a wider world of many. Children learn consciously and subconsciously through us, and this is passed on from one generation to another!

We have different impressions of our father over the ages as we grow up; as a child, a teenager, and a young adult. The impressions could be that he was loving, serious, tough, angry, happy, worried etc. towards us and many. As

adults we realize that there is finally only one expression of a father that shines in their mind - the one of “guiding love”. During my younger years, I did not have the time to think or give importance to thinking about the influence of my father on me. Later, like many, I understood the inimitable and the omnipresent role of a father that filled every moment of my life. That’s when we are seasoned to look into and understand the worth of our fathers. When I look back, I realize that he has moulded us along with many. He had a role of a caretaker to create a useful citizen of many, not just for his sake alone!

The finest moments are those when you can chat with your father, which usually happens when wisdom sets in. Try opening the memory treasure. It will be interesting, educative and directional if we could plot instances of moments in life with father and reflect on why did he do what he did or say what he said?

“Father” is a fantasy that a child can live up to as (s)he would love to. The values and beliefs that we hold on in life to a great extent are shaped by him (of course along with the mother!).

Talking to Teenagers



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The beautiful picture depicts the full blossomed life of an individual. From the centre of the flower where we are born to the layers of petals of different colours, we go through various stages, expanding in maturity and understanding, depicted by the different concentric patterns of petals. In this is the transitional layer of “teenage”, which many of the readers above 18 have gone through. This is a brief look at how parents (and teachers) need to help the teenagers especially in the present times.

Teenage is a period of transformation in our life - the unique and most important transition in human development. Possibly one could divide the life of an individual, biologically (which has social implications as well) into childhood, teenage and adulthood.

It is a world of new experiences, fascinations, likes (and dislikes), confusion, fan-worship, fun and infatuations. Every adult has a part of the “teen” in them. But then, they are mature enough to understand the goodness and to realise facts over a period of time.

This stage of transition for children is different nowadays from what it was a few decades ago for various reasons. To mention two:

a. The main stakeholders who had a role 20 or 30 years back were the parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers and friends. The joint family system (or extended family with more members) helped in giving teenagers an ear and acted as a solace in a family. In addition to being hearing by the elders, this also brought in serendipitous learning for all. The nuclear family system has reduced the human interaction to a limited parent-to-child.

b. The omnipresent technology or media and its access has made it an important stakeholder in shaping the thoughts of a child as (s)he moves on in this Google age.

Parents and teachers need to realise that teenagers are still young to understand the first experiences of natural changes in their body and way of thinking. They may challenge, question or react in a manner parents do not expect (not always)! The parents have to learn that it's largely natural, and accordingly set their maturity to the tune of "temporary whims and fancies". Some parents find it hard to relate to their children when they are teenagers. It's tough if we think so, but it's a management in parenting and every parent should have an insight about this.

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In a nuclear family, with parents having their own busy schedule at work, on net or TV, the teenager is dependent more on the media. But any answer from the searches will be short of the emotional and personal touches and clarifications they get from their mother, father or teachers! And that's key for a teenager of today.

The teen years are the first stage of exploring an identity in life. Anxiety, shyness, dilly-dallying, appearance, feelings, timid, challenging, perfection, liking, loving... there are many combinations we go through.

Some parents remark (s)he is acting strange - weird. But in reality, the parent is unable to listen and understand to the natural phenomenon of changes in the thinking of the child; and to accept it. Instead of considering this as different and unnatural, if parents accept this and then try to explore why (s)he thinks so, the child feels comfortable.

Teenage is a period of life in which some feel thinking, talking, feeling etc. of a different nature is a “mistake” and they brood on these without sharing. If shared (or the parents give the atmosphere of sharing) the family can realise this as often trivial and could ease the worry or heaviness on the child. Marks in class, recognition, achievements, abilities, affiliations, friendships, comparisons... all are to be dealt with easily with an open mind. It’s a natural transitional period for positioning the personality for the future. Parents/teachers can create an atmosphere of encouragement in which (s)he can open up and get their support. Build that confidence and trust.

An important message at this stage is not to sink into the infatuations of ascribed “love” and sacrifice this transitional period to a life of worries, fights and conflicts. The real love often gets clearer after the “teenage cloudiness” of a loaded mind of feelings, fan-fares, glitter and pomp. This is a period in which the parents have to guide them (walking with their thoughts and sorting it). Teachers have a big role, as they have seen many students growing through these stages and good teachers can make a difference. They have the duty to listen, care and guide the children to unknown wisdom, which the students are yet to achieve. They are touching the future.

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Parents care for their children (sometimes go overboard). As children, some don’t think and accept how we hold them. As a teenager it becomes important that (s)he also feels we care, since an enquiring mind would have started. LISTEN to them. Hear and feel their versions. Some may seem silly, insignificant, from your perception; but do not ignore the importance with which they communicate it.

Avoid conflicts. If you shout or get angry at a teenager after years of your maturity what does it say about you? Even though you know what a teenager is asking for is not genuine, never give a point blank “No” until it merits it (which is generally not the case). There might be an element of thought that you may not have felt from his/her perspective. Be patient and positive in listening. Impatient and sarcastic listening are sometimes worse than not listening too!

Don’t push to fall in line with the “parental aspirations”. In childhood the

child may easily get coerced to aspirations of parents, and teachers. But in teenage, (s)he would have started experiencing what they like. If what they like is different from parental aspirations, a conflict can arise. It's here again the parent /teacher has to be a good mentor on knowing the reasons for the "like".

Accept teenagers as they are. Let them like, adore, enjoy and be fascinated during this discovery period about them and the world. The parents have to observe, and not to intervene unless they feel the children may get tricked, deceived or trapped with these natural feelings. For this the parents (and teachers) need to know what they are about.

Mentor them without their knowing. That's an art of parenting. "A bundle of advice" at this age may not be well received. The best way is to "be with their ideas, and transform them if necessary". Walk that extra mile along with their ideas.

Grandma's Grace

Grandparents are irreplaceable sources of love in our life. The merry life of grandchildren is enriched by the presence of grandparents. They are often the soul mates to whom children share all secrets and apprehensions, including how strict and tough their parents are, how silly sometimes friends are and how cruel teachers are in asking them to do homework and learn! Children have favourites among grandparents.



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In an age of technology dominated by short settlements in different regions of the world for work, and nuclear families, the role of grandparents is changing.

I share a few incidences with my grandma as a tribute to all grandparents.

“Granny expresses her approval of this attitude (of Swami) and then begged leave to start the story of Harishchandra, who, to be true to his word, gave up his throne, wife, and child, and got them all back in the end. She was half-way through it when Swaminathan’s rhythmic snoring punctuated her

narration, and she lay down to sleep.” Swami and Friends: R. K. Narayanan.

One of the fondest memories we cherish in life is that of our grandparents, especially the undiluted love and affection we received from them as children. My favourite was my grandmother (fathers’ mother) who died when I was 10 years old. She stayed in a village in Anducode, in the present district of Kanyakumari and visited us in Trivandrum for short terms on compulsion.

Grandma narrated stories that were short, expressive and emotional, and I used to love hearing the stories lying beside her. My grandmother’s stories often took me to a world of imagination from where it took time to get back to the real world. I remember how she told one about Krishna going to Hastinapura to appeal for peace with Duryodhana on behalf of the Pandavas, after their 12 years of exile in the forest and 13th year of living incognito. He was to ask the kingdom for the Pandavas! Duryodhana was arrogant, wanting to show his power and ego, and disparage Krishna, in spite of his father and other Gurus advising him not to do so. Duryodhana instructed his courtiers to remain seated when Krishna arrived in the court. They too sat firm to their chairs. Krishna indicated his arrival by blowing his conch, Panchajanyam. The kings, ministers and Duryodhana’s brothers started trembling as their chairs shuddered at the sound of the Panchajanyam, and they started to fall from their seats! What a picture she drew for a nine year old and stimulated the art of imagination! The dramatic, exaggerated version had no physical gestures – all were through the gentle voice modulation that brought the story alive like a movie.

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Parents are our ideals. However, children feel they are strict with many schedules (of course, for the good of the children!). When I was young, the only person who could overrule my father’s decisions regarding my freedom was my Grandma. She used her veto power mainly regarding my play time (often at the cost of studies!) and lying idle to hear her stories.

Grandma’s compliments when I achieved (and even when I didn’t) are so heart-warming.

My maths teacher, Joseph sir (a wise old man), occasionally came home

to teach me maths. One day, while teaching me multiplication, he asked me to repeat one of the tables that he had made me practice several times. I could easily say the multiplication tables from 1 to 12. Tables from 12 to 16 required some more effort, which I didn't put in, especially my Grandma being around. He scolded me and I started to cry loudly (if it was my parents, they wouldn't have minded). Grandma came as an angel from inside and told the teacher, "Enough of your teaching!" Joseph sir couldn't convince her in any way.

My father, who had become a Professor of Education at that time, came to know of it in the evening when he returned from the college. He talked to his mother and requested her not to intervene in teaching. However she refused to oblige saying, "Any teaching that makes the child cry is not real teaching!" I was so happy when she reminded my father of how he had studied without being scolded or slapped. He had answers, but was unable to explain in front of me!

108 When I was eight, I was to write the Sainik School exam. Grandma told my father that it's not a good idea since I would have to live away from the family in a hostel at a young age. My father had his reasons that were fair, and he asked me to appear for the entrance examination. Though he was serious about my attempting it, grandma had a personal session with me on why that life would be difficult.

Anything for her! I made sure I didn't get through the test! The attitude of taking certain things lightly in life might have been planted in me by her.

Grandma used to explain about the relatives, relations and was open in her versions of who are good and who are not so. They were straight talks- simple and loving - and offered unadulterated joy. I used to enjoy helping her crush the betel leaves (*vettila*) and areca nuts (*paakku*) in the small stone, kept for that, which was her most relaxing time.

A grandma's presence in a home moulds the children, without her/his knowing and, they are rarely credited for shaping the personality. Grandmas are always a joy – whether we are sad, angry or happy, they "talk to" and empathise with you. They hear out all our petty complaints and silly stories

at home and school, and join us. Grandma to grandchild is a special bond.

Though short, I cherish these moments of my childhood. I now realise the deep impact it had in me. Above all, I loved her nose-jewel stud, mukuthi (red stones on gold stud). She was aristocratic, mature, expressing unbounded love, simple and straightforward.

Grandmas – the invisible angels who shape us!

Success of Listening

*Heard melodies are sweet,
but those unheard are sweeter
Therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;*

Keats : Ode on a Grecian Urn

The ode is a reflection on the power of thought, imagination and anticipation, which is often greater than the act itself. Are we losing these powers to the busy schedules and continuous use of smart phones and other techno-connectivities ?

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She doesn't listen to what I am saying!

My father doesn't understand why I want to do something!

My mother doesn't listen to what I am saying!

Any time you see my son, he is on the mobile phone!

He is not listening in the class, but hooked to the phone!

She is playing a lot on the phone!

She doesn't hear what I am saying to her.

He doesn't hear what I am saying; he is always on the phone!

These are some examples of comments that often reverberate with unexpected consequences. Some of these comments are heard, some unheard, some are heeded, some are not. Many of these go unexpressed too. But many

can create stress if not properly understood!

This article is an attempt to understand what “listening” to others (as evidently stray thoughts pulled randomly) means to get a perspective in the current context. It is an inter-generational, technology perspective. This may help in better self-realization for a learned listening!

This is longer than usual, and I hope time and interest permits you to ‘listen’ to my thoughts!

History is a timeline of “events”. Civilizations, trade, wars, explorations, discoveries, inventions etc. are used individually or clustered as points of reference to develop, understand and explain events for the periods for which we seek insights into. To quote an example, “science” has been a tool of change in human history (from the time of Plato through the new scientific revolution - attributed to Galileo since the 1630s), or later, “technology” is an eventful history maker. (science and technology are intrinsically connected, though.)

The timeline (or era) of history, with the advent of accelerated inventions of technologies in society in the last two decades, has shorter time-spans of eventful happenings that make ripples of faster changes compared to the slow happenings arranged over longer periods of time in the previous centuries. One of the simple ways to look at it especially from the point of the topic of present discussion - listening, is to place people in generation boxes (Gen Box) by virtue of the year of birth.

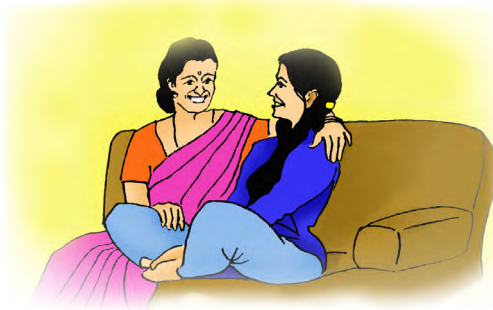
“Information”				“Instant Connectivity & information”				
Newspaper Gen	Radio Gen	TV Gen	Computer Gen	Internet Gen	Mobile Gen	Google Gen	Android Gen	Whats app Gen

(One can modify this in any manner of logic and history!).

I designed this classification for the vital component of “Information” that runs through all these generations, and as we start from Computer Gen we

find that we are travelling beyond information to “instant connectivity”. One way of understanding “listening” is first to place ourselves in an appropriate Gen Box and then look into the Gen Box of the listener.

The Gen Box is a representation of the realm of reality on which our behaviours are usually based. It is natural and fair. People are often comfortable with others in the same Gen Box, from a perspective of technology-based approach (though issues in communication happen at intra Gen Box level too) than with Gen Boxes farther away from them. It’s important to accept and understand the “realms of realities” in other Gen Boxes, for continued “basic commonness” for meaningful communication. Listening is the primary step in this acceptance.



For e.g., a TV Gen mother talking to a post-Google gen daughter - the behaviours of these two are naturally influenced by the context, values, habit, ethics (and many more) they have evolved from. The main point is that they vary a lot. Listening (the predominant function of successful communication) for one may not be the behaviour expected from the other. Our perception is that a product is made up of many factors such as the “gene kit” we are handed over and the environment which nurtures us. To make a complex phenomenon simple, let us call it the “Identity” of an individual.

Identity has more to do with “becoming” than with “being”, and it’s a process that starts right from birth. The mirror that our environment holds up to us determines who we become (Paul Verhaeghe, 2014: What about me?).

As we advance, two fundamental tendencies would seem to be typical of every living being: we want to be part of the greater whole, and at the same time we long for independence.

Revisiting the earlier example of the TV-mother and Google-daughter, now, in addition to the Gen Box, it is growing to the interaction between the two identities. It is in this situation listening warrants more care from the communicators. The speed of the technological changes (and hence growing diversity in gadgets), identity (in terms of “brands” over a growing market economy), communication (that attempts at connectivity at a physical level across the globe: now it’s only virtual!) all have created a new “global civilization”. These were changing over a period of time, to the present neo-liberal era, in which consumer is the key. All present day Gen Boxes are embedded within the global civilization – like it or not!

For e.g., from “product” to “product-of-class (brand)” - be it clothes, phones or bikes - the new Gen refers to the “brand” of a product rather than a product. It’s not the material but the brand that communicates to the people in the present day market- based society, especially the e-marketing with Amazon, Flipkart and so on.

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How do two Gen boxes synchronize for a happy living? By changing.

It is not simply a question of making the “other” change; the painful truth is that we, too, will have to change (Paul Verhaeghe, 2014). Thomas Friedman, 2016 (Thank You for Being Late) also states the significance of changing or adapting to new technologies (in terms of Identity having more to do with becoming) so as to be on board of reality of the present day. Called as the Big Shift, they argue that we are moving from a long period of history in which “stocks” were the measure of wealth and the driver of growth - to a world in which the most relevant source of comparative advantage will be how rich and numerous are the “flows” passing through your country or community and how well trained your citizen-workers are to take advantage of them. It calls us to learn faster by working together and to pull out of ourselves more of our true potential, both individually and collectively. New Gen has the advantage of being born into this phenomenon. Others have to reinvent their skills and

mind set to adapt for a “common minimum understanding”.

Listening (the key tool in communication) happens across generation boxes. Listening happening within a Gen box is usually uneventful, since the equations of the day generally bear similar meaning for all. While listening to the connected world around, find time to disconnect to connect with the near ones, or learn to accept a new pattern of listening.

Accept intergenerational box differences and change wherever possible. We can't exclusively blame the new gen for the “high speed travel in the information motorway”, which science and technology offers, and our not being able to cope with it. Ensuring values (listening rather than commanding plays a vital role) could strengthen the order and life, whichever generations we belong to.

114 “I indulged myself one evening, after a seminar in a dark conference room in a Mumbai hotel, to sit quietly in the roof-top restaurant for dinner, and watch the sunset fading over the Arabian sea. A young man and woman sat on the table next to mine. Then another woman joined them. Thoreau's Three Chairs, I thought. Except that they had the Arabian Sea and a warm sunset outside, instead of Walden Pond and snow. The waiter lit a candle on their table, brought champagne in a bucket, and poured three flutes for them. They raised their champagne flutes, looked up from their smart phones for a few seconds at each other, said “cheers”, and quickly returned to their smart phones to find out what was happening in the world elsewhere. They didn't seem interested in what was happening in each other's hearts or minds.”

Arun Maira, 2017 *Listening for Well Being: Conversations with People Not Like Us*. P 103.

*Thoreau's Three Chairs: Henry David Thoreau, the American Philosopher wrote in *Walden* (1845) “I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship and three for society.” He could sit in one chair and watch the autumn outside, geese on the pond and the flurry of snow. He could listen to his own thoughts detached from others, while seasons changed.

I was pleasantly surprised when one of the faculty in a college recently wrote interesting verses, stating that the person was in solitude and inventing the fineness of nature during that time: Thoreau's first chair! Many of us use the chairs; if not, we need to! Search for these chairs: find the Wordsworth, Bharatiyaar, Gandhiji, Mother Teresa, Changampuzha, Marie Curie, Nelson Mandela... and so many. Become them. We need to place the chair for some time so that we can internally listen to ourselves, friends, family and society. Listening is life.

Listening is a purposeful thought process. Settings affect our thoughts. E.g., silence improves our thoughts. It might be quite difficult to aspire for "thoughts" (and hence listening) amidst the "noise" of the TV soap opera or sounds of songs with loud beats (not the sound of music!).

In *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, (2015), Prof. Sherry Turkle, at MIT argues that just as Thoreau needed these symbolic chairs in his cabin near Walden Pond, we need a similar social structure to communicate effectively. But cell phones are damaging our capacity for engaged conversation, she suggests, and thus our capacity for friendship and social connection.

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For e.g., Turkle argues that we avoid solitude, Thoreau's first chair, by constantly checking our cell phones, despite the fact that we need this solitude to truly know ourselves. With cell phones, "we turn to other people to support our sense of self," robbing us of the self-knowledge necessary for rich conversations! She claims that in the end, we are sacrificing conversation for connection!

Respect the Gen Boxes, do not blame them, learn to live with the different boxes, understand that "Identity" undergoes a change with time and technology, from utility to brand, realize conversations are important in the age of connectivity, disconnect and reconnect, have the three Thoreau's chairs... It's listening, an intergenerational technology perspective for a new order of harmony for the present day.

Did you listen today?

LIFE

Leadership: Bringing out the Best

Excellence is rooted in various factors, leadership being one of the foremost: a perspective on leadership to bring out the best.

Most often we chase a profession rather than excellence, which is the key to making a difference.

It's not what you want to become, but bringing the best in you to what you become, the key of success, service and happiness.



Essentially it means excelling in what we do as quoted by the example of Martin Luther King Jr.: “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michael Angelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

In general, our priority is what a boy or girl wants to become especially after their +2 schooling or A levels. All the efforts and energy are driven towards choosing a job, probably getting an admission into medical, engineering or other professional courses. However, what I feel is that the performance in the profession is a continued affair that is often more important than the job or the profession chosen, especially to justify our choice. The second part is conveniently or habitually forgotten.

The profession or job is not the end as often perceived. It is in fact the innovations, processes and activities of originality in a job that brings out the excellence in the person, contributing to profession and society. This is a wider area of discussion. I plan to focus on one theme that may improve our outputs in terms of, again a much bigger theme- Leadership.

Some questions to reflect on:

1. Did I make a difference in the job I hold?

120 2. Have I changed the way in which I deal with people, policy, institutions in a way that is beneficial to them?

3. Did my sitting in a chair for a task help or brought happiness to others or myself?

4. Am I following mediocrity in functioning?

5. Do I feel this as a monotonous job?

Each one of us has a leader and follower in us. It is important to identify the leadership and apply it if we want to excel. It may be convenient to be a follower, but if you are a follower in a leadership position, then it will halt development and growth.

To effectively discharge a big phenomenon such as leadership is the function of

1. Vision

2. Courage

3. Ability to withstand the consequences of what we do.

4. If needed, overcoming incompetence and inefficiency, to ultimately fulfil the duty called by the job.

Interestingly, by virtue of the positioning as a leader (government or NGO), we are expected to be capable of the above.

To be able to do so, we also need to assess our capacities and weaknesses from a personality and social context (this is a theme for another discussion). This analysis can help to bring out the best in us.

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam interestingly explains in a wider context to Indian democracy in the chapter Creative Leadership in his Book A Manifesto for Change (2014).

Excelling or performing well in whatever we are doing is essentially a factor of inventing our leadership abilities and taking over the “follower” attitude.

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Many of us complain about why we cannot perform or excel. One of the interesting books *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch, a Professor of Computer science at Carnegie Mellon University, who lost his battle with pancreatic cancer in 2008 while he was 46, explains life lessons and what complaining means:

“Too many people go through life complaining about their problems. I have always believed that if you took one-tenth the energy you put into complaining and applied it to solving the problems, you would be surprised by how well things can work out... We all have finite time and energy. Anytime we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won't make us happier.”

The key of success, service and happiness is not in what you want to become, but how you bring out your best in whatever you become.

Strandom

Bringing the best in you means finding the leader in you, as Randy says, by focussing on solutions and not on complains..., vision and courage follow.

Excelling: The root is the leadership already within you; discover and ignite.

Confidence as God

We break coconuts, light candles and lamps to fulfil our wishes or to thank for fulfilled wishes! We offer these to God for blessings and support. We get confidence to take the steps needed to achieve the wishes by doing so.

The God in Us

Belief in its final form is Faith. Faith doesn't need answers. As humans, we are often worried about the results of faith, and hence we start from belief, but rarely reach Faith in its real meaning. The attempt itself is great though, the travel through belief to Faith. Every religion teaches that Faith is the key to happiness and ultimate peace. Faith in an ideology, based on truth, is also a religion! Ultimately, all these aim at peace, happiness and universal Unity (the ultimate union with Brahma as per the Hindu philosophy).

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Carlo Rovelli, the famous Physicist, in his book *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* (2016) talks about the theory of relativity. To quote, "In short, the theory describes a colourful and amazing world where universes explode, space collapses into bottomless holes, time sags and slows near a planet and the unbound extension of interstellar space ripples and sways like the surface of the sea..." Can we comprehend the Universe completely? Or Brahman or God?

The body is made of Panchabhootas, (Earth, Water, Fire, Wind and Sky) and this body experiences world through the pancheendriyaas (hearing, sight, smell, touch and taste), controlled by "manas" (mind) and managed by "Budhi" (Intellect). Truth is above all these. We are limited in our capacities to perceive what really is out there. Experiences vary.

This is endorsed by again Rovelli (and many scientists):

“Interestingly the images we construct of the Universe live within us, in the space of our thoughts. Between these images – between what we can reconstruct and understand with our limited means - and the reality of which we are part, there exist countless filters: our ignorance, the limitations of our senses and of our intelligence.” They decide our experience.

Religions teach us the complexity of the Universe, simplicity of truth and love and direct us to search for God within.

“Isvarah sarva-bhutanam
hrd-dese ‘rjuna tisthati”

(Bhagavad Gita : meaning, The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone’s heart, O Arjuna!)



“Thy body is the temple in which God dwelleth” (The Bible) Your body is the temple where in God resides.

A major purpose in this life is to grow in the righteous character of

God.

An Example of Lord Ganapathy

Ganapathy, the Lord of Ganaas, popularly known as Vigneswaran or Vinayak, is considered to be the remover of obstacles.

Ganapathy has a head of an elephant and rides a small rat/ mouse. Several meanings can be derived from this - that the wisest and the largest can ride small vehicles. The paradox that displays great imagination gives lessons to think of the unthinkable. The astute capacity of God is evident when Ved Vyasa was advised by Brahma to pray to Ganapathy, who is the ideal person to write down his narration of the great epic Mahabharata.

Often, the different appearance of Gods has been a mystery to many. A foreign disciple of Ramana Maharishi once asked the Saint if there exists such a thing as a Personal God.

“Bhagavan: Yes, Ishvara.

Disciple: (with astonishment)- What ? With eyes, nose, ears etc?

Bh- Yes, if you have them why should not God also have them?

Disciple: When I read in the Kabbala and the Puranas that

God has these organs, I laugh.

Bh- Why don't you laugh at yourself for having them?”

(Guru Ramana, Cohen, SS 1998)

Many of us initiate auspicious events in life by worshipping to Ganapathy in different ways, to bring in peace, harmony and remove obstacles on the way to achieve what we desire. We break coconuts as an offering. The breaking of the coconut symbolically denotes the breaking of a problem to elicit a solution. It's an activity that builds inner confidence (in addition to seeking

the blessings of the God). This develops self-confidence and improves belief in self.

In fact, it works as a psychological outlet in instilling self-confidence, and drives us to go ahead and solve problems, ultimately bringing peace.

This is, for a human, the self-manifestation or an image of confidence within the self, projected as a symbol of ardent faith.

Kamba Ramayanam is a Tamil epic written by Kambar during the 12th century. The story says that the Chola King (King Kulotunga Cholan III) had asked Kambar to come to his palace, and gave him an ultimatum to complete the final chapters of Ramayana Charita by the next day (probably, there was an undue delay in finishing the epic by the poet! Hence he was given a deadline). It is said that Kambar slept and woke up worried saying

“neeravum vedinchitu ambey”

126 (Oh, Time is out, my mother (Goddess Saraswathi)) And Goddess said

“granthavummudinchitu kamba” (your book is also over Kambar!)

To his surprise, the scriptures were completed in front of him, ready to be submitted to the King!

One view of this could be that creativity and God that dwell in us are the same. It's not me but the power in me that makes me. That power is a boon to me. Kambar himself wrote it. But he seems to have not known it. Probably he was deeply involved in the writing, and he might have felt as if he was waking up from sleep.

It's the belief. Sustained belief is faith, and faith helps us unravel the mystery of the Universe through the tools of truth and love. The search through established facts and experiments helps us to unravel truth. Religion,

science or both, we need to be on board, balancing the act of life on these two wheels or on any one bigger wheel.

“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.” - Albert Einstein

Joy of Living

Raju counted the rupees paid reasonably for the intellectual job he meticulously undertook and relaxed on the rear seat of the Ambassador car. The car drove through buildings with beautiful architecture and reached the main gate of the public road in the busy city. As he was placing the envelope with the payment in his pocket, he glanced at a woman sitting still on the footpath with a child sleeping nearby, on the path. She rested her chin on her hand, and was gazing into the unknown, possibly thinking of her struggle for the day. A blank look into the future... There were many like her as Raju's car continued up the street. But something about her visage hooked him and her image travelled with him.



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For no reason, an advertisement he had seen that morning, “A big villa that you can own!” flashed through his mind. Do we need big villas and houses (often underutilized or unused) even if we have the wealth for them? Or small homes with full lives?

As he sipped tea from a roadside stall, Raju noticed the many people around - the “caricatures of the common man”. The joy of life is in meeting the need, not in the grumble of greed. When we limit our needs, the life

we sketch gets better, and the ordinary becomes special. Not big villas but wisdom is what makes us one with the crowd, anywhere, anytime.

As Raju slid into the car and leaned back on the seat, he heard a feeble knock on the car window. An old man stood with a stretched hand, palm facing up. Raju took out a few coins from his pocket, and as they fell on the wrinkled hands, parting from him, he could hear the tinkling laugh of joy.

Currencies cry when parting for big villas, they laugh in joy when parting for etching a better caricature.

The car took a turn into the main road of life, again...

Why it Happened so?

We humans often blame “time” for the not-so- good happenings in our life, though time is a construct of threaded events already existing inbuilt. This is an epistemological enquiry.

Does time decide events or events decide time?

All events in life take place at a “time” and life is a collection of these events. For e.g., there is an accident at a particular moment. We can think, rationally, that the accident could have been avoided provided the previous events – how we started a day on a morning, took a bath, talked over phone had tea, breakfast etc. – had been done differently. A fraction of a second’s delay or different timing would have prevented the accident from happening.

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But we do not know that an event/accident is waiting. Time sets or decides that event. People remark “my time is not right”. We are familiar with the manmade 24 hours of a day and night marked as am and pm. But the “time” we talk about is a combination of events; it is a construct of attributes that make the time.

Losing a job, not getting something we wanted, getting something better than expected, getting sick, straining relations, building relations which are usually marked by humans as achievement, recognition, appreciation, satisfaction (or their opposites) etc. are events. On a different note, the occurrence of events is sometimes viewed as “chance” founded upon randomness (different view of discussion). Whatever, events exist.

A year signifies a human construct. A construct that makes us believe that time exists as dates, months and years, and they move forward. It is fair to create an order and uniformity much needed for the humans to exist and coordinate connectivity between them.

But science and religions talk about time as a relative phenomenon. They view it as a process in which changes around (changes are events!), and in us, construct “time” which is relative. The same hours of a clock seem to run slow when we are upset and worried, while it flies when we are happy and satisfied. Einstein’s famous contribution of relativity has helped us to learn this in an easier way. In a way we are the same...things around us change and we say time is moving. Interestingly, we must think of time as a localised phenomenon: every object of the Universe has its own time running, at a pace determined by the local gravitational field (Rovelli).

Every event is linked to time any time has an event linked to it. Simply put, the canvas of events of life unfolds around an individual. We do not move, that moves (we call it as change, which is ubiquitous). When it moves, we call it as time.

Does time decide events or do events decide time?

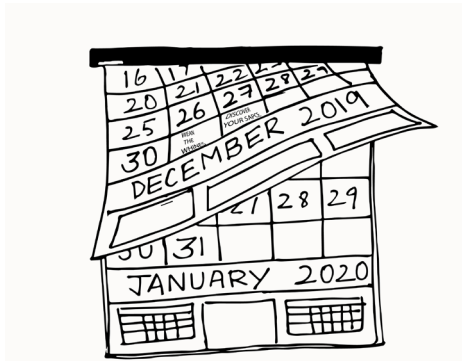


As 2019 bid Adieu

As the countdown in 2020 begins, 2019 leaves us with moments of satisfaction and scope for further betterment. It's difficult to document the learnings in the 525,600 minutes of 2019. This is an attempt to jot some of them (as a series).

Prologue:

The writings that follow are built on the premises which are numbered as follows:



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1. “Wean the Whines”: Never complain; we can suggest, opine or modify.

“Complaining does not work as a strategy. Too many people go through life complaining about their problems. I’ve always believed that if you took one tenth the energy you put into complaining and applied it to solving the problem, you’d be surprised by how well things can work out.

We all have finite time and energy. Any time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won’t make us happier”. (Randy Pausch, The Last Lecture)

2. “Discover your space”: at work, in Family and Society. Move out of “self”, reach out to the many families of humanity.

3. “Be active”: Innovate and prepare to modify (and to get modified), and to change. “The world is 2.0 and we are still 1.0. We need a complete reboot.” Emotionally as well as organizationally, we cannot transform thinking and behaviour overnight” - (Richard Gerver, 2013, ‘Change: learn to love it, learn to lead it’.)

4. “The Future is purchased by the present”- Samuel Johnson. Live the present moments in the best way possible, future will evolve.

5. EDUCATION: from teaching the subject to teaching the student

Students make teachers! Teachers need to teach the students the subject, not subject to the students.

I feel Education as facilitating the ability to see the bright, ever growing banyan tree of wisdom from the inner corridors of knowledge. The role of a teacher is the key in shaping the children to be the best citizens of a Nation. The art and science of Teaching are also undergoing fast changes with the advent of technology. Teachers have to cope with that as fast as possible. Teaching in 2019, I see, is “to nurture individuality and diversity amidst uniformity in a class”- that’s a formidable challenge. To connect with every student, to mould the heterogeneous to the best they can be.

As Dr A P J Abdul Kalam puts it, “I have met 18 million youth, and each wants to be unique”. A great onus lies with the teacher to find out, nurture and accomplish the uniqueness of the student.

“The basis for the future of education must lie in schools and inspiring teachers. The human mind is an incredible thing. It can conceive of the magnificence of the heavens and the intricacies of the basic components of matter. Yet for each mind to achieve its full potential, it needs a spark...The spark of enquiry and wonder. Often that spark comes from a teacher,”

(Stephen Hawking, 2018: ‘Brief Answers to the Big Questions’.)

6.AGRI-CULTURE: Addressing “irrelevance” rather than “exploitation”

It is the most important link in the existence of life in this planet. The “culture” that fits in Agri- is changed to Agri-business or Agri-technologies (one can argue this as a new culture!). The ordinary farmers are to cope with the fast changes which throw more questions at them than give answers; more uncertainties than definiteness. A majority of them are gazing at the fast domination of information technology, biotechnology, globalisation and climate change. Yuval Noah Harari: 2018 (21 Lessons for the 21st Century) says that the revolutions in biotech and InfoTech will give us control of the world inside us, and enable us to engineer and manufacture life. Relating to the present agricultural scenario, one way of looking at it is “...Perhaps in the twenty first century populist revolts will be staged not against an economist elite that exploits people, but against an economic elite that does not need them anymore. This may well be a losing battle. It’s much harder to struggle against “irrelevance” than against “exploitation”.”

7.FAMILY: Disconnect, to connect to the physical reality

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As the virtual world is expanding through “online” and is fast entering every home, the offline interactions between family members are shrinking.

Listening, an important function of family members, which happens across different generations inside a family sometimes turn turbulent (it’s not the age but the technology exposure and habits). 2019 is transforming the humans into a more “online” species or “man-machine”. Relationships between family members are to be duly revisited, consciously worked out between the children, and between children and elders to make them realise that there is a physical world. It’s too complex a topic to be discussed in detail here, but the essence is that the family has to survive the Smartphone test; speak, listen, care, interact, smile, discuss play, eat with awareness... Beware, connectivity doesn’t help in these physically!

Listening happening within a Gen box (as mentioned in “success of listening, page 109) is usually uneventful, since the equations of the day generally bear similar meaning for all. While listening to the connected world

around, find time to disconnect to connect with the near and dear ones, or learn to accept a new pattern of listening.

Accept intergenerational box differences and change wherever possible. We can't exclusively blame the new gen, for the "Hi Speed travel in the Information Motorway", which science and technology offers, and our not coping with it. Ensuring values (listening rather than commanding plays a vital role) could strengthen the order and life, whichever generation we belong to.

The Punch Lines of Life

Life is as remote as the universe, and just as difficult, to understand. But then, we feel it through the presence of incidents, phenomena, people, plants, animals, sea, sky and what not. Many things matter.

Control Complaints

At the end of the day, we all seek happiness, or a state of peace, amidst the various problems we face. There is no life without problems. Learning to accept and address them is the first step. Try not to ponder much or complain about the issues we have. Discussed earlier,

136 We all have finite time and energy. Anytime we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won't make us happier.' Randy Pausch in Last Lecture.

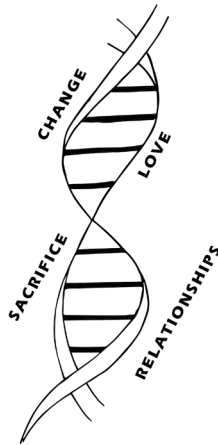
Do share them, but with "options of optimism" than as a "basket of worries".

Balance on Fulcrum of Love

The fulcrum of life is Love. Life balances and moves on it. The leverage will be smooth and strong when there are no undue expectations! Expectations are creations of the self, which should not be encouraged or should be nipped off at the bud, when wisdom starts in our life - this, can make life easy and light. The coordinates of love are quite tricky to be plotted. Aspirations (or definitions of Love) vary with age, circumstance and the times we live in, and is different for each person.

Sacrifice as Duty

Experience or enjoy sacrifices – don't worry about this. The law of nature and religions teach us to treat sacrifices as a way of life whether short or long. I exist and write this, and you read this because of the sacrifices of many. Generations are products of sacrifices. Work is duty done with sacrifice. You may lose time with family, friends, or things you like, because duty beckons



That's how societies exist.

Adapt to Change

Try not to fear or worry about changes. Often, many worry about their children preferring what they call as “odd choices” for their lives, rather than conventional professions that parents and the society decides for them. The youngsters are products of change, as we all were, or are. The style of dressing, talking, gadgets (cell phone, laptop), entertainment patterns and social behaviour of many are products of the present day. People are looking out for “Identity” - boys, girls, young and old. In his interesting book on *What About Me: The Struggle for Identity in a Market-based Society*, Paul Verhaeghe (2012), debates about the identity as “...we are the product of

constant interaction between our brains - or, more broadly, our starter kit of genes, neurons and hormones - and our environment.” With technology toys and branded products floating all around them, and the fast changing societies, how do you stop a child from not trying them!

Relate Relationships

Relationships are strands tied between people intended to be managed with strengths and tenor between them. You necessarily enjoy sailing on this ship with people whom you identify - parents, family, friends and peers. The realm expands every day to accommodate new people. Enjoy the relationships. The fabric of relationship is fragile, smooth and velvety. It's important that we play our role to sustain the stability of these. This could mean compromise and adjustments, sometimes seemingly one-sided. Relationships invariably become strained and maybe are not worth so much effort, in some cases.

Be Respected

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Don't worry if you are not liked by everybody in this world. It is not possible. Mr. Mohamed El Baradei, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and who was awarded Nobel Prize in 2005, in one of his interviews with CNN, mentioned that he doesn't expect to be liked by all, but was sure to be respected for his opinions. Don't indulge in a deed expecting to be liked by all. Do what you feel is right (intention) and good for the society, which is founded on morality. "Morality is the basis of things and truth is the substance of all morality" - Mahatma Gandhi. People realize what you do after a while. Doesn't matter!

Emerge from the Past

Never be prisoners of past. In reality, incidents that have happened could never have happened in a different way. Move ahead. Pondering on the past is unnecessary, and if it is painful, it hinders you from moving forward. Many thinkers have put this forth. David. A Shiang, in his book, 'God Does Not Play Dice' says, "Much of our attention is spent second-guessing the past, but we can know with absolute certainty that nothing could have taken place in a different manner. By one estimate, more than 30 percent of the time we

spend worrying, concerns things that have happened and can't be changed.”

Switch on the Light(er) Side

Learn to see the lighter side of things, events and people. Enjoy the fun of the “unseen in the seen” (or scene!). Explore the passions and experience the world in a way only you can. The world is a creation of our perceptions and it's a different world for different people. Accept.

At the end of the day, the “world” matters, and how our talents/capacities help the world matters.

Worry of the Missed Opportunity

(A message especially for parents and teachers)

Let me pull out a few real examples from thousands -

1. One student tells me she missed writing the Government Public Service Commission examination because she was five minutes late and the gates were closed.

2. A friend says his son did not get the subject of his choice in under graduation since he missed it by one mark.

140 3. Years ago, two friends of mine who were brilliant in studies faced a disaster when their performance was rated as too appalling (though there was a different fact on this) to be able to pass the course.

4. Students fail in examinations and develop an aversion towards that subject and hence to life.

5. Some feel they are not good in English and hence cannot be successful.

6. The “school/college drop outs” worrying and parents underestimating them.

Live that moment of “the miss”, and you are sure to be worthy of the world in the future.

I am writing from experience...only experience!

If you at any point of time felt or worried that you have missed the bus, remember that something better awaits you just round the corner. I am not saying this to console, but having come across innumerable examples of

people who have experienced this!

The six real examples mentioned here are the most successful altruistic and happy personalities in the world today (like the many others I have met) who contribute a lot to the society. Interestingly, in the case of all the five examples, I was with them when they missed the bus, and told them that there are worthier things waiting for them (which I was and am convinced about)... and it came true.



Next time you miss something and get hurt or upset, please remember that there is something worthwhile waiting for you... that which allows you to explore more of your abilities, helps you reinvent yourself for a better society and makes you feel happy and satisfied as a human being.

Let me conclude from a book *The Black Swan - the Impact of the Highly Improbable* (Nassim Nicholas Taleb):

“When missing a train is painless: Missing a train is only painful if you run after it! Likewise, not matching the idea of success others expect from you is only painful if that’s what you are seeking.”

Live that moment of “the miss”, and you are sure to be worthy of the world in the future.

It's at such a time that you need your parents and teachers to support you, to bring out the best in you, to unwind the farrago, and just nudge you towards the wonderful world that awaits only you.

A Retirement Tribute

Mr. Aun L Desai IAS, a day before his voluntary retirement, shared some thoughts with government officials in the Secretariat, Puducherry, on 30 October, 2017. Some of these are picked up that are relevant to us, especially since he practiced what he preached.



1. We are not Government Servants but Public Servants.
2. Be positive and helpful.
3. Test of a good file note: “Write a note that you would expect your juniors to write and put up to you.”
4. Compared to two decades ago, a new tendency in file preparation is that there are less note writings in the file. In the hierarchy of administration,

it's important that the Heads of Departments "write notes" rather than sign decisions that comes from an LD Clerk.

5. Intentions are important; and good intentions always justify "bona fide mistakes".

6. Bona fide mistakes are OK, but never the mala fide ones.

7. Never demand anything in return for the duty we deliver; never accept gifts for work, especially when a work is pending for the "gift-giver", even with the best intentions!

8. Never turn away from challenges - face them - if new initiatives are there, mistakes may happen, but be bold, since the intentions are good, benefitting public and ultimately all will be good.

9. Blessings of the people whom we are supposed to help really matters.

10. Never keep pending files/decisions with you.

11. Keep "needs" restricted; never slide into greed. Don't get into the bad race of greed - for more and more - there is no end!

12. Try to enjoy life within the salary we have and are entitled to.

13. Health is vital. One of the major reasons of me taking voluntary retirement is health.

14. Having stayed away from work for a period, I realised the type of pressure it used to give, which we don't realize when we are actively involved in it.

15. Follow the prayer of serenity:

God, grant me the Serenity

To accept the things I cannot change...

Courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference.

16. Be ready to accept change.

17. Always keep the “student” in you “alive”.

18. You may not get the work you love, but nobody can stop you from loving the work that you have got.

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STRANDOM is the light of thoughts in search of paths
of life.

This book helps to learn some parts of the changing
life, to fit ourselves today for the tomorrow.

