

Business as 'YAJNA'

BUSINESS WITH A SOCIAL PURPOSE,
AS A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.
STORY OF GROWTH OVER TIME,
AND A MESSAGE...

YOU TOO CAN GROW

LIFE LESSONS FROM INDUSTRIALIST

YAJNA NARAYANA KAMMAJE

Narrated by : B Anantha Bhat & Team

Business as 'YAJNA'



**INITIATIVE OF NIT-K ALUMNI
FOR NATION BUILDING THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**Writer & Chief Editor: B Anantha Bhat
Editorial Team: S. K. Guru Prakash, A. S. Karanth, V. B. Parvatikar & Hemal Kharod**

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Also contributions from many employees and associates, too big a list to mention here, which are used in the body of the writing. We are thankful to all contributors for their time and effort. A lot of credit goes to them for this book.

Foreword:

C.K.Venkataraman

Managing Director, Titan Company Ltd.

<https://www.titancompany.in>



I was privy to reading the draft of this book, *Business as 'Yajna'*. I have not really had the pleasure of working with Yajna for long. My predecessors have worked a lot with him for decades. But from what has been written about him by the legions of his well-wishers and admirers, I can make out that he is no ordinary person.

Also, to me he is the exemplification of the phrase, “With great power comes great responsibility”. From the many conversations I have had with him in the last two years and various aspects covered in the following chapters, it has been clear to me that Yajna is a complete multiple-stakeholder technocrat, committed as much to the betterment of employees and society as to the improvement in the business prospects of Sona Group of companies.

He combines this extraordinary “consideration for others” with a jolly personality!

I am sure this compendium of stories about him will inspire hundreds of people to reach out for the stars. That is the stated aim of the book writers. I wish them all well in this endeavour.

April 2021

Editor's Note: From the Titan Company Website:

Mr. Venkataraman, a post graduate diploma holder in Management from IIM-Ahmedabad, joined Titan Company Limited in 1990, and worked in the Advertising and Marketing functions before becoming the Head of Sales & Marketing for the Titan brand in 2003.

Thereafter he took charge of the Jewellery Division in 2005 and last held the position of Chief Executive Officer, Jewellery till September 30, 2019. Subsequently, he assumed office as Managing Director of the Company from October 1, 2019.



Foreword:

Prof. Uma Maheshwar Rao Karanam

Director. NIT-K, Surathkal

<https://www.nitk.ac.in>

It gives me immense pleasure to write a Foreword to the book - *Business as 'Yajna'*- a memoir on the life of Yajna Narayana Kammaje, who stands as an epitome of success, growing from rags to riches and whose journey of life has become a beacon for the young, to get inspired to realise that 'success the hard way is the best way'. He is one of the many illustrious alumni of our institute.

Many have dreams, big or small, but only those few who convert their dreams into reality differentiate themselves from the others. To dream to become an entrepreneur, stepping out from a stable job in HMT in itself speaks of what makes an entrepreneur in the late 1980's. It is hard for the present generation to visualise the knock-backs and refusals Mr. Yajna must have experienced as an entrepreneur before finding an alternative route to the summit. Drive, self-reliance, will power, patience, integrity, passion, optimism and confidence converted his ideas into a business and transformed it into a profitable business. The main purpose of this book is to motivate youngsters by taking the broader message that obstacles can be overcome and significant achievements can be made with hard work and dedication, sustained over a long period of time.

The book is a conglomeration of episodes, personalities and interesting snippets along the journey of Mr. Yajna. Though the book is not a biography, it has projected Mr. Yajna well, as an icon, as an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and a good human who always had passion to serve the society through all means for the upliftment of the poor.

Entrepreneurship is growing around the world. It is a global mind set and the goal,

to create more wealth and employment. In these times of growing entrepreneurship, the book - *Business as 'Yajna'* as a case study has covered all aspects of a business. The effort of a group of alumni who worked on this book, in particular, the Mumbai chapter of NIT-K Alumni group under the National Builder series has resulted in the praise worthy book, *Business as 'Yajna'*.

April 2021

Editor's Note: From the NIT-K Website:

Prof. Uma Maheshwar Rao Karanam graduated in Mining Engineering from Osmania University, Hyderabad in the year 1983. After working in various mining industries for a total period of around three years, he joined the Indian Institute of Technology Banaras Hindu University (IT-BHU) for a Masters in engineering program. He acquired his M-Tech in Mining Engineering in 1987, and was the topper of the class with a CGPA of 9.38 on 10.

Prof. Rao started his teaching career as a Lecturer in Mining Engineering at the then Regional Engineering College, Surathkal, DK, Karnataka during 1987-89. Later, in 1989 he joined the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur in the Department of Mining Engineering as a Lecturer. He obtained his Ph.D in the field of Rock Mechanics from IIT Kharagpur. With a steady growth from Lecturer he became a full Professor in 2004. As a Professor, Dr. Rao has served IIT Kharagpur through various administrative positions. Some important portfolios were, Chairman Estate, and Vice-Chairman Joint Entrance Exam (JEE). Prof. Rao was the Head of the Mining Engineering Department during 2006-08 and 2010-14.

PAGES FROM LIFE & TIMES OF YAJNANARAYANA KAMMAJE



- Early Years
- Study and HMT
- Sons Group
- Alumni Association Work
- Social Work
- Supporting Entrepreneurs
- Travels and Learnings



**Growth is
essence
of life**

Life Story & Learnings in his own words



Appeals



- 1 Commentary by Colleagues
- 2 Sharing by Industry Leaders
- 3 Sharing by Colleagues
- 4 Note of Gratitude from Beneficiaries
- 5 Family Members and Associates

Personal Photo Album

Press coverages

Factory Details

Editor's Preface



The culture associated with the present day Indian land mass has made significant contribution to all fields of human knowledge. This is referred to by scholars as *Sanaatana Dharma*. *Sanaatana* in many Indian languages means ancient, from time immemorial. According to this philosophy, there are four main goals to human life. These are referred to as *Purusharthas*. i.e. worthy endeavours which give meaning to life. They are always recited in this order to highlight their significance and prioritization. We have put them here in a few Indian languages.

1) Dharma, ಧರ್ಮ, धर्मा, धर्म, ಧರ್ಮ, ಧರ್ಮ

This is the foundation of all other activities. The path of righteousness in the conduct of all affairs of humans and their interactions with the world.

2) Artha, ಅರ್ಥ, अर्थ, अर्थ, ಅರ್ಥ, ಅರ್ಥ

Literally means money, but it is more of a guideline on acquiring various forms of wealth to sustain life and use it as an instrument to serve. To be carried out only by following the diktats of the No.1 priority- Dharma

3) Kama, ಕಾಮ, काम, काम, काम, काम

Literally means desire. Using the bountifulness obtained by the above two approaches, it is an appeal to pursue good desires on the personal front, family, lifestyle and society at large.

4) Moksha, ಮೋಕ್ಷ, मोक्षा, मोक्षा, ಮೋಕ್ಷ, ಮೋಕ್ಷ

This is “THE” ultimate goal of human existence. Roughly translated, it means Self-Realization, or the attainment of a higher spiritual state. This is more of a personal journey through many ways.

This book is the story of the first three of these lofty goals. This is the narration -- and more importantly lessons -- from the life of Yajna Narayana

Kammaje. He was not born with a silver spoon. He came from a humble background and grew up in a family full of constraints. But he built a near rags-to-riches story by sheer hard work and achieved success in his professional and multiple businesses spread over decades. This is the story of how he wove a social purpose into the conduct of business. And how he used the wealth thus earned for a bigger social purpose, and earned the respect of his peers in the industry.

India regained independence as a country in 1947. In post-independence India's industrialization, a few trends have emerged:

- 1) Around 30 years of focus on heavy engineering industries, big dams to support agriculture, basic transport and core infrastructure, scientific research and focus on higher education. This is when centres of pre-eminence like IITs, ITI, HMT, HAL, SAIL, ISRO, BARC, etc., took shape and made major contributions and put India on the path of Industrialization, and boosted the confidence of the nation.
- 2) The second trend is focus on MSME (Micro, Small, Medium Enterprise) and the IT/BT sector. MSMEs have been credited with generating the highest percentage of employment to the working population, and spreading the industrial culture into the nooks and corners of the country.
- 3) The decade of the 1990's and later saw liberalization and economic reforms that led to an increase in the growth rate, mostly driven by the Information Technology sector.

The Editors of this book would like to introduce one successful entrepreneur who has made a major impact in the MSME sector: Yajna Narayana Kammaje, who has served the watch industry initially with HMT and later through the Sona Group of Companies started by him. He is credited with being one of the first executives who brought quartz technology into India while serving at HMT, and one of the few engineers who served in the field from 1973 -- i.e., more than 50 years already.

The Sona Group has been in operation from 1987 and has contributed towards creating a manufacturing base for dials, leather, metal, gold and black

plated straps and the associated ecosystem. A group which has developed a design and manufacturing experience with per annum capacities for 4 million metal straps, 6 million leather straps, 3 million buckles, 2 million watch assembly (as of 2019) AND using its success for many social objectives like employment generation and women's empowerment.

This is not a biography written by him, but an effort by many of his associates, colleagues and beneficiaries of his success. Many of us came together to jot down our experiences and the Editors have found it worthy to be compiled in a concise book form.

The growth of the Sona Group coincided with the growth of another major contributor in this Industry -- Titan Ltd from the Tata Group. Former leaders from Titan have also contributed with notes. We thank them. We thank all contributors who have put in effort and shared the experience of their interaction with Yajna, as he is called by his friends. Their writings have been reproduced in the second half of the book.

We hope it also serves the purpose of recording the developments in the Watch industry, through sharing of experiences, and as a representative of many leaders in the MSME sector who have contributed a lot in the last few decades. We have documented his story while keeping in the back of our mind that several such MSME leaders have served the nation while facing many challenges. The nation salutes them all.

This book can also serve as a piece of history of an industry, for students to study, and of the prominent people associated with that field. Some threads have been included to use the milestones as case studies in management studies by students/young readers. We intend to create more collateral in various formats that can also serve academic programs.

In terms of style of writing, note that the word “we” is predominantly used for a few of us who volunteered to be the editors for this project. We made requests to lots of people to contribute anecdotes, writings for compilation, with absolutely no constraints on what to write, or topics to highlight to fit a narrative. It is entirely based on their recollections. Many have contributed on their own and have been

used almost in entirety. You will see it in various approaches, grammars and styles and even language chosen for writing. This ensures a conversational approach to reading this book.

We have discharged our Dharma by reading various content and only AFTER that planned and wrote the coordinating paragraphs. The writing style aims at a consistent format of Editorial commentary, but a totally individualistic style of writing by associates and contributors.

We have chosen a mix of a chronological order of narration for the whole “body of work”, while mixing episodes, personalities and interesting snippets along the journey. We hope that makes for interesting reading and not serve as a yearly diary. Do give special attention to the word “he”, which often refers to the leading protagonist of the book, and sometimes refers to the writer.

When Yajna read many of the letters from contributors and inputs in the interview process, he was surprised at the superlative terms used to describe him. He is modest enough to acknowledge and wonder if he deserved the level of praise that was showered on him. We too are aware of the 'giving pledge' movement and multi-billion rupee philanthropies. A lot more impactful projects have been executed by those endowed with resources. But we believe the level of social service and support undertaken by Yajna is worthy of recording. For a few reasons: 1) The modest beginnings from which he started his life, and 2) Absolute non-interest in seeking publicity for these acts over the years.

This project was not driven or initiated by him. It was by all his associates who came together and conceived this project. In particular, the Mumbai chapter of NIT-K Alumni group, under the National Builder series. This series focuses on those who have contributed to employment generation and furthering social connect. They prodded him to agree to be profiled, and to provide his inputs to this book. The predominant feeling was that his way of life is worth emulating. Thus, it is worth documenting his life journey and lessons. Vithal Parvatikar, who served in the editorial board can be considered “THE” trigger for this book.

You will hear the story of near-rags-to-riches and we are hopeful that these stories will help in motivating readers to overcome their present challenges and also

achieve heights of success over the years --just as Yajna did. And also, with the hope that you and other well-endowed populace become “GIVERS” back to society. Just like he has been doing.

We hope that this book serves multiple purposes. For any comments or additional material, suggestions for corrections/modifications (which we alone own), and to continue the discussion, please write to businessasyajna@gmail.com.

Just to add a sense of humour, we have titled the book *Business as 'Yajna'* with a spin on the word 'Yajna' -- Yajna as the Sanskrit word, to worship/revere/serve with an element of sacrifice. Yajna as the person. That is what we observed. Incremental but continuous growth has been the hallmark of Yajna, as we saw it. And we chose “Growth over Time” as the Footer note to walk you through that journey and hopefully you will see growth in some aspect of yourself. We enjoyed doing this project. We hope that you will grow in some aspect or the other as you join us on this exciting journey.

We will start with select quotes from various contributors:

Bhaskar Bhat. Former Managing Director, TITAN Company Ltd: *“This is my small effort at telling you that 30 years back your name (Yajnanarayana Kammaje) was unique to me as I had not heard of anyone with that name. But after 30 years, I realize that you are unique.”*

Prof. (Dr.) K.B. Linge Gowda, Ex Director, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology: *“Yajnanarayana Kammaje, I see as a down to earth person, an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and a good human; he always had the passion to serve the society through all means for the upliftment of the poor.”*

LUB (Laghu Udyog Bharati) Team: *“He is a Visionary. A Leader Extraordinaire. A Mentor Par Excellence, a Generous Philanthropist, an Active Educationist and above all a Man with a Golden Heart.”*

P. Venkat Rao, Koota Maha Jagathu: *“Honesty, hard work and integrity in addition to commitment and an insatiable zeal in every endeavour is key to achieving the pinnacle of success. Challenges like poverty, lack of opportunity or*

support and encouragement will not stand a chance in the way of anybody who is committed to succeed and achieve. These words aptly suit my friend, philosopher and guide Sri Yajnanarayana Kammaje, the great entrepreneur, philanthropist of our Koota community.”

TK Gururaj, Ex HR Director, HMT: *“It is always a great pleasure to talk about Yajna Narayana. He belongs to a rare breed of people who excel in whatever they do. He has worn many hats during his illustrious career; culminating in his becoming an extremely successful industrialist.”*

P Jayarama Bhat, Chirman, Karnataka Bank: *“Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje is a man of vision and creativity. This book throws light on his thoughts and achievements through his life journey depicting the core values practised by him which makes readers understand his personality.”*

BG Dwarakanath, Ex COO, Titan Ltd: *“As the name suggests, our Yajna too is present in many Avatars and has occupied almost all the possible areas that one could think of in one's Life - a Technocrat, a Technologist, an Entrepreneur, a Social worker, an HR expert, a People's Man, Religious Worker, Philanthropist... .. the list is endless.”*

Dr. Ullas Karanth, Reasearcher, Environmentalist: *“Yajna the dedicated Horologist with the necessary micro-vision, had also developed a farsighted, global view of the society at large. He had a clear idea of the role of engineers in nation building as well as a deep empathy for fellow human beings. He has strived hard to make the world a better place for all of us.”*

Mihir Kharod, TRADEPOST Magazine: *“The watch industry of India has been privileged to have been blessed with some incredible personalities. They are doyens who have illuminated this industry with their faithful hard work and sincerity. These industry stalwarts have coloured this sector with the pride of place that it finally enjoys today not only within India, but also in many other countries of the world. One such impressive, fascinating, and remarkable personality is Yajna Narayana Kammaje.”*

HG Raghunath, Ex CEO, Watch Division, TITAN: *“His employees and*

engineers always looked up to him and had very good words to say! He is a Respected, Performing (Accolades winning) and Innovative Entrepreneur and spoke well at our Vendor Partner meets. He was very constructive in his feedback to the Company. He is indeed special in many ways in my view.”

G. S. Shanthiraj, Ex Finance Director, HMT: *“Ever smiling, never angry” Yajnanarayana, even today. Both husband and wife are gifted with their innocent smile.”*

K. R. Upili, Former Director and Board Member, Siemens, South Asia: *“What struck me most about Yajna is his humility in spite of his phenomenal material success. He just treats his wealth as a means to reach out to the needy and be as useful to as many as possible. He is a source of strength to everyone he comes across, one way or the other.”*

Harish Bhat, Tata Group Brand Custodian: *“I also know Yajna Narayana as a deeply spiritual person, who is committed to following principled values in his life and in the businesses that he has founded. For this reason alone, he can serve as an inspiration to many young entrepreneurs who wish to build good and sustainable businesses in the years ahead.”*

Dr. K. Balaveera Reddy, Chairman, Board of Governors, NIT-K: *“He has created opportunities for over a thousand down-trodden women by providing them a means of livelihood. This could be achieved by proper training to them and also jobs at his own establishments.”*

SP Kudva, Industrialist: *“During our college days nobody would have imagined that Yajna would scale such great heights in life but the attitude and passion to earn a name and fame and share it with the society may have triggered such a scale.”*

Appa Rao, Member, Govt of India Advisory Board: *“He shaped the careers of his engineers who now have resumes, of which they can speak with pride.”*

Unanimous Opinion of many associates:

“Yajna strived to make ordinary people to produce extraordinary results.”

Why this Endeavour? Many purposes of this book

This book is special in a few ways.

1) It is not an autobiography. Almost everyone born into this wonderful world will leave it by making some impact. It could be with just a few members in his/her family, or hundreds and thousands of people in an Institution or company built by him, or millions through a leadership position in a country or an invention or discovery, or building an institution that will outlive him. Some write detailed accounts of their journey, as a matter of historical record and to give some perspective, often written as a first-person account. This book does not qualify to be in that category. Though the Sona Group of companies has made positive impact on lots of people's lives, this work is not an initiative started by Yajna Narayana Kammaje.

2) It is not an authorized biography written about a person or a group as told by the protagonist of the book to a close confidant. Often such books are collaborations between a leader and a journalist/professional writer, based on inputs collected in a series of interviews and available public literature or body of work of the concerned.

3) It is not a commissioned work to profile a person or a group. Those are often planned with a specific branding purpose in mind, often associated with a fund allocated for the purpose. This is not the case with this book.

4) So, what is this book really about? This is collaborative work of associates and friends of Yajna Narayana Kammaje undertaken to achieve multiple purposes.

a) To document nuggets of wisdom that could be of use for those already in businesses. Especially, the section on business strategies behind the success of the group, and the last chapter on musings on faster industrialization.

b) To serve as a rich study material for students in general and students of MBA or those with interest in business in particular.

c) The reason Yajna and the Sona Group were taken for profiling in the Nation Builder series was as an approach to achieve social objectives through enterprise. India has lots of successful business leaders. It is hoped that the theme postulated here will catch on so that more businesses will work to increase social impact.

d) To be a trigger for others with an entrepreneurial spirit to take Yajna and his journey as a role model. The aim is to make them achieve more. 'If Yajna can grow with time, I too can grow over time,' is the spirit that we want to inculcate.

Any non-fiction book can serve multiple purposes. These include,

1) The first, to serve to bring out the main message. The message of this book is to make achieving business success while using it for positive social change a cause of celebration. Also, to empower young readers to think big and take the message of “You too can grow” to heart.

2) The second is to document a journey of significance in any sphere of activity like Industry, Sports, Political Science, Administration, Social Service, Science, which has, over the years, contributed to making history. We hope readers will see value in reading about the journey of the Sona Group of companies.

3) Some books propose new theories, new ways of viewing the world, new thought processes, new insights. We don't make any such claims. Most of what is here can be found in other literature. We hope readers will find our mix of narration and pointers on skills to be learnt along with each narration, interesting.

4) For those who may know the hero of the book, there should be some new insights, some new learnings, a few new anecdotes. You will find some of it in the Editors' writings but more importantly in the writings shared by other contributors.

5) One aim is to start a new trend. Bring in an element of innovation. Using current technologies, push the state of the art. We are making an attempt in that direction. We are sure that the internet and connected devices are changing almost all aspects of life. The reading habit is no exception. A significant percentage of reading has moved from paper and books to the online medium. We chose to mix the online and book formats. We have created a page on the social media platform, *facebook.com*. Most of the photo collections that contribute to the story are archived online. Very few have been added here in this book. We assume internet access will be ubiquitous. Hence making use of both formats will not be an issue. The photos are catalogued into sections on personal, academic, professional, national, international, community and other sections. We hope it will also serve as a treasure trove for those featured in the photos and help them to recollect fond memories and stories linked to them.

6) As a work of literature, it should contribute to the vocabulary. We have coined the phrase, “**Jambavantha Effect**” which means to make deliberate, conscious effort to bring out the strength in others. Make them achieve more. Inspire them to aim higher and become bigger. Envision bolder dreams. We make the case that the hero around whom this book is written has been doing that.

And as a demonstration of that resolve, we will be distributing this book freely to all interested colleges for further distribution to students. It can be downloaded free of cost. We will make active effort to spread the advice enunciated in this book. Conduct quiz contests and distribute prizes through colleges.

Some Alumni of KREC/NIT-K who got a chance to preview the book are already planning to proactively use this book and kindle the spirit of entrepreneurship in general and rural entrepreneurship in particular. There could even be a financial support model that may get developed to enable bringing into action some of the ideas motivated from or derived from this book. This plan for financial backing of entrepreneurship is what makes this book unique.

Yajna Narayana Kammaje is referred to as YNK, KY, KYN, YK, Yajna, Yajna Sir, Yajna Sir Ji, Boss in the various writings about him. (A small tidbit: Kammaje is the

name of a place in coastal Karnataka. He also goes by the family given name Yajnanarayana Herle in some of the press coverages.)

Contribution from Shankar Prakash:

Shankar Prakash is an International Anchor, Commentator, TV and Radio Presenter, Expert, Voice-over Specialist, Management, Media, Marketing Consultant and an alumnus of the same college as YNK. In his submission to this book he says,



Shankar Prakash

“If I have to write about Shri Yajna Narayana, it's simple and straight-forward. He lived up to his name. Every move of his has been a Yagna of Success. His approach has been very devoted just like when you prepare for a Yagna. He performs it with utmost Sincerity, Dedication, Commitment. Any Yajna or job if done with perseverance and a will to excel like him, the result can only be one -- Success. And he had loads of achievement.”

It is these kinds of comments that convinced us that the name coined by us, *Business as 'Yajna'* is the most appropriate name for this book. If at the end of a few hours of reading the book or browsing the website, if you are also convinced to internalize it and spread the message to others to treat business as a sacred act, as an act of service, we consider our effort as rewarded.

Read on to find out more. We look forward to seeing you all a little taller at the end, when we meet you again in the acknowledgement section at the end.

**-S. K. Guru Prakash, A. S. Karanth, V. B. Parvatikar, Hemal Kharod.
Writer & Chief Editor: Anantha Bhat**

PS: If you would like to hear some of the contributors, recordings are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfuWA87vngdQFDGXbWuLy780rTJcSzR3> The event was held to celebrate 30 years of the Sona Group of companies.

Salutation from Yajna Narayana Kammaje

Yajna Narayana Kammaje
#6. 5th Cross.
N.S. Palya Industrial Area
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www.sonagroup.net

I heard about the initiative of bringing out a book to share my story, focusing on my personal, business journeys and social activities. This was initiated by some prominent members of the Alumni Association of KREC/NIT-K Surathkal. I got to learn about it after various write-ups were collected. I learnt and then reconfirmed that the tone and tenor of the proposed book would not be just biographical, but written with a bigger purpose of motivating readers in general and young aspiring entrepreneurs in particular. Thus, I also got enthused and joined in, in reaching out to many to contribute their write-ups, with authorization to publish.

I am at a loss for words to express my thanks to all my business associates, classmates, college-mates, ex-colleagues, present colleagues for honouring this request from us and allocating time and contributing detailed write-ups. You are all my friends and well-wishers, and my life is enriched by my association with you all. I am grateful for your kind words written about me. I would like to convey my deepest appreciation for your efforts. All contributors have been very kind and have used superlatives while describing some of my actions, achievements, and contributions.

Special thanks to all customers who are too many to mention. But a special mention must be made of the great company TITAN, a dream customer to have. It gave me a wonderful platform to excel in the initial growth phase of my business, and a leader to grow up with. TITAN's way of treating vendors with empathy is phenomenal and beyond words for me to explain. The TATA's code of conduct drove us all to do business with high Integrity. TITAN's support during the crucial stages of the selected vendor's journey is what has made it worthy of the highest respect.

I would like to thank all those who brought me up and all those who entrusted me with responsibilities and provided the opportunities to grow. And those who worked with me and extended all possible support for various roles in HMT, Sona Group of companies, Alumni Association activities, KREC/NIT-K Governing Council, Laghu Udyog Bharati, Koota Maha Jagathu organization, Rotary International and various social / service organizations.

I have fond memories of a call at 7.30 am in the morning from Prof. PN Singh sharing the news of my nomination to the Governing Council of NIT-K, based on my work in the Alumni Association. That was such an honour for me, to serve with so many talented people serving the institution that is dear to them.

Similarly, I am grateful to the people who prevailed upon me to take on the position of Trustee in the 800-year-old Sri Guru Narasimha Temple. This role and the result - of seeing the transformation of this place of worship into a big Kshetra-- is a project that has given me immense satisfaction. And I can see the effect of good karma earned in this role, in helping me tide over tough times in my life.

I would like to mention one more honorary appointment which reinforced my belief that you do good work, and due recognition will follow. My name was included in the VISION 2020 policy making body of the Government of Karnataka. I relished the chance to work with many leading members of Industry and Commerce.

I should mention the hundreds of workers in our factory, whose hard work is what has enabled us to get recognized as Industrialists. My family and I are eternally grateful to their contribution to the growth of the Sona Group of companies. I cannot forget the day when 200 odd lady workers surprised me with rose petals and singing of Happy Birthday Boss. That is an indication of love showered on me. I hope and pray that I get more chances to impact more and more segments of the society.

Finally, my thanks to the editorial team which formatted various contributions and made a story line. I hope our readers also appreciate their effort by spreading the word about this book and the main message it carries.

The main purpose of this book is to motivate youngsters to take the broader message that obstacles can be overcome and significant achievements can be made

with hard work and dedication sustained over a period of time.

I end with a prayer which captures the wonderful essence of the Indian ethos and culture:

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः। सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः। सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु। मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत्। ॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः॥

om sarve bhavantu sukhinah. | sarve santu nirā mayāḥ| sarve bhadrāṇi paśyantu mākaścidduḥkha bhāgbhaveta |om śhānthi śhānthi śhānthethee ॥

May all sentient beings be at peace, may no one suffer from illness, May all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer. Om peace, peace, peace.

My salutations to one and all who gave opportunities and moulded me, worked with me and supported me over the years. It was a pleasure to arrange a gathering of many of my seniors. Those associated with HMT can recollect lots of memories with these professionals.



In an effort to bring all senior executives who retired from HMT, Yajna had arranged a get together in Bangalore in 2020.

Top Standing. Left to Right: Mohan Ram, AP Nayak, Krishna Murthy, Shanthiraj, Satya Kirthi, AP Rao, Yajna Narayana Kammaje, MR Prasad, SPMallik, Bhavani Shankar and Narahari

Sitting. Left to Right: TK Rajagopal, Linganna, Hari Rao, KB. Basavaiah, Nageshwar Rao, Rajashekar, TK Gururaj, Sidda Linga Swamy and BG Dwarakanath

Editor's note: *This is a good gathering of luminaries of the Indian horology industry & Hindustan Machine Tools industry in a single frame after their retirement from service.*

List of contributors to this book with Quotes, Stories and Anecdotes

Name	Designation and Organization
From fellow travelers in Horology & Industry	
Bhaskar Bhat	Former Managing Director of Titan Ltd, Present Director, Tata Sons
BG Dwarakanath (BGD)	Executive Coach & Management Consultant, Former COO & Sr.VP, Titan Company
HG Raghunath	Former HMT executive. Former CEO of Watch Division, Titan Company
Mihir Kharod (<i>Tradepost</i>)	Senior Journalist and Historian of Horology
R Rajagopalan	Vice President & Chief Manufacturing Officer, Titan Company
T. K. Gururaj	Former HR Director. HMT Ltd. B.Tech (Hons) I.I.T. Kharagpur, DIISc (I.P.E.) Indian Institute of Science
Harish Bhat	Brand Custodian. Tata Group
GS Shanthiraj	Former Finance Director, HMT
T. Vidhyadhar	Ex DGM. HMT Ltd. President, V.V.Nagar (HMT Layout) Welfare Assn., R.T. Nagar, President FORWARD Federation of RWAs, Org. Secretary, Citizens' Action Forum, Member, Namma Bengaluru Foundation, Dy. DVN Warden, Civil Defense DVN-17, Secretary, Thoreau Foundation, Adviser, BAB (Honoured with CM medal for meritorious service in Civil Defense)
B.N. Yalamalli (BNY)	Ex HMT, Author, Consultant in Design & Quality
T.V.N.S Appa Rao	Ex HMT, Director in many companies. Member of Government of India Advisory Board

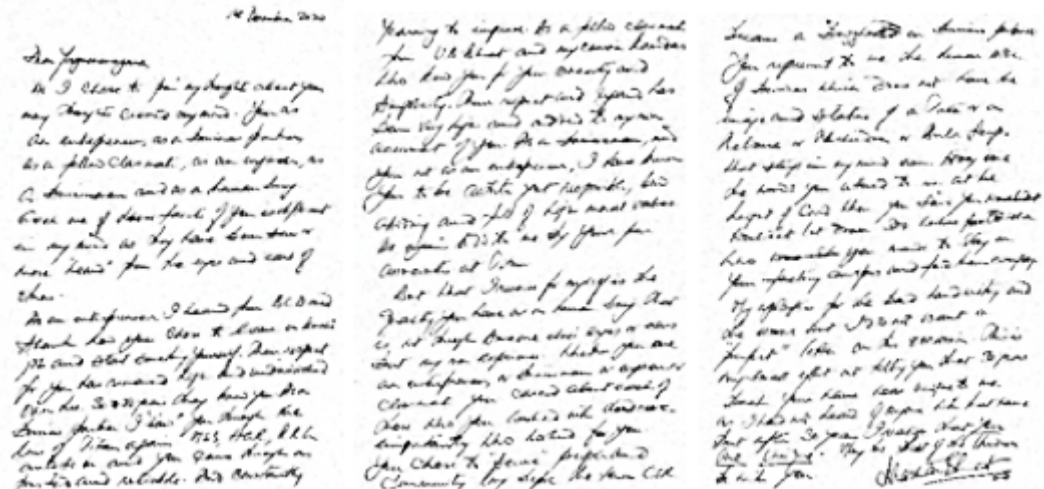
Chandrashekar Shetty Mundkur	CA and an Academician
Harishna Bhandary	Multinational Executive
Krishna Deshika	Ex HMT, Director at many Multi Nationals
P.V. Bhagavan	Ex HMT
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NVGK Bhat	Ex HMT, Entrepreneur
Raghuram	Retired Additional Director of KSSIDC
Valued Associates	
P Jayarama Bhat	Chairman of Karnataka Bank Ltd.
Ramakrishna Upadhya	Journalist & Former Chief Editor of <i>Deccan Herald</i>
MG Chandrashekar	Former Scientific Secretary. Govt of India
Dr. Puthuraya	Author, Faculty in Medical Education
From the warm Association with KREC/NIT-K	
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Prof. Sandeep Sancheti	Former Director of NIT-K. Now, VC of Marwadi University, Rajkot
Prof. SS Murthy	Former Director. NIT-K. Currently, Member (BOG) Board of Governors of IIT, Dharwar
Prof. Balaveera Reddy	Senior Academician, Former Vice Chancellor. VTU. Present Chairman Governing Council of NIT
Prof. Gopal Mugeraya	Director, NIT Goa. Former Director, NIT-Agartala
Dr. Ullas Karanth	Alumnus of NIT-K, Prolific Researcher on Tigers, Internationally reputed Environmentalist, Chairman CWS
SP Kudva	NIT-K Alumnus, Industrialist
Ranjan Moodithaya	Former Scientist at NAL
Dr. Souptik Mukherjee	Alumnus of NIT-K, Mentee of Yajna
Shankar Prakash	International Anchor, Commentator, TV & Radio Presenter, Expert, Voice-Over Specialist, Management, Media, Marketing Consultant

Gopala Bhupal	Past President of KREC/NIT-K Alumni Association. Industrialist. Chairman, Karthik Group of Companies
Hemanth D Pai	Alumnus of NIT-K. Banking Professional & Member of CBI Investigation Board
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Partners in Social Service	
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LUB Team (Laghu Udyog Bharati)	Pan India organization to support MSME's
UB Bhat	Alumnus of NIT-K. Past Marketing Chief of UB Group. Past District Governor of Rotary District 3190
Dr. Linge Gowda	Former Director, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology
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Radhakrishna Bhat	One of the Pillars of the Sona Group
Umesh M	CA. Auditor team of the Sona group from inception
PB Madhusudan Karanth	One of the Pillars of the Sona Group
S.S. Swamy	Technologist. Ex CTO of Unisoft India
Vikram Bhat	Entrepreneur and associate of the Sona Group
Hanumantha Reddy	General Manager, Sona Group
Giri Karanth	Corporate Lawyer

Jagdeesha Upadyay, Balakrishna, Ravi Prakash, Shashi Prakash & many others	Factory heads and key contributors to company operations.
Ramprakash Holla & Sudheendra	Directors, DPS Technologies
Smt. Nilamma	Senior employee, Woman Leader from Village Chandapura
Family members of Yajna	
Dr. Shobha	Niece, Researcher in Chemistry
Dr. Sahana Annadorai	Niece, Researcher in Chemistry
Shashanka Rao	Nephew, Researcher in Biotechnology
Dr. Vasanth Rao	Co Brother, Medical Doctor
Sri. Keshava Holla	Maternal Uncle of Yajna who blessed him with a poem towards the end of the book
Editorial Team	
A S Karanth	Alumnus of NIT-K, Wind Energy Professional
Vithal B Parvatikar	Alumnus of NIT-K, Industrialist
S K Guru Prakash	Alumnus of NIT-K, Entrepreneur
Hemal Kharod	Journalist, Publisher - <i>TradePost</i>
Rtn. B. Anantha Bhat	Engineer, Rotarian, Trainer, Management & Business Advisor, Sportsman, Narrator, Writer & Chief Editor of the book

Handwritten Thoughts from Bhaskar Bhat

Former Managing Director, Titan Company Ltd.



Dear Yajnanarayana,

1st Dec 2020

As I chose to pen my thoughts about you, many thoughts crossed my mind. You as an Entrepreneur, as a business partner, as a fellow classmate, as an Engineer, as a businessman and as a human being. Each one of these facets of you is different in my mind, and they have been seen, or more “heard” from the eyes and ears of others.

As an Entrepreneur, I heard from BGD and think how you chose to leave a cushy job and start something yourself. Their respect for you has remained high and undiminished over the 30 odd years they know you. As a business partner I “saw” you through the lens of Titan again --MSS, HGR, RRG. And to us, you came through as trusted and reliable. And constantly yearning to improve. As a fellow classmate, from UB Bhat and my cousin Ramdas, who know you for your sincerity and simplicity. Their respect and regard has been very high and added to my own assessment of you. As a businessman, and you not as an entrepreneur, I have known you to be astute yet responsible, law abiding and full of high moral values. As again told to me by your peer associates at Titan.

But what I treasure for myself is the quality you have as a human being. That is not through someone else's eyes or ears but from my own experience. Whether you are an entrepreneur or businessman or employer or classmate, you cared about each of those who you worked with, and more importantly, who worked for you. You chose to “serve” people and community long before the term CSR became a buzzword in business parlance. You represent to me the human side of business which does not have the image and stature of a Tata or a Reliance or a Mahindra or Birla Group. What stays in my mind are the words you uttered to me at the height of COVID -- when you said you wouldn't let down 300 workers from Odisha. You made them stay in your factory campus and fed them everyday. My apologies for the bad handwriting and the errors, but I did not want a “perfect” letter on this occasion.

This is my small effort at telling you that 30 years back your name was unique to me as I had not heard of anyone with that name. But after 30 years, I realize that *you are unique*.

May the best of the universe be with you.

Signed: ***Bhaskar Bhat***



Editor's Note: Bhaskar Bhat had articulated his corporate philosophy while talking about the success of Titan. “Belief in the Indian Consumer opportunity was the source of our courage.” He has rubbed off that belief on to all his associates. Yajna is one of them.

CHAPTER 1:

Early years: Growing up with constraints and life long resolve

Time per se, is immemorial, has no beginning and has no end. “Naa Adi, Naa antha” ना आदि, ना अंत as they say in Sanskrit. The same in Kannada is ನಾ ಆಡಿ, ನಾ ಅಂತ. Readers may recall the famous *Mahabharat* serial by BR Chopra which conceptualized the Sutradhar commentator starting with “*Mei, Samay Hoon*” i.e ”I am time”. He used the concept of eternal time as an observer, and went on to narrate the classic events of the Pandavas and Kauravas.

We want to introduce a word which many would have not heard: Horology. It means the “science of watches”. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horology> Organizing of this philosophical concept of time into a common understanding and accepted standard for all enabled organizations of society and productive entities that drive modern society is horology. E.g., a factory opens at 8.30 am, classes start at 7.30 am, lunch break is from 1 pm to 2 pm, etc., etc. All aspects of modern life, coordination across people, across cities, continents are smooth because of all sticking to standard time. The product that makes this happen is the ubiquitous “watch”. Just imagine how the world would be if 7 billion people had different concepts of time! The world would not be the same.

In post independent India, there are a few engineers, technocrats, businessman, technicians who have around 50 years of experience in this field of horology. All their contribution is immense. You will hear about many of them in this book. Their efforts have made the Made in India watch a reality. It still symbolizes the best gift after a teenager passes his/her 10th standard and becomes a proud owner of a watch.

There is a book authored by B. N. Yalamalli (popularly known in the industry as BNY), titled “*Watches: A Know-It-All Manual*”, published in 2020. He is considered an expert in the watch design and quality management domains. <https://www.amazon.in/WATCHES-Know-all-Yalamalli-BN-book/dp/B08Q8KWCM3/>

Writing a foreword for this book by BNY, BG Dwarakanath (popularly known in the industry as BGD) who retired as COO of TITAN mentions a popular adage: Time is also defined as “what you make out of it”.

What follows here is the story of how Yajna Narayana Kammaje made use of his time, excelled in studies, achieved a successful career in the early days in watch making at HMT and later built the SONA Group of companies in different aspects of horology, which completed 30 years of successful operations in 2017. He was awarded the **Lifetime Achievement Award** by the prestigious magazine, *Tradepost* in January 2020.

Apart from just the financial growth of the company, what many of his associates recall are the core values, and use of this prosperity for social purposes, and generously shared their observations. They urged the Editors to document various aspects of his life which will serve multiple purposes. We intend to delve into this aspect.

India has been blessed with generations and generations of Nation Builders who have contributed in their unique ways and left their footprints in its illustrious history. Society treats them as great sons and daughters of the motherland. In the arduous task of growing a society, a nation state calls for work in various sectors like Science, Technology, Politics, Administration, Military, Social Service and various segments of Commerce and Industry. For the narrative at hand, we will restrict our discussion to Post-Independence Industrialization in India.

The following can be the broad category of people who added brick by brick to what the nation is today.

- 1) Participants in Commerce & Industry based largely in India before independence, and then expanded their contribution.
- 2) Those whose base got uprooted during the unfortunate partition of the country, and literally rebuilt from scratch.
- 3) Children of well to do families who built on the existing strengths and increased the size of the operations.

- 4) From various segments of the society, whole masses of the population who became Professionals, Engineers, Doctors, Teachers, Managers, semi and even unskilled workers who worked within an Enterprise.
- 5) Certain segments who could not get formal education or degrees per se but were great learners in the world university, and never let the lack of formal degrees come in the way of contributing to the society industriously.
- 6) Some are those who might not have great resources to start off with, but made the best use of education, took calculated risks and created opportunities, and went on to become successful Entrepreneurs and Businessmen.

(We have done some Research on these lines and are in a position to guide students through offline interactions that will be mentioned later.)

Yajna Narayana Kammaje would probably fit into the last segment best. He was born in a village and his school was miles away. He grew up in an environment that can be best described as one with highly constrained resources. He faced early struggles and suffered personal tragedies. Being dependent on others to a large extent for his necessities, he turned it around by using academic excellence as the key to break the cycle of poverty, and later made best use of the opportunity at hand to have a successful career. He achieved excellence, being part of a team that brought quartz watch technology to India, and later took a calculated risk and grew to be the head of a group of companies started by him in the Watch Industry.

But that is not what qualifies him to be the hero of this book. It is the unique approaches that he adopted in achieving success, and how he shared this success through active social service themes woven into business operations, along with a high level of Personal Social Responsibility that has won many hearts. That he has achieved all this without using / seeking excessive publicity is an additional bonus. Among his peers, he is a role model to emulate.

Allow us the literacy liberty to coin the phrase, “***Near Rags to Responsible Riches***”. He is humble enough to point out that there were difficulties, but the situation was not really that desperate that the next meal or survival was at stake. So, we have coined the words “***Near Rags***”. There is no shortage of those who can be called

Rich in recent history. We coined the term “*Responsible Riches*” to recognize the category of people like Yajna who use a portion of their wealth to achieve significant social impact.

Now the reason we want to document this story of Near Rags and Responsible Riches is to motivate readers and to endorse the mantra that “Hardships can be overcome, and great results can be obtained with sustained effort over a period of time.” And to start off the series of Nation Builders who have contributed to mass employment and to provide a platform for interaction with them.

Where did it all begin? A baby boy was born to Smt. Padmavathi and Sri Venkappayya on Oct 22nd, 1949. Place Siddakatte, Bantwal Taluka in South Canara District, which was later renamed as Dakshina Kannada, in Karnataka state. There is a certain logic or linguistic thought in naming places, that people with knowledge of Kannada can appreciate. The word '*Katte*' is probably attached to the smallest of common spaces in villages. It means a place where a few people come and meet.

Yajna's father was a Shanbogh, which is a position involving general book-keeping, initially attached to a family and later to the village administration unit, called Panchayat. It is a prestigious but low paying job. But it used to come with the perk of rice grains, a share of the agricultural produce of the village.

This boy was named Yajna Narayana. That name turned out to be most appropriate, as later years proved. A brief about the significance of the name: In glorious Hindu culture, the creator, divinity, the life force behind the universe is celebrated and worshipped in many ways. It is tagged by many names. It can be in the form of Brahma, the divine force as creator. And to assist in creation, is goddess Saraswathi, the goddess of knowledge. Narayana is the lord of sustenance. And to assist in sustenance is goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Finally there is representation of Shiva, the destroyer. And to assist there is goddess Shakthi.

The pursuit of a spiritual journey is to see various forms of this divinity. For example, the mild fire, the body heat in all living beings is referred to as *Vaisawanara*. But the fire that forms its deepest intensity at the centre of a Yaga is Yajna Narayana. This Sanskrit word is the embodiment of the spirit of sacrifice that leads to all higher forms of achievement. It is symbolic of hard work needed to

sustain the self, treating life itself as one spiritual journey. Be ready for all the hard work and sacrifices needed to sustain yourself and those around you. As the future had destined for him, “those” included hundreds of workers and their families in his later role as an Industrialist.

A brief word about his father as recalled by Ramakrishna Upadhya. *“His meagre income was hardly sufficient to sustain a family of five, including wife and three children. Remember, we are talking about the 1940s (Yajna was born in 1949) when India was largely an agrarian, poor and illiterate country, milked dry by the British Empire for nearly two centuries. Dakshina Kannada was no exception.”*

Fortunately, he grew up to be a healthy boy. The reason to mention this is that that did not turn out to be the case for his siblings, which we will touch upon later, which also became a turning point in his life.

Education and learning have been important for generations and more so for Indian families immediately after independence from the colonial rule of the British. But infrastructure and systems have been lacking for most part of history. At the time of writing this book in 2021, the education infrastructure has vastly grown in all sectors --K-12, i.e., Kindergarten to class 12, college education, higher education, etc. Schools now get recognized by brand names. Parents have lots of choice. But in those days, the initial education came from the mother or a teacher. Schools were known by the teacher's name. These teachers often taught in one makeshift room inside their house. In interviews we conducted with Yajna, he recalls Chandrayya Jain as his teacher until he reached the age of 8 or 9. It was an informal learning environment. Only after this did he go into formal schooling, probably class 4 to begin with.

It is every parent's wish that the school be within walking distance from home. In Yajna's case, it was only a 5 km walk! He used to walk to Venur to attend school. He is not alone. Many of Yajna's generation have gone through the same. Modern India is proud of what they underwent as they laid the foundations of modern India.

It is well known that entrepreneurs, businessmen, community leaders and philanthropists of coastal Karnataka of Dakshina Kannada/South Canara districts have made major contributions in the fields of Banking, Education, Hotel and Food business. While discussing these pages, Yajna recalled Late SN Mudbidri and Late

TMA Pai. It is due to these pioneers that the education sector expanded beyond what the Government could provide. The growth of the towns of Moodabidri (often referred to as Jain Kashi of the South) and Manipal are their contribution to India's nation building. Yajna was one of the beneficiaries of the educational institutes created by these visionaries. He completed his PUC (Pre University College) at Mahaveera College. He is quoted as saying, *“Determined to continue studies, I went to Moodabidri with a greater resolve to succeed. I had nobody to guide me, but all that I wanted to do was study well. My hard work paid off and I managed to secure 87 per cent marks, further fuelling my ambition.”*

Talk about the multipurpose usage of basic infrastructure. During school days, after restaurants closed, benches used to be assembled together and get converted into a bed -- that was the sleeping arrangement for months together for him. Seeing this, it was Sri. Anantha Krishna who took pity and invited him to stay with him during school.

He stayed with the family of Ananthaiah Chowtha during his pre university studies thereafter. Yajna recalls Sri. Chowtha's wife, Ratnamma, who almost become the Mom for him. They treated him almost like their son and he is eternally grateful for their support in this phase of his life.

Yajna has kept in touch with the family including his son who now serves as Principal of an academic institution in the education town of Ujire near Dharmastala. Any request from that college for help is automatically serviced now. He along with his contacts in the Industry have fond memories of an address there to 2000 students on the topic, ***“Be motivated to succeed”***.

In later chapters, his journey involving academic excellence, flourishing career and successful business units are discussed. But what gets discussed more is also his attitude of service. We spoke to many associates to trace the origin of this conviction to grow and serve, and the following episodes seem to have influenced Yajna's upbringing to a large extent.

His mother died early in life when he was 12. Yajna has recounted in interviews on the circumstances surrounding this sad incident which happened to him at an impressionable age. He recounts how his father struggled to transport the mortal

remains of his mother and had to struggle to arrange money to transport her dead body and complete the final rites.

This was just a few days after the joyous occasion of his Brahmopadesha (sacred thread wearing ceremony). The whole family had been to nearby Mangalore. Yajna's mother was to deliver a baby, probably with just enough money to go by bus and come back. On 4th Mar 1962, his mother delivered a baby girl -- what would have been his younger sister. It turned out to be a case of infant mortality and the baby did not survive, but died soon after birth, around noon. There was the double misfortune of maternal mortality too to follow, with his mother's health deteriorating and she too died at midnight. One can speculate it to be probably due to septic infection. It is shuddering to wonder if his mother had learnt about her baby dying, in her last few hours of her life. This happened in a government hospital in Mangalore which was in operation since 1848.

This was not a time when embalming and present-day funeral practices were at work. The culture was to accept death as a finality and to attend to cremation matters before the next sunset. His distraught father and young Yajna walked for more than an hour to the residence of a relative in the middle of the night. No one including the extended family was ready to cope with these circumstances with the severely constrained economic situation of the 1960's. With great difficulty, Rs. 12 (around 15 US cents at February 2021 rate) were put together. The taxi driver offered his services to transport her dead body to the village. But it was made known that it was a specially discounted rate, given the unfortunate circumstances. With a few others chipping in here and there, final rites were performed the next day.

That is it, he resolved. Never again, should I /we be in this state. This incident was one of the turning points in his life that shaped his future and his drive to work hard, succeed AND to help others who were in need.

(On a side note, Yajna recalls all those who helped his family during those fateful days and prays for them.)

In spite of their financial difficulties, his father inculcated deep moral values and motivation into him, which served him well in his later years. Yajna himself

recalls, “I was born into a poor brahmin family in 1949, October 22nd.” As is known, Brahmins traditionally pursue knowledge, and the wealth that comes out of it is secondary. In olden times, it was customary to extend the hand with the palms up, to seek alms. The giver often gave with the palms down. His father instilled in him the true meaning of a) *Dharma*, b) *Artha*, c) *Kama* and d) *Moksha* as the driving forces of life : a) *High moral conduct* b) *Honest pursuit* of wealth and its use thereof c) *Healthy desires*, and leading to d) *Salvation*.

Some of the lessons Yajna picked up early was to be a seeker only for a few years, but be a giver for the rest of the years. Never again should the palm be held face-up to collect. Let it always be face-down for giving.

Apart from this explicit advice, Yajna does not recall much by way of lectures or advice or do's and don'ts from his father. That was probably the predominant parenting style of the 1950s. It was not common to give a checklist to live life by. But there were lots of lessons taught by the way they conducted themselves and how they treated others.

Many may be aware of a management game or technique used in motivational talks. The speaker will say, I will say ONE, TWO and THREE. After I say THREE please clap once. Then the speaker goes on to say ONE, TWO and instead of saying THREE, claps himself. In more than 80% of the cases, all listeners will also clap. And that is often followed by great management advice “**FOLLOWERS WILL DO WHAT LEADERS DO, and NOT WHAT LEADERS SAY.**”

This appears relevant to how Yajna got influenced by his parents. Though his father had modest means, he never made it the primary focus. He went about his work and developed a pleasant nature. His house attracted lots of people at various times. It would have been very easy to make them feel unwelcome, given the financial constraints. But he NEVER did that. All felt welcome. They were treated well and somehow his kitchen churned out food to serve all his guests. The Indian ethos treats guests as representatives of Divinity. “*Atithi Devo Bhava*” is the Sanskrit quotation that is often quoted as the guideline on how to treat guests. That seemed to be the prevailing culture in their house. And some of the guests were not even there for the short term. Yajna's father was the 'go to' person for solving many of the problems of his extended family.

Venkappayya's family lived in a small dwelling which was not even waterproof. It was a challenge to manage in the rainy season. Oh, boy, the coastal Karnataka belt is known for its heavy rainy season. Be it as it may, one fine day the number of people staying in the house increased, as circumstances necessitated arrangement for long term stay for a few family members. This happened not just once. It happened twice. Just imagine, a house which was housing five people now needed to accommodate ten! And imagine adapting to this change without “making a fuss”, to use a modern idiom. In the 21st century, especially in urban India, kids expect an upgrade from a two bedroom apartment to a three bedroom dwelling so that each kid can have separate living spaces. In contrast, Yajna grew up knowing the value of sharing. Even now, he rattles out the names of the extended family members he grew up with.

Also recall that such survival had to come from the perk of grains of rice from agricultural produce that his father was given. Food for nourishment, basic dwelling, and a set of the necessary clothes were probably all that were taken care of. The rest was optional, comforts to be postponed to a later date. That probably sums up the childhood of Yajna. And yes. Lots of care, love, and confidence showered on the boy from the father and mother, as long as she was alive!

The Editors here have good experience in the Education line of work. The mid-day meal schemes have helped in furthering education among children. ISKCON, Akshaya Patra and many institutions are active in this form of service and contribute to nation building. That is the best use of tax money, with many governments also firmly behind such projects, which have helped increase enrollment in primary education. If we can nourish and take care of the precious human body, over time, wonderful transformations can happen. Yajna is an example of that. That probably drove him to ensure three meals a day to all workers in his factories, which we will read about in the chapter on the business life of Yajna.

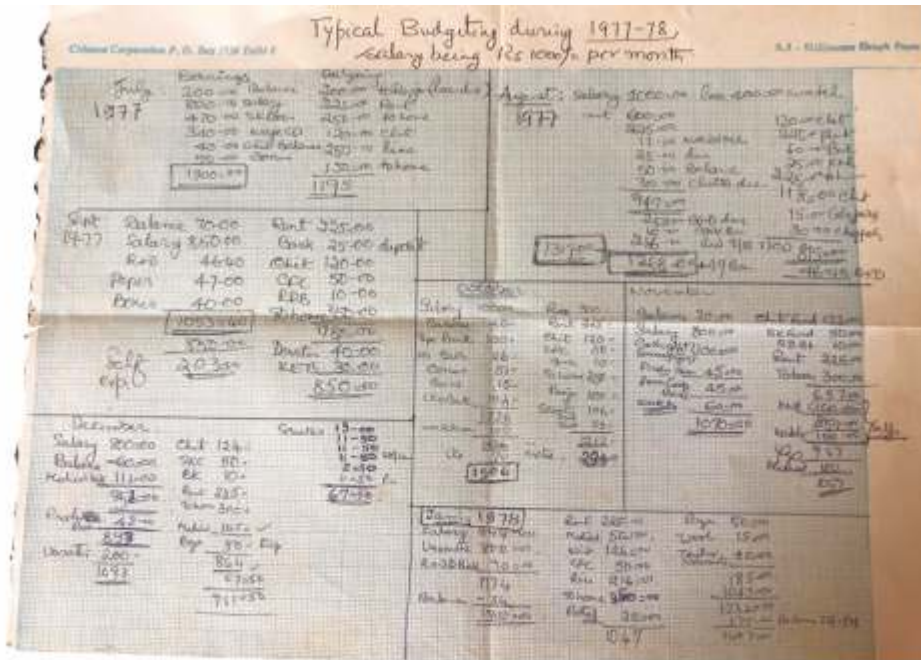
We are going to repeat this point in later pages again. The reason for mentioning it now is to point out that when Yajna prospered in future years, his house in Bangalore became one such place where guests felt welcome. The culture that his father inculcated in him continued.

One other big legacy any parent can pass on to his children is the sense of confidence in their own ability. This, with moral support and encouragement at crucial times will motivate them to achieve more. We got a chance to meet a few family members in Yajna's age group. From them, we learnt what Yajna's father used to share with them about what he felt about Yajna. His refrain was, "This boy will do very well in life, later." It is very easy to understand the effect of such positive messaging that would have rubbed off on to Yajna in his early years. Whether it was done explicitly is beside the point. That implicit confidence reposed in him boosted his confidence at many important stages of his life. That included academic excellence, fast growth in his career and success in business later.

Readers will see that that he took help from many to pursue his studies, but after those few years, he has been a giver ever since. Many of the beneficiaries of his giving recall by quoting the famous song from Dasa Sahitya, '*Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma*'. In this celebrated divine song, the great composer Purandara Dasa quotes "*Ankey Illada Bhagyava Kottuu*" ಅಂಕೆ ಇಲ್ಲದ ಭಾಗ್ಯವ ಕೊಟ್ಟು that is, She gives countless and abundant wealth.

Just to give a sample of the journey, we are attaching a few pages from a personal collection of household papers which document the income and expenses of the family. He has kindly shared this for publication, as it helped the narrative. These kinds of papers may also serve to be nostalgic for some old timers. This tracks a monthly income of Rs. 1317/-, Rs. 1053/-, Rs 1070/- etc. for a few months of the year 1977-78. Side by side are expenses, including basic expenses. This accounting knowledge was destined to come in handy in later years when he started his entrepreneurial journey.

After 40 years, only the size of the numbers has changed. On the occasion of the 30th year celebrations in 2017, Yajna gave a ballpark figure of an annual turnover of @ Rs. 100 crores for the whole group. At the time of writing this narrative, it has become much bigger. While he has a team of accountants to track all his earnings for tax filing purposes, he has no track of how much he has given to help others from his post tax income. Many beneficiaries of his generosity vouch for this. He is truly blessed by the goddess of wealth with a bank balance, and more importantly an attitude to be content with it, and a well appreciated inclination to use this as an instrument to do good.



Boya' mentioned here in one of these papers is his younger brother. This seems to be a nickname for younger brothers, a variation of the word boy. Just a piece of general knowledge. A girl would have been 'putti'. Also note the entry of 'Donation' here and there. Even at this stage, he was already supporting others.

1) House Expenses	445=00
2) Rent	225=00
3) chit	130=00
4) Boya	45=00
5) i) Vasanthi	60=00
ii) Busfare	30=00
6) Pant stitching	37=00
7) Sweater wool	50=00
8) Scooter Petrol	80=00
	<u>1102=00</u>

What follows is, how did he go about doing this. And why? A word about our motivation. Here are a few lines from renowned writer Dr. KP Puthuraya who wrote about Yajna: "There are three types of people in society. One, who perform and inform. Second, who only inform but never perform and the third who never inform but keep on performing. YNK belongs to the third group." Dr. KP Puthuraya's letter, written in his very good handwriting can be seen on the link:

Handwritten note by Dr. Puthuraya (Page 163).

All editors and associates are clear on one thing -- that the tone of the writing should be focussed on Yajna's beliefs, core values and lessons thereof, and not personal glorification. He has consented for interviews and provided material for this book on that condition.

For nostalgia, a photo of a representative type of house where he grew up is archived as part of the photo collection. The house would have been porous, and lots of water would have entered the house during the peak rainy season. It would have needed regular emergency attention just to make it livable. We understand that Siddakatte got electricity in 2017 during the drive for Rural Electrification by the government led by Hon PM Narendra Modi.



Sri Venkappayya,
Yajna's Father

Talking about his family, did you spot an important aspect we forgot to mention so far? More about his mother. *Matru Devo Bhava*. “Mother is the embodiment of divinity”, it is said in the *Upanishad*, a part of India's vast spiritual literature. A vast percentage of India lives by this dictum. We would have loved to record a photo of her. Maybe one alone by herself, or as part of the family, or a selfie of Yajna with his Mom! Sorry, such a photo does not exist, or we could not trace one, despite all effort. In the 1950's, photography was used more to record significant pages of history, it was not a toy or facility for the common man, and was not as ubiquitous as it is now. An unelectrified village would probably not have a photo studio. And for a family that was almost at subsistence level, hiring a painter was not even in the realm of possibility.

Yajna was showered with all the love that mothers are capable of showering. As the eldest son, we can imagine a little more doting from her, as well as him being part

and parcel of many household activities. One such activity had to do with cashews. It seems there was a cashew plantation nearby, and a windy season meant an opportunity to collect a lot more seeds. Cashew nuts would have been a luxury. The main purpose of collecting cashews would have been to trade them for the basic staple of rice grains needed to survive. His mother had taken Yajna, who was 6 years old then, on one such expedition. Yajna, by mistake, was standing behind her. The rod used for plucking cashews hit his face. That caused a big cut, blood loss, face swelling and an emergency. He recalls having a big bulge and the family rushing him to a local doctor to get him treated. He still sports a scar just below his left eye which serves as a remembrance of his mother! Well, accidents do happen for a reason!!

Deprivation in India caused by the long colonial rule is well documented. How much was the price paid by the enormous Human Resources of Bharat/India by the lack of opportunities is unfathomable. Yajna and a few others of his generation are people with huge grit. But it makes us wonder, that for one Yajna of modern India who could build a multi crore business enterprise, how many would not have made it, in spite of having the potential?

Some of the policies of the first few decades of post-Independence India prolonged this agony of lack of opportunities and difficulties in business. Being acutely aware of this problem, Yajna has devoted a lot of his time supporting segments of society to help with their needs. Be it moral support, be it advice and guidance, be it hostel for the needy, or funds for entrepreneurs. You will hear about just some of these cases in the pages ahead. His impact is not limited to personal contributions, but also in leading campaigns to get other affluent people to contribute to good causes. He expresses his thanks to all those who responded to his appeals for contribution. A big portion of the credit attributed to Yajna also goes to those who partnered him to do good.

Prof. PN Singh, Former Principal/ Director, KREC/ NIT-K at Surathkal shares the following: ***“There is no stopping in life, it is a game of going on and on; YNK firmly believes in this, no matter if it costs him the pleasures and leisure times in life. A very humble and soft spoken person, Yajnanarayana has achieved many laurels in his life, yet his indomitable zeal to help society has not diminished and will never diminish. I wish him every best in all his endeavours.”*** The full message

from Prof. PN Singh can also be seen on the link, *Contribution from Prof. PN Singh (Page 164)*.

P Jayarama Bhat, Chairman of Karnataka Bank shared the following: ***”I know Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje since long. Shri Kammaje was born in a remote village and had lots of challenges during his childhood days, including poverty, and his firm determination never allowed him to be trapped in the cycle of deprivation. He managed to sail through this phase and become economically and socially successful. He was able to transcend the steep obstacles in his path even being in the midst of fewer privileges. Since his school days, he is a firm believer that one should not become a burden to the society, thanks to the good seed of character, values and morality imbibed by him from his parents and elders.”***

We are grateful for his submission, and the same has been reproduced here at the link, *Contribution from Jayarama Bhat (Page 208)*.

Bhaskar Bhat, a Technocrat who was one the leaders who put TITAN on the world map as a big industrial house of the Tatas shared as follows: ***“This is my small effort at telling you that 30 years back your name was unique to me as I had not heard of anyone with that name. But after 30 years, I realize that You are Unique.”***

This kind of sentiment is something that is common to almost all who contributed to this book.

Food for Thought from this Chapter *(Especially for Young Readers):*

- ★ Have you found your passion?
- ★ What is your formula to Excel?
- ★ What early life lessons would you like to carry for life?
- ★ You will grow up. What do you REALLY want to do in life?
- ★ What lessons have you learnt from your Parents?



CHAPTER 2:

Great times at NIT-K Surathkal & Association with Alumni over the years

Poet, Writer and well known literary personality Dr. KP Puthuraya's letter on the occasion starts with the following lines. **“There are three types of people in this world. 1) *Who never dream* 2) *Who only dream* and 3) *Who convert their dreams into reality*. Sri. Yajnanarayana Kammaje belongs to the third group.”**

Let us delve into how he went about pursuing his dreams.

Ramakrishna Upadhyaya, in his writing says: **“Yajna had heard of the prestigious Karnataka Regional Engineering College (later renamed as National Institute of Technology, Karnataka) at Surathkal. He contacted a distant uncle who stayed at Surathkal. He was told to send his application by post. Thanks to his merit, he was not only selected, but obtained a scholarship of Rs. 1,500 per annum for five years! He was virtually over the moon. 'From the scholarship money, I used to pay Rs. 250 towards tuition fees. Of the Rs. 75 monthly allowance, I used to spend Rs. 62 towards hostel fees and send the remaining 13 rupees by money order to my father living in Siddakatte,' says Yajna. Being the eldest in the family, he was conscious of the fact that he had a younger brother (Narasimha) and sister (Bhagya) to support, and that the little contribution he made did help his father. From a very young age, a sense of responsibility, empathy and discipline in life were embedded in his mind.”**

One sure way to start the journey towards realizing one's dreams is to use college education to the fullest to learn the various skills of the profession, and also many life skills. Examinations and marks at the end are just one measure of your learning. Yajna recalls in his words, **“The path that made me reach that position was the empathy showered on me by my teachers at High School at Venur, Dakshina Kannada, in accommodating me along with them for shelter and food, followed by a respected Jain family who readily agreed to shelter and take care of me like their own child during my PUC at Moodabidri. Once I got good**

marks in PUC, my admission to KREC was administered by my uncle Laxminarayana Adhikary who was running a canteen in the campus. During those years, every student was interviewed by Principal Dr A S Adke, a renowned and respected engineer of that time. I cannot forget that day, when I went inside his chambers. He saw me in a lungi without a chappal or shoe. His soft advice telling me to wear the uniform and to follow discipline and etiquette are still fresh in my memory. The Government of India in its wisdom supported 25% of students admitted with merit-cum-means scholarships of Rs75 per month, which was more than enough for my living in the hostel. The five years of engineering was a great learning opportunity in my life, to study engineering, apart from how to develop attitude, morale, leadership, humility and struggle to get your rank, to keep the scholarship intact. If we didn't pass with distinction, the scholarship would be stopped.”

Talk about pressure to survive! Financial support was structured in such a way that unless you demonstrated excellence in learning, your scholarship would be discontinued. He did very well in college and got the 6th rank in Mysore University (to which KREC was affiliated to, at that time. Now it is NIT-K, a premier National Institute).

Timing plays a crucial part in everyone's life. Some are dream-periods to graduate in, when the job market is buoyant and there is a sense of euphoria. 1971 was definitely not one of them. It was a testing time for India as a nation. It was just a few years after the 1965 war and the next war was round the corner. India as a country was also impacted by famine. Despite great academic records, jobs were not easy to come by. Even if one found a job, it would have been with meagre salary. That was the time Late Prof B H Karakaraddi suggested to Yajna to continue his post graduate studies. That is how he enrolled for his master's degree in technology (M. Tech) in Industrial Electronics.

One good thing that the nation did was to create, what is in the present day financial market called, “patient capital”. That was to fund higher education as a priority and also with scholarship support to many students. During his studies, he used to get Rs.250/- per month and that helped two more years of Engineering education. He recalls Prof K M Hebbar who was monitoring his studies and taking on the responsibility to arrange for industrial training. Yajna considers himself fortunate that he got a chance for six months training at NAL (National Aeronautical Laboratory), Bangalore, a premier government entity in aerospace engineering. That was probably his first industrial exposure. After completing M. Tech in 1973, he joined as a lecturer at R V College of Engineering. He was there only for a few

months. Life had bigger plans for him. He was to learn a lot more lessons. He was to get more experience in life. And then to share those lessons with the next generation. But that teacher's role remained with him. Except that he does not now teach subjects, but 'coaches' entrepreneurs on business excellence.

In the 1970's as well as now in most cases, the immediate aim after formal education is to take up the “first” job and settle down. It is amazing that he got the courage to move on from the first job and move out of academia. He saw an advertisement for the post of Assistant Director in the Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Karnataka, and sent in his application. Merit did count those days and without spending an additional penny, he landed the job.

Many people would consider a government job – that too in the Industries and Commerce department – very “lucrative”, as there would be a lot of scope for making money. Just a web search with the key word “cement allotment scams” will reveal how hanky-panky the nature of these schemes is, and such fertile ground it would have been in the corrupt times of constrained, centrally planned economic model adopted by Independent India in the first few decades after Independence. But Yajna was made of a different mettle. He resigned without thinking too much about the consequences. He started spending time alone, sitting and enjoying nature in Cubbon Park in Bangalore and figuring out what to focus on next. Talking about his experience at that time, Yajna shares as follows: **“It was the most boring job I had ever done. All that I had to do was to go through the applications and make allotment of cement and steel to various parties. I had no other work. I was so frustrated and disillusioned, that I resigned within six months. Zafer Saifulla, who was the Director of Industries and Commerce and later went on to become the Union Cabinet Secretary, urged me to stay on, as the post had a bright future, but I had made up my mind.”**

Ranjan Moodithaya who knows Yajna from those days recalls, **“I remember, Yajna would come in the evening every day and tell us about the files in which he could clearly see misappropriations, and say – 'this is not for me, I can't be at peace in such a job!'”**

That is a lesson about having a conscience and following good principles that young, budding readers should incorporate.

The next change was to move from the Government to Industry and enter the field of Horology, the science of watches. He spent the next 50 years and counting, in this field, after this change. Some successes are found in first jobs/endeavours.

Where as in Yajna's case, his brief stints in Academia and Government gave direction to the rest of his life.

We are going deep into that journey from the next chapter. The focus of the remaining paragraphs in this chapter is about his fond associations with his alma mater.

In one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popular **“Mann Ki Baat”** programmes where he shares his thoughts in a monthly broadcast over the radio, he had appealed to the alumni of various educational institutions to get active with their alma maters and also appealed to Institutions to create a mechanism to absorb the expertise of its alumni. This was in November 2020. But Yajna had already served his Alumni Association as President for nearly 15 years (1995-2010) and led major schemes which are shared by his batch mates, educationists and academic leaders of NIT-K.

Please read the recollections of Dr. PN Singh, Ex Director, where you will realize that such an initiative has been happening in NIT-K over several years, and YNK has contributed immensely to this effort. This is as early as the 90's onwards. **“When Yajna Narayana (YNK) completed his B. Tech and M. Tech degrees from KREC, I was a faculty member in the Department of Chemical Engineering and was on deputation for higher studies. I had no avenue to meet YNK. During the year 1986-87, I was overseeing the responsibilities of Convener of the Silver Jubilee Celebration Committee. The alumni of the Institute had decided to build a SILVER JUBILEE AUDITORIUM for their Alma Mater, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1985. Funds were not forthcoming. I requested some of my senior colleagues to visit Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore to raise funds for the auditorium from our alumni. My colleagues informed me that Yajna Narayana helped them at Bangalore.”**

Having lived through tough times, it is but natural to have empathy for others in similar situations. It is natural to respond to calls for help from others in similar situations, PN Singh continues: **“I became the Principal of KREC, and later Director of NIT-K in 1997 and 2002 respectively. Some time in 1998, I was informed by the Security of the college that some of our students slept on the terrace of our academic building. I called the students and asked them the reasons for sleeping on the terrace of the college at night. They informed me that they were very poor. They did not get any scholarship and their parents were not able to meet hostel fees. I tried to get a bank loan for them, but failed. That is when I came in touch with our senior alumni, and one of them was Yajnanarayana. I narrated the entire story to YNK and persuaded him to do**

something. Soon he called a meeting of the local alumni and he requested them to create a corpus fund and raise money to help poor and needy students. In that meeting, YNK felt that the Alumni Association was in dormancy and needed to be awakened and reorganized, which he did, commendably. He contributed substantially from his own money to the corpus fund to help the needy students and solicited his seniors and juniors to jointly build the fund. He was the President of the Global Alumni Association of KREC / NITK for many years. During his tenure as President of the Association, it was decided that the Global Alumni Association should meet at least once in two years at the campus of the Institute. In the process, he energized and synergized Alumni Association activities.”

It takes the contribution of many leaders to build up an Institution or contribute to parts of an Institution. Governing Councils of Alumni Associations are no different. Yajna served as founder President for 15 years. Later, Gopala Bhupal, BK Krishnamurthy served as Presidents. Each team led by the President has office bearers who are too numerous to list here, but all their contributions are gratefully acknowledged by all.

PN Singh continues his sharing on this topic:“**During 2001-2002, YNK was appointed Member of the Governing Council. Since then, he has been regularly involved in the activities of the Institute. KREC was facing several administrative hurdles to get transformed to a Deemed to be University, since it was not meeting all the requirements as stipulated by the MHRD and UGC. It was at that time that Yajna Narayana along with Umar Teekay took the lead to help the Institute to cross all hurdles by getting the VTU law amended and getting a No Objection Certificate from the Government of Karnataka, so that KREC could be awarded a Deemed to be University status, which happened on June 26, 2002. But for the involvement of the alumni, there would have been considerable delay in getting the Deemed to be University status for KREC.**”

Particularly interesting to note is the role of Alumni meets in reviving old connections and wonders that happen in the revival of old friendships and connections. Dr. Ullas Karanth was Yajna's batch mate in 1971. He claims he was in the bottom 10% of the class, but later moved on to make a significant mark as an environmentalist and noted researcher on tigers. He recalls,“**It was thanks to the intricate web of the NITK Alumni Association woven together with much diligence by the likes of the irrepressible Sathyanand Karanth, that we were able to reconnect.....**

“Fortunately, after Yajna and I reconnected in 2010, we have become close friends, meeting quite often and even sharing some new family connections. While Yajna remains a deeply religious man, I notice one positive change in my old friend: his spirituality now includes some of the spirits I too love, making our meetings all the more enjoyable.”The complete letter of Dr. Ullas Karanth can be found in the link: *Contribution from Dr. K. Ullas Karanth (Page 166)*.



A.S Karanth, Yajna Narayana Kammaje, Dr. Gopal Mugeraya during their visit to NIT Agartala. He fondly remembers the address to thousands of Engineering students on Entrepreneurship.

Like any alumni association, NIT-K has put in efforts to bring back past memories and friendships together. Snippets of the associations are shared for further reading in the future chapters on Support to Entrepreneurs. We appeal to readers who are associated with KREC/NIT-K to get in touch with the Alumni Association at <https://alumni.nitk.ac.in/>

One other area where great memories of NIT-K and willingness to contribute back to the Institution are channeled is support for Entrepreneurs from NIT in general and NIT-K in particular. More details of the same will be covered in the later pages.

Following are some snippets of the write-up from Ranjan Moodithaya who has known Yajna from his student days. He rightly comments, **“An empty pocket teaches you a million things in life, but a full pocket spoils you in a million ways’—is a popular saying which is true in most cases, but not in the case of Yajna. Kammaje Yajna Narayana Herle, or Yajna for us, is an extraordinarily compassionate, but simple human being, difficult to put inside a boundary of words. His rags-to-riches story is a model for youngsters, but one thing is for sure – he has not changed to his friends and family in spite of his riches. I met**

Yajna in the early seventies, when he was a student and found him an extremely intelligent, witty, straightforward and committed young man. Coming from a similar background, we became good friends immediately. One distinctive character which youngsters should emulate from Yajna is the risk-taking ability. He would take calculated risks instead of operating from the comfort zone which most of us do. His favourite quote used to be “one can't fall below the ground, so why fear trying to go higher? ” That doesn't mean that he would take risks unnecessarily. As a young man, he would try for a better tomorrow, but would not compromise with his principles and integrity.”

His interaction with NIT-K spreads over the tenure of several Directors. Prof. Sandeep Sancheti, who served as NIT-K Director and later joined SRM Institute of Science and Technology has shared his observations which are reproduced at the link: *Contribution from Prof. Sandeep Sancheti (Page 172)*.

Recalling one more incident showcasing Yajna's quick decision making and keeping beneficiaries in mind, SP Kudva, member of the organizing committee of an event in KREC recalls: **“Contribution to the alma mater from where we passed out doing our engineering and where we learnt about values and character, is paramount to Yajna. He was never found wanting whenever the alma mater was seeking his guidance and help. Let me recall a small incident like the re-union of 1971 batch (our batch) in the college campus during December 2019 when we managed to save an amount of Rs. 1.35 Lakhs. Being one of the members of the organizing committee, I was pondering on various options as to what to do with this leftover amount. Although Yajna was the main donor which in fact had resulted in the major portion of this amount, he did not intervene. But then when we did not come to any conclusion, I naturally referred it to him and the spontaneous response was that we could donate it to the elementary school in the college campus itself. What a noble idea and gesture!”**The complete contribution from him is available in the link: *Contribution from SP Kudva (Page 177)*.

Centres of academic excellence have been expanding and serving more people. NIT is one such. National Institutes of Technologies have now spread to many centres and doing yeomen service in Tier1 education in many regions. It calls for able educationists and administrators. Dr. Gopal Mugeraya is one such person, and is associated with NIT-Agartala and was director of NIT, Goa at the point of writing this book. He has also contributed to the book.

One management adage goes thus: “A leader is not known by how many followers

he creates. Good Leaders strive to produce more leaders”. We see a glimpse of that in Dr. Gopal Mugeraya's sharing. We have referred to it as the **“Jambavantha Effect”**. This concept is taken from the pages of the *Ramayana* where *Jambavantha* is purported to have motivated Hanuman to recognize his inner potential and achieve more. This is the culture that we should develop to see and encourage others. A web search of this keyword did not yield any exact result. We earnestly hope this word gets accepted as our contribution to literature. But more importantly this concept should spread as a culture. Each should assist others to come up in life. It can come in many shapes and forms. But all must strive to deploy this effect in their sphere of influence. The complete contribution from professor is in the link: *Contribution from Prof. (Dr.) Gopal Mugeraya (Page 174)*.

Dr. K. Balaveera Reddy, Chairman, Board of Governors, NITK Surathkal, sent us a letter titled 'Yajnanarayana Kammaje: An Illustrious Alumni'. He traces the paths travelled by YNK and writes as follows: **“The success of Yajnanarayana, one of our illustrious alumni, an entrepreneur who opened up his heart to serve the society and the alma mater, which was demonstrated over the last two decades through his involvement in pooling local alumni to create a corpus fund to help poor and needy students of NITK; serving as the President of the Global Alumni Association of KREC / NITK for many years; serving effectively as a member of the KREC Governing Council; taking the lead in setting up beach side facilities, tree plantations; starting new chapters of Alumni at different places; conducting regular annual and global Alumni meets; initiating Alumni awards, and establishing a proper functional structure of the Alumni body for effective working.”** The complete Contribution from this senior Academician can be read in the link: *Contribution from Dr. K. Balaveera Reddy (Page 175)*.

Here is a letter written by Prof. S.S. Murthy, highly accomplished academician. We strongly recommend reading his blog page <https://ssmurthyblog.wordpress.com/>

YAJNANARAYANA, A VISIONARY

By S. S. MURTHY

Professor (Rtd), IIT Delhi

Formerly, Director, NITK Surathkal, Director ERDA Baroda and Vice Chancellor Central University of Karnataka



I know Shri Kammaje Yajnanarayana (briefly addressed as Yajna) from 2003 ever since I joined NITK Surathkal as its founding (regular) Director, on deputation from IIT Delhi, when he was the President of its

Alumni Association (AA). As soon as I joined he quickly arranged a welcome get together for me with the Alumni at Bengaluru. It was a grand function with over a hundred alumni present. I was deeply overwhelmed by this reception as I observed the enthusiasm of Yajna and his eternal commitment to NITK. I was a total stranger to this crowd as I knew none and none knew me. When RECs were converted to NITs, the then central minister Murlu Manohar Joshi was keen to induct IIT professors as their first Directors to quickly transform NITs through the IIT culture. Since I hail from Karnataka, I volunteered to steer NITK, as also a few more IIT professors who took over the reins of other NITs. My mission was to speedily effect a leap forward to NITK through my IIT experience. I laid out my vision and roadmap in front of the alumni in the above meeting, which were well received. One alumnus remarked that he had been skeptical as to how a strange character from Delhi could make any perceptible change in NITK, but was convinced about my sincerity after my talk. But I needed considerable local support to implement my plans. Yajna stood like a rock with me throughout my tenure and provided enormous support as he was also a member of the Board of Governors (BoG) of NITK in his capacity as the President of AA. In all BoG meetings I could totally bank on his support for all my reform measures despite reservations from some conservative members. He organized many Alumni events during that period and they all had the 'Yajna' signature. His enormous contributions to NITK in different forms are already highlighted by his well-wishers in the accompanying articles and I shall refrain from repeating the same. His humanitarian help for poor students is a legend that has lifted a large number of families above the poverty line and made them stand on their feet. An impressive activity during my time was the massive tree plantation by AA under his guidance with very effective execution by his equally enthusiastic general secretary KN Bhat. This truly made the campus green and contributed to environmental rejuvenation.

During my time as NITK Director, the then Vajpayee Government had a plan to convert some leading NITs to IIT and set up a committee chaired by Dr Joshi, DG CSIR, to identify institutions for such upgradation. I immediately jumped into the fray and wanted to push the case of NITK as a candidate. I met several members of the committee and lobbied the case. Through local leader Veerappa Moily I got a letter sent by then Chief Minister SM Krishna to Vajpayee. I talked to Yajna to do something to push our case from AA. He immediately organized an impressive seminar in Bengaluru addressed by leading industrialists and alumni with a combined resolution to forcefully plead for converting NITK to IIT. After the

change of central government in 2004, the whole scheme collapsed. Arranged by Yajna I attended and addressed Alumni meets in several cities such as Pune, Hyderabad and Delhi and was impressed by the great success story of KREC/NITK alumni nationally. During my visit to USA for a conference, Yajna arranged a meet with local Alumni in Washington DC through another successful alumnus, Chandrashekar, located there. This was a great education for me as I learnt from first hand the experience of our alumni in USA with Indian education. They opined that Indian education is quite sufficient technically to manage and excel in USA, but for soft skills.

Yajna came from a humble village background and grew to be a towering personality in the society as a self made man today by sheer hard work, integrity and dedication. His enterprising skills have few parallels reflected by novel and varied entities established and anchored by him, employing a large work force mostly coming from humble and marginalized families. He has provided internship to many NITK students and employed a few based on successful projects. Whenever I recommended any candidate he would never say 'no', and somehow fix the person somewhere within his units. Thus I find him always positive and helping with a large heart. His contribution to the Watch Industry in India is unique, starting with his efforts to make indigenous Electronic Watches and varieties of straps. Today he supplies watches to several brands. He has visited the world famous Watch Museum in Switzerland several times to be up-to-date in the field. He is literally the ***'Watch-man' of India.***

He is highly patriotic and nationalistic, with infinite love for 'Mother-India'. He is passionate about the growth and development of the country and prepared to be an active participant. He rejoices at India's success and laments for its weakness. I saw him involved in social service, cultural and community activities in his neighborhood to impact the society and country at large. He is very spiritual and religious and not communal, as seen by his role in rejuvenating temples.

He has received many awards at national and overseas levels. But I strongly feel that he deserves 'Karnataka Rajyotsava' award at the state level and a Padmashri at the national level. His well wishers must work towards the same by nominating him and mobilising support.

I am sure he will be ever active throughout his life. I wish him a long, healthy, happy and blissful life and continue to be a beacon for the society.”

Yajna was very touched to read this letter and replied to him as follows:

“Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for your very articulated article on my association with you during KREC/NITK activities.

This document coming from a highly accomplished Professor like you will be a testimony in my life, apart from several rewards and accolades and treasures to keep safe for long, as reference for my kith and kin and close ones.

Regards

Yajna Kammaje”

Through this medium, Yajna again wishes to convey that all accolades received by him are really on behalf of ALL Alumni. He is just a “*Neemittha*”, as quoted by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. '*Neemittha*' is an expression of humility that symbolizes that if not him, someone else would have filled the role, and it is respect for the position, attributing the results to the overall teamwork. With contribution from many visible and invisible contributors, Yajna wishes to share a note of appreciation for all those who responded to his appeals for financial contribution and enabled many of the projects mentioned to come to reality. This is the best justice to the acronym TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More.

YNK chose to carry out this role and considers himself fortunate that he got to associate with this wonderful organization. He appeals to all alumni to continue to keep the alma mater in their memory, do all acts and deeds to improve matters for future generations of students. After all, many of the accomplishments are built on the foundation of the education that was obtained there. Everyone owes a lot of gratitude to their teachers, and to the tax payers at large who subsidized education in government run institutions. Whatever one does to their alma mater is not enough.

He wishes to see the NIT-K Alumni Association to be a model for Alumni Associations far and wide. Even after relinquishing the role of President, he is still consulted and is an active contributor. 2021 is the golden jubilee year of graduation of the batch of 1971. It will be interesting to see what that batch comes up with as a way of contribution to the society.

Yajna has won many awards during his 50 years of service to the industry, and by virtue of his contribution to various causes in both professional and social circles.

We will mention some of them, recording his association with those institutions. But the one shown alongside, that he is really proud of. This has a prominent place in his display cabinet.

His gratefulness and effort to give back as an alumnus is not restricted only to institutes of higher learning, like KREC/NIT-K. Recall the first school that Yajna attended as a young boy in Venur, and his pre university education in the town of Moodabidri. He has not forgotten these. He has gone back to these institutions also and funded infrastructure projects in the name of his late father. He is a well wisher and source of support to teachers and administrators there.



India is proud of many Institutions built after Independence. Its Armed Forces is one of the most prominent in this list. It is something that inspires millions of youth.

In the world's defence matters, it is recognized that joining the Indian defence forces and other branches is fully voluntary, not conscription based. For one position, there are tens, hundreds and even thousands of applications. This aspect has great strategic significance. Indians are assured of their security thanks to all the hard work and sacrifice made by the Indian Defence forces. The nation salutes them.

Yajna recalls that from his batch, he and four graduating students applied to join the Indian Army. Here is a recollection of the five days spent in Allahabad (now named Prayagraj) in Uttar Pradesh, in this connection (pic on page 27).

Destiny had it that he was to contribute to nation building through other ways, and not as a defence serviceman. The element of patriotism exhibited in applying to join the defence forces is what got channeled to build a successful business and use it as an instrument to do social good.

It is highly recommended that one has some co-curricular, extra curricular hobbies and activities as part of a student's life. Yajna seems to be more of the studious type.

18 SERVICE SELECTION BOARD
ALLAHABAD



SEATING ON Chairs-1.S.K. Bhatti, 2.S.V. Ghatge, 3.T.K.S. Bhatnagar, 4.C.B.N. Chander, 5.Channarayana Reddy, 6. H.K.L. Deshpande, 7. K. Jayaraman, 8. K. Varadarajan,
standing 1st Row- 9.H.K. Thapar, 10.M.S. Bhandarkar, 11.S.P. Ghosh, 12.J.L. Bhatti, 13.A. Krishna Rao,
standing 2nd Row- 14.S.K. Kulkarni, 15.C.P. Prasad, 16. G. Sundararam,
standing 3rd Row- 17.K. Gopinathan, 18.S.L. V. Srinivasan, 19.A. K. Noida, 20.P. Palaniappan, 21.K.P. Reddy,
22. A. J. Srinivas, 23. H. Thomas, 24. T.P. Sankaran,
standing 3rd Row- 25.S.K. Shanbhag, 26.P. Prasad, 27.J.K. Patil, 28.K.L. Patil, 29. G. V. Subramanyam,
30.V. Venkatesan, 31.P. C. Chandra, 32.C. Chandra, 33.G. Chandra, 34.G. Chandra, 35.G. Chandra,

What about sports as an extra curricular activity? It was also there. But he does not claim to be a great sportsman. One event that he recalls is a 10 km run. He stood 3rd and has photo (pic below) to prove it!

Who came second? His batchmate from the Electrical Department, Hemant D Pai, who

shares the following: ***“While he was a brilliant student, he was also active in the sports field and for the college sports day he participated in the 10000 mts race and finished third and I finished second. Later it transpired that the person who got the first place had actually run one round short, which meant he was behind us, but the mistakes of judges resulted in our getting one place lower than our rightful places.”***



Well, I am sure if this was known before hand, the first prize winner would have understood the situation and given up his position. It would have been laughed off. But maybe it helped in learning the lesson of accepting situations as they come. Not to crib too much about it. We are sure this would have been a funny point to talk about, at later Alumni meetings. What is college life without funny anecdotes to tell? The complete sharing of the letter written by Pai is in the link: *Letter Written by Hemant D Pai (Page 179)*.

Though not as a sport, Yajna follows a rigorous walking regimen as a way to stay healthy. A morning walk every day and yoga always find a place in his daily schedule. He is a role model for many other residents in the apartment complex. That is also something he adopted, exposing many of his employees to Yoga and its

benefits, and also organising programmes by specialists. He believes in the saying that a healthy mind resides in a healthy body.

We are coming close to the end of the chapter on college days. We treat this as a preparatory for future chapters focussed on lessons to be learnt from Yajna's business life. Treating Business as 'Yajna', not Yajna the name, but the Sanskrit word to mean an activity filled with service and sacrifice to achieve greater good.

No college life is complete without the so called Educational Tour! Of course it calls for a visit to many industrial complexes, power plants and installations. (And swinging to picnic spots nearby!)

Here is a group photo of a college tour. This may not be of much interest to the lay reader unconnected with the college. We put much effort in tracing this and put a lot more effort to touch up the photo to make it presentable. This is done with the fond hope that those connected with KREC around that time will be able to recollect many of these names, and narrate stories about them to their children and grand children.

If it serves in refreshing great memories from their college time for even a few, we consider our efforts have been worthwhile.

Welcome to a great memory lane.



One of the events at NIT-K campus on the occasion of a college event, Tech Flash.

Dr. PN Singh, Alok Ohrie (President of DELL, India), Prof. B.R. Samaga, Dr. Souptik Mukherji and others are seen in the picture.



On the occasion of the 2nd Global Meet.

On stage are L-R, Murari, Dr. PN Singh, Dr. NR Shetty, KV Kamath, S.R. Philar, and Yajna.

With that, let us leave the beautiful township of Surathkal on the west coast of Karnataka and enter the city of Bangalore (later renamed Bengaluru) to continue Yajna's journey.

Food for Thought from this Chapter *(Especially for Senior Readers)*

- ★ What are your fond memories from College?
- ★ Do you take efforts to be in touch with classmates?
- ★ What can you do to support the studies of the needy?
- ★ What are your plans to support your Alma Mater?

Scholarship, internship chances, guest lectures, factory visits, placement chances, angel funding or other forms of support for budding entrepreneurs, volunteer time to serve in committees, serve in alumni associations, etc?

- ★ What academic and non-academic lessons did you learn in college that you are proud of?



CHAPTER 3

First journey into Horology, Growth and Business life

One day, YNK saw an advertisement for the post of a Junior Engineer at the HMT's Watch Division. He took up the job – though some of his friends were surprised that he had “demoted” himself from being an Assistant Director to a Junior Engineer – and he began working in 1974 at a princely salary of Rs. 686 per month. HMT was a dynamic public sector institution those days under the stewardship of chairmen like Shri S M Patil and Shri Mansukhani, who had many innovative ideas.

We urge readers of this book in general and young and upcoming professionals in particular to contemplate on this phase of his life. It should not be short term gains or immoral gains that you can make that should guide your actions. Having a long term vision and plan will even out even short term ones, as we will see this pan out in the coming pages.

Here are some notes from Yajna on his early experience at HMT, and later thought processes. He was deeply involved in that project and had the pride of launching the First Electronic Quartz watch in the country on 15th Aug 1980.

That was a dream day for him personally as all the senior executives kept acknowledging his committed hard work in bringing technology from M/s Citizen Watch Company, Tokyo.

In the late 1970s, watch companies worldwide had started introducing Quartz technology and the Citizen Company of Japan was the leader. Since he had displayed a sharp brain for electronics at HMT, he was asked to go to Japan and meet the officials of Citizen Company.

Being an enthusiastic young man and effective communicator, he was able to convince the Japanese to transfer the Quartz technology to HMT. In 1979-80, Citizen and HMT signed an MoU. HMT put him as one of the managers in charge of implementation of the Quartz technology project.

As the demand for HMT watches began to soar, he was given a free hand to recruit young, talented engineers. He and his managers went talent-scouting to prestigious institutions like KREC, UVCE and BMS and they were able to attract many bright students.

In a way, he was the blue-eyed boy of the then Executive Director I. K. Amitha, who had complete trust in his capabilities. Yajna was promoted as Deputy General Manager and at one point of time, he was multi-tasking and handling seven projects across the country apart from the ones at Bangalore simultaneously, and all other DGMs were reporting to him.

He was handling the indigenization of several component projects for watches like assembly of circuit boards, quartz crystal, silver oxide batteries at Guwahati in Assam, stepper motor project at Tumkur in Karnataka and a few parts at the Bangalore complex,

As some well-wishers were mentioning, he now wonders as to how he could have managed to implement such a mega project with bureaucracy on the one hand and a public sector mindset and unionism on the other. Looking back, he is thankful to leaders and colleagues who trusted in his ownership of the project and contributed towards the overall success.

He used to get many promotions and was promoted to Senior DGM at the age of 37, which was hard to come by, at that time. Many of his talents that came in very useful in later stages like multi-tasking and being organized were learnt during his crucial first years at HMT.

Six AGMs were reporting to him on six projects and when he got similar promotions, he would go up the ladder. Many of his friends had hinted that he could even become the CMD of HMT.

Talking about growth in his career, no one truly and fully grows without pulling up the whole team. Following are some important management experiments that are worth debating, and being considered as appropriate:

1) Spot talent and empower them: He recruited many Junior Engineers and in a short span gave them important responsibilities, and they contributed way beyond expectation. His other managerial colleagues were very surprised with his ability to get talent from so many premier colleges to join a Public Sector unit. Some of the engineers he spotted had the right talent and he gave appropriate responsibilities.

2) Appropriate assignment: We asked how this formula worked in almost all the cases. The secret was appropriate staffing. It was an art to choose who would head Purchase, who would head Assembly, etc.

3) Set the right priorities and have more Doers, not Monitors: Yajna used to get lots of time with the Managing Director. In one of the interactions with the extended management team, the discussion was on how to improve efficiency of operations. There should be more Doers, not Monitors, he said in an emphatic way to the shock of many. That was Yajna's way to emphasize the need for those who directly execute and contribute to the bottom line and the synergetic role played by supporting functions like Accounting and HR.

4) Unconventional approach: One more example of his unconventional approach was to hire deaf and dumb staff in the assembly operations. Some research has revealed that they are better suited for some operations.

5) Be unconventional to get great results: Here is an example of his boldest of decisions. His hiring of Appa Rao. Appa Rao is what society calls handicapped, physically challenged, differently abled, *divyang purush*. Though wheel chair bound, he was given the appropriate assignment of supervising watch assembly operations. As is known, HMT had tied up with Citizen for Quartz watch assembly, and the right personnel needed to be sent to Japan for technology absorption. In spite of the difficulties, Yajna decided to depute Appa Rao. He overcame his challenges of movement and made use of the opportunity. He sent us a letter recalling his association.

Contribution from T.V.N.S. Appa Rao:



”I was polio stricken at the age of 1½ years (one and half years). Having learnt to walk at the age of 6 months young, only to lose the ability to walk, a year later. I don't have memories, of either learning or losing the ability to walk, as I was very young. I am by name T.V.N.S. Appa Rao, qualifications being two graduations in pure sciences -B.Sc. (Bachelor of Science with Maths, Physics and Chemistry) and another in practical sciences, B.Tech, in Electronics and Communications Engineering. I used to walk with a unilateral prosthetic aid worn on my left leg.

Sri KYN selected me in this condition and many a times he praised my capabilities in extracting the best I had in me, sent me to M/s Citizen Watch Works Tokyo, for establishing the same wristwatch assembly back at home. He chose me to be in production, in charge of the floor. I picked up Kannada and learnt to speak like a Kannadiga, and he extracted good production from me. All this was his success alone. Later I was transferred to Watch Factory I & II of HMT to establish watch assembly. There too, I managed it so successfully that I was made 'Production Chief' of mechanical watches as well.

I was selected to be an internal faculty of HMT to speak on 'HMT Product Watches'. I was always rated highest by the attendees who were IAS, and Income Tax Officer Probationers, etc.

All this KYN could guess from my faculties, as I was a gold medalist in 50 elocution and debating competitions in English right from my 15th year, throughout India, 40 gold medals winner in English essay writing competitions and was 'poet laureate' in English at the Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University for four years.

I took VRS from HMT at the age of 44 years and worked as Director on three boards of private companies as (Director Technical). Later on I joined GE Capital International Services and Genpact and was finally picked by the Government of India as Member, Minimum Wages Advisor Board, Government of India and finally retired in 2014.

KYN expands into a man of magnitude of incalculable proportions to become an industrialist in an industry related to the beginning of his career as an M. Tech engineer in the then HMT, a blue chip company. He worked to establish very successfully, the Electronic Watch Division, EWD, in the late 70's, which he did with more than resounding success.

He started it right from choosing the first batch of six engineers, of whom I was one, placed in the HMT electronic watch division.

He shaped the careers of his engineers who now have resumes of which they can speak with pride.

I should not be named guilty of trespassing the limits of propriety if I mention that he had his own boss, not just colleagues, who shaped him into a man par excellence.

KYN was in HMT for many years, before he quit to be on his own, and now owns more than a prestigious Sona Group making straps without which watches cannot adorn wrists.

He stands tall today as a strap supplier to the leading watch makers of the country.

His faculties match his experience, he is a widely travelled man, and is known to be both a business and family man. He leads a happy life with his wife and two married sons, one in Canada while the other helps him in his business. He is very energetic, industrious and soft-tongued, which qualities ensure he only has friends.

I write all this with liberty as I worked with him from almost his beginning days in HMT, and I have kept in touch with him ever since, through phone calls.

He is a complete man and I briefly stated about myself, whom he chose to serve at HMT, to indicate to anyone who wants to know about him, that what I wrote about him has not even an iota of exaggeration.”

Many may wonder how this quartz watch project was executed within a public sector setup which would have involved so much clearing of files. One interaction with the Finance Department was telling. There was some delay in clearing some

file. Yajna argued that if and only if the division made a profit, would there be a money trail to audit. If bureaucracy serves to slow the project itself, what would there be to monitor? With his assurance of OWNERSHIP of the project from the Engineering side, all other divisions extended support and a harmonious relationship ensured project success.

And talking about style, it was not uncommon for Yajna at the DGM level going to a senior accounts clerk and discussing any pending issues on behalf of his team member or project. Whatever it took to remove hurdles that came in the way of project success, he was ready to do, go and meet anyone and get it done.

HMT also was a place where Yajna made many life long friends. He had fond memories of the 18 years he spent in this premier public sector enterprise of that time. G S Shanthiraj, a Former Director Finance at HMT recalls the following memories about their times in HMT.

Contribution from GS Shanthiraj

“My association with Yajnanarayana goes back to the mid 80's, which blossomed at HMT Tumkur as his colleague, albeit in the Finance Department and continues even today. The same calm, 'ever smiling never angry' Yajnanarayana, even today. Both husband and wife are gifted with their innocent smile.



I never forget the simple boiled rice '*ganji*' (rice porridge) I had on numerous occasions at his typical middle class house in Malleswaram in Bangalore during my bachelor days. His father used to sit beside me and serve me pickle, while his wife, with all smile and warmth served me '*ganji*' with ghee/coconut oil. Even now whenever we prepare '*ganji*' at our house, I remember those days. It is probably this humility, simplicity, and warmth of his family and sticking to his roots, that has made him what he is today, a very successful entrepreneur.”

In the later pages, there is a mention of continuous learning as one of the ingredients for success, as a piece of wisdom that we gleaned from our discussion with YNK. He recalls some of the great training that he benefited from, both in Japan and India.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES

(First Course of Lecturing Programme)

January 16 – February 18, 1989

Venue : Tata Management Training Centre, Pune



SITTING L to R : Mr. F. A. Vandrewala, Mr. K. Kuppusemy, Dr. F. A. Mehta, Mrs. Krishna Singh, Dr. R. Ramanna, Director, NIAS, Dr. Francis A. Monazes, Director, TMTC, Mr. R. C. Tripathi, Mr. B. Muthuraman, Mr. G. S. Ram.

STANDING 1st Row L to R : Mr. S. K. Uppal, Mr. S. T. Boskaron, Mr. K. Jaynansayana, Mr. K. M. Thomas, Mr. K. Padmanabhan, Mr. N. N. S. Rana, Mr. M. Kamal Naidu, Mr. Ranjan Banerjee, Mr. K. V. Rajagopalan, Mr. S. N. Chaturvedi, Mr. A. D. Hanamshet.

STANDING 2nd Row L to R : Mr. C. B. Imani, Adm. Officer, TMTC, Mr. R. Srinivasan, Mr. D. N. V. Rao, Mr. V. F. Banaji, Dr. A. K. Mukherjee, Dr. Ram Kumar, Mr. C. S. Dwivedi, Mr. R. Venkat Ramaiah, Mr. V. S. Dubey, Mr. Vasant V. Chaudhari, Mr. D. S. Solanki, Mr. K. U. Limaye.

The National Institute of Advanced Studies is housed within the premier educational centre, the Indian Institute of Science, more popularly known as Tata Institute. They conduct many advanced training programmes, and YNK fondly recalls one such which was conducted at the Tata Management Training Centre. The attendees were senior management professionals from across private and public sector and government research units. He recalls great talks and more importantly meeting stalwarts like Dr. Raja Ramanna, the famed nuclear scientist who served as Director of NIAS. He was an intellectual giant who made a great impact on Indian science.

Yajna recalls that it was a great opportunity to be among luminaries like JRD Tata, Raja Ramanna, Muthuraman, F A Mehta and others. He could catch the traits of these people like simplicity, great vision and concern for Indians and development.

In particular, he repeatedly mentions his interaction with JRD Tata. He recalls the humility and pleasant nature by which he conducted himself. This impressive behaviour was something he carried with him till the very end. Readers may be aware that JRD Tata passed away in Geneva, Switzerland on 29 November 1993 at the age of 89. The nursing staff had no idea that they were treating a multi billionaire, head of the most respected Indian conglomerate. He behaved like an ordinary patient till the very end of his life. The reason to recall this aspect was to record the greatness of Jeh, as he was known in close circles. JRD had impressed millions of others, and Yajna was one of them. In Kannada, there is a proverb that goes, “*ThumBiDha Koda, ShabDha MaaDalla*”. The English version of the same is “An empty vessel makes the most noise”. This is quoted to indicate that people with high achievement do not brag or show off, and are great models to emulate. Yajna is thankful to all his formal teachers in schools and colleges. Add to that list these great teachers, the 'full vessels' so to say, in the real world from whom he has learnt plenty of character-building qualities.

Yajna remains thankful to HMT for providing this opportunity. He was one of only two executives deputed for this training. What is also pertinent to note is that he had already indicated that he would leave HMT to plunge full-time into business. May be the HR department wanted to use this training as a retention tool.

He was being considered for a promotion to Joint General Manager which would have been one more feather in his cap. But he announced his resignation to the panel that was selecting him.

So, come and join us as he leaves the safety of a PSU job and tumbles into the world of business, full time. You are on a rich journey, in more ways than one.

The self talk that drove this thought process of Yajna:

“I wanted to be a job creator all by myself.”

Following are some of Yajna's recollections, in his own words “I made a resolution to recruit and train the poorest of the poor who are at the bottom of the pyramid and in rural areas.

With the help of a Gujarati friend, Mukund Majithia, we started gold plating on stainless steel bracelets, the technology for which was not readily available.

We imported a plating plant from Hong Kong and got a Chinese person to come and establish the process. The technology transfer was done to my wife who ran this business for a few years until I was fully involved.

Parallely, we put up a modern SS strap manufacturing unit far away from the city in Attibele to manufacture 1 lakh straps per month.

It was a struggle for the next 20 years, to put up four such units, as the demand far exceeded the supply, and both HMT and Titan were driving us to excel and produce more and more with newer designs, to substitute imports.

That is why I now think Atma Nirbhar Bharat was started in 1991 when PM Narasimha Rao opened up the economy. It is not a new concept, or strange for me to understand Atma Nirbhar Bharat now, whose importance has increased since 2020. I am extremely confident that post the COVID-19 pandemic, focus on Manufacturing and Atma Nirbhar will yield great results. But it needs hard work to be done by the present leaders, as we did in the past decades.

In spite of being a first generation entrepreneur, all 3 Ms were hard to come by -- Men, Materials, and Money. It is appropriate to acknowledge the great and generous help extended by my in-laws to pledge my mother-in-law's gold for a mere 2 lakh loan.”

Yajna's decision to start a business was considered challenging or admirable or foolhardy, depending on whom you talk to. To appreciate the decision to start a business before the 1990s, let us give the lay of the land then:

1) High Interest rates: Loans from banks would come at around 20% interest. One can work out how difficult it can be to make any business viable with that high cost of capital.

2) Not easy to get loan sanctioned from banks: Even if a person worked out a proposal for a viable business, there were no collateral free loan schemes, and getting bank loans was a challenge. Even with collateral, loan sanction would take a long time.

3) High rate of corporate taxes: Post-independence India's industrial policies and taxation were so skewed that income from industrialists and businessmen were subjected to taxes of over 50% on profit!

4) Safety of a public sector job: A government job or job in a government entity was considered a job for life, with the best work-life balance.

5) Licensing and control: This has been well documented. Ease of business has improved over the decades. But in 1990, India was considered one of the most difficult countries for industrial operations.

6) Very few job opportunities: In the 21st century, it is common for professionals to try out an idea through a start-up, and if they fail, they join another job or try other ventures. It was not so in those times. It is shuddering to think what would have been the options if the initial phases of entrepreneurship had failed. Probably, Yajna would have been unemployed for some time for sure, or would have been forced to seek a job, literally with a begging bowl.

7) No access to role models: The government was on the side of the dominant player in the industry. The private sector was dominated by a few big industrial groups such as TATA, BIRLA, THAPAR, SINGHANIA, AMBANI, etc. There was no vibrant private sector to get access to mentorship or support or learning from role models.

8) Limited purchasing power: A big percentage of the population was living on the basics of survival, with little comfort and almost non-existent luxury.

In this context, if we probe as to who would have indirectly motivated Yajna, the closest would be his father-in-law, Arakala Krishna Somayaji. He was an industrious person with hundreds of workers and someone who was looked up to in South Canara and beyond.

That has rubbed off on to his sons as well. So in a way, the whole Arakala Somayaji family is in business. One of them who impressed Yajna with his hard work is his brother-in-law Ganesh Somayaji, who over the years grew to be a successful businessman too.

Through common connections, a reference was provided to Indian Bank for a loan. But it was nearly impossible to get it sanctioned without collateral. When Ganesh Somayaji learnt about this, he put in efforts to make it happen. It was his initiative to arrange his mother's gold as collateral for the time being. Thus the famous anecdote: The seed capital for Yajna's group of companies is his mother-in-law's gold. This public sector bank gave a slightly better customer service at that time and continues to be one of the bankers of the Sona Group of companies even today. (Just a historical note. Some readers may recall that an upcoming software company in a similar time frame, 1980s -- Infosys, was supported by a government financing unit, KSFC. The role of public sector financing to enterprises in the 80's, though small, was critical in those days.)

If one pillar of Yajna's confidence is his education and learning, the other strong pillar is support from his wife Vasanthi and his extended family. The third pillar is his **"CAN DO"** attitude. That comes from his spiritual side, influenced by the *Bhagavad Gita* which we delve into now.

What inspired him in the early days of the SONA Group of companies? Let us hear it from his colleagues in HMT and his business associates. Ramakrishna Upadhyaya recalls as follows: "Despite his success in taking HMT to great heights, Yajna wasn't very happy on two counts: The salary that he was earning was barely sufficient for middle-class living. As his two sons were growing, he had to think of giving them good education and settling them in life. Secondly, he also wanted to do something for society, help uplift the less privileged, but those were dreams he could not fulfill being a public sector employee."

"That was when he began to consider venturing out on his own and become an entrepreneur. Yajna knew Mukund Majithia from Bharuch in Gujarat for a long time, as he was a vendor for HMT. One day, Majithia told Yajna that he had some watch strap making machinery lying idle back home and he would send them to Bangalore so that together they could run the factory.

"Yajna thought it was one of those casual conversations. But, within no time at all, the machines landed in Bangalore. As he was still employed at HMT, it was his enterprising and dedicated wife, Smt. Vasanthi, who came forward to run the show along with a core group of his friends. She used to ride her Luna from her

Malleshwaram house all the way to Bannerghatta Road to attend to the factory work, besides looking after two children and household work. The factory started doing well, supplying watch straps to HMT at a competitive price.

“Being a top functionary at HMT, which was growing by leaps and bounds, Yajna saw the demand for watch straps made of gold-plating, stainless steel and leather going up manifold. In 1987, he set up the Sona Group with its factories at NS Palya and Attibele for manufacturing these items, which became a roaring success.”

The full contribution from Ramakrishna Upadhya can be accessed at the link: *Contribution from Ramakrishna Upadhya (Page 187)*.

Yajna recollects the days around 1987: “Those days, I would get up at 5 am, finish bath and pooja at home, drive to Attibele to supervise the construction of my factory, and then go and report to my office at Lavelle Road by 9 am. Once I was in HMT, my full devotion was there. But soon I realised that I could not carry on like this and in 1990, I decided to resign from HMT. My superiors were not ready to let go of me, but after seeing the progress I was making as an independent entrepreneur, they accepted my resignation.”

Serendipity -- chance happenings that are fortuitous -- often plays a role in one's life. There were two such that we would like to share here. When news of some senior personnel of HMT leaving and starting a business spread, three boys approached him. Ravi Kumar, Shashi Prakash and Ravi Prakash. They introduced their talent and willingness to join Sir and work with him. Yajna considered it one more important instance of the stars getting aligned for a good cause, and was very happy to employ them. They have grown with him over the decades and are key anchor employees of the company.

What did Yajna do with the money he would have saved from his salary in HMT? That was a time when Australia as a country was scouting for talent worldwide and was making it very easy for professionals to get residency permits. Quite a few from HMT got it. It was very easy for him to get a residency permit too, given the reputation of NIT-K as a premier centre of higher education. He worked out a detailed plan to explore if migrating to Australia was viable. He spent most of his savings to buy a ticket to Australia. He stayed with friends, met many companies,

explored employment opportunities. Many countries want a young workforce, and managers in their late 30's are not the obvious first preference. Nothing worked out, and the *decision was made to plunge into the exciting world of business on his own*. Well, in retrospect, one can see, Australia's loss was gain for India's MSME sector and to thousands of employees of the SONA Group and beneficiaries thereof. We hear clichéd statements, “All happened for the good”. This 'no migration to Australia' made lots of people happy. The happiest of the lot was his father who got to stay with Yajna till his very end.

Following are some recollections of NVGK Bhat, who was his colleague at HMT then:

Contribution from NVGK Bhat

”Yajna Narayana Kammaje is a year older than me and we worked together in HMT (Hindustan Machine Tools) in the second half of the 1970's. I was in the Machine Tools division and as is well known, Yajna had an illustrious career in the Watch division.



His impact at work:

Public Sector Undertakings laid the foundation for India's Industrialization. HMT in the initial stages made tremendous impact in machine tools for industries and watches. In a consumer market, the 80-20 rule has many variations. It is often attributed that 80% of the work gets done by 20% of the people. It is beyond doubt that Yajna belonged to that 20% who contributed immensely during his years at HMT. He led by example to introduce great discipline in the production plant and was one of the key management professionals who helped bring the quartz watch revolution to India.

Calculated risk taking ability:

It was very clear to all his friends and observers that Yajna could go far in HMT and could even reach the position of CMD in due course of time. But alas! He started sharing plans of an industry of his own. That too in the 1980's when the culture of business and entrepreneurship had not taken root like it is now in 21st century India. We were amazed at his risk-taking ability. I was Secretary of the Executives

Association of HMT. We wished him well when he left. When he resigned from HMT, he did not get any VRS benefits. He raised the seed money for his Sona Group of companies elsewhere, later we learnt it was by pledging his mother-in-law's gold.

We are so glad his calculated risk paid off and he became a role model for many others to follow, over the years.

In spite of all his success over three decades, he has kept in touch with many of his former colleagues and we all share a deep friendship and fellowship with him.

Family support:

It is to the credit of his wife Smt. Vasanthi Kammaje that she supported him fully. She was involved in all aspects of the initial operations and their enterprise started within ten years of marriage.

Just to give a perspective on how far sighted this was in the context of the culture of the country at that time: When I resigned from HMT to move to the private sector in 1990, my grand mother who was 85 years old at that time protested by fasting for a few days!”

Here is a sharing from an entrepreneur supported by Yajna, referring to one page in the early history of the Sona Group.

“It is known to many that his wife Smt. Vasanthi Kammaje (with assistance from her nephew Diwakar) was the original contributor in the Sona Group. Once, she was on the long drive from her home to the factory, with her young son, on a two wheeler - Luna. There was an accident and she lost consciousness, with the young boy left unattended. With the basic data that could be collected from her son, some bystanders rushed her to the hospital, took her son to his house and called the reception at HMT to alert Yajna. The family may now be moving around in multiple cars with drivers. But that came after a long journey that the Kammaje family went through, with hard work.

I used to share a paragraph of Manku Thimmana Kagga where the great poet DVG, (DV Gundappa) says, for the happy moments and comfortable life that many of us enjoy, lots of people have contributed, and we should be grateful for them. Yajna

symbolizes this spirit. I will end this note with the lesson that I realized this aspect of Yajna from the way he treats hundreds of workers. He is never tired of saying they are the real contributors to his success.”

Following are some sharings from Laxmidhara, Yajna's business partner, trusted lieutenant, with whom he shares a great working relationship. His house is named 'Yajnashrya'! One of the many houses named thus, as you will read in the upcoming pages.

Sharing by P Laxmidhara

“In 1981, I Joined as Trainee in the Electronic Watch Project (EWP), HMT Ltd, Bangalore.

Having got promoted by Sri. KY Sir, I worked in the Development section and Purchase department of the Watch Division for about three years, up to 1984-85.

Afterwards Sri. KY Sir guided and advised me to move to HMT (CNC Division), to the Planning and Purchase department, a new unit under a collaborative agreement with M/s.Siemens, W. Germany, for the manufacture of CNC systems (Turning and Milling) from 1984-1991, as Purchase Manager.

Sri. KY Sir's encouragement to move to CNC division helped me learn Import – Export policies of those days in detail, and I got the courage to face all Commercial related challenges.

Subsequently after that I took Sri. KY Sir's advice and moved to HMT (International) Ltd, as Project Manager for the Maldives Project and worked there till 1992-93.

Almost every Sunday and during the holidays I had made it a point to visit Sri. KY Sir's residence at Malleswaram since 1981 till 1989. As I was a bachelor then and staying alone, the homely food was shared with me at Sir's residence, without



P. Laxmidhara - one of the early associates of the SONA group. Yajna considers him one of the pillars of the enterprise

thought to the disturbance caused to them. And I also never thought how difficult it was to take care of an outsider along with other family members. Madam was treating me more like her own brother, and also happily welcoming my sudden and untimely visits exclusively for food, which cannot be forgotten by me forever. There were so many guests visiting Sir's residence during the holidays but still I used to stand on the other side of the road until the guests left, and then rush to Sir's residence and end up eating and also spending nice time talking with Sir's father, Sri. Venkappayya. The above is one small incident which I have shared, but the list is long, as they were treating me more like a family member, which I took advantage of.”

This comment about the hospitality meted out to guests and food served to them is part of the Indian culture, which has always urged us to treat guests as representatives of the divinity/Almighty: “*Athithi Devo Bhava*”. In all the interviews, we found this quality of hospitality to guests prevalent among all members of Yajna's family. Visitors and guests were welcome. The kitchen was always open --whether during the resource starved period of the 1980's, or in their life of abundance after their success in business.

Among the early leading contributors in establishing the leather strap manufacturing line is Somashekar, who was earlier a colleague in HMT before joining the Sona group. Some of the best practices in statutory compliance were put in place by YNK's uncle, Subraya. He also handled the costly operations of buying gold for plating, often from the bullion market in Mumbai. After his retirement, Narayana Rao took over Accounts and Administration. Some of these early stalwarts of the Sona Group referred to in this paragraph are not with us in this world now. We pray for their souls to attain *sadgathi* and eternal peace.

Mihir Kharod, eminent journalist in the field of Horology, the brain behind the prestigious *TRADEPOST* magazine mentions in his contribution: “***(He was) A part of one of the earliest batches to have joined HMT, alongwith many other stalwarts of horology like Messrs I.K. Amitha, Hari Rao, B.G. Dwarkanath and H.G. Raghunath who later made it big in the World of Time***”.

Let us hear from the aforementioned senior executive leader HG Raghunath (HGR). The writing covers his time spent in HMT as a colleague and later as

vendor. Here is a complete reproduction of the letter which shows insights into the working style and mutual respect they had for each other.:

Contribution from HG Raghunath Yajnarayana, the person I saw in HMT as a BOSS!



I joined the HMT Electronic Watch Project after my engineering and a short stint of teaching in the same college where I passed out. HMT in 1979 was a dream company to work for, it being a house-hold name for watches. I joined as an Engineer Trainee through an all India selection process. I met Yajnarayana on Day 1 along with Dr. Montena who was the DGM and head of the Project. We were four engineer trainees and the first batch to join the Project.

I felt very good when I met KY for the first time. He was simple, down to earth, unlike the other HMT officers I had met while completing the joining formalities. I realised he was also an engineer and his way of communication made me feel at home. He introduced us to Dr. Montena and Amitha the super Boss of HMT Watch Division and his way of introducing freshers like us was very motivating!

When we were selected to go for a four-month training programme to Citizen Watch Company, Tokyo, we were so excited! But he made sure that we went through a rigorous training stint on mechanical watch assembly and manufacturing process at HMT Watch Factory Bangalore before going to Japan. This helped us a great deal to pick up the training in Japan on quartz watches. He had watched our skills for some time and allotted training areas for each of us. I was selected for After Sales Service Training, which was endorsed by the Trainers at Citizen and I now admire his ability to pick up the right people for the right slot!

He used to be a very people-person and easily approachable. HMT being a public sector organisation, was very process driven (terrific processes), so much so that to get proposals cleared we would need a lot of effort convincing, clarity, priorities etc., at the HO. But it was so easy to deal with KY because he would listen, appreciate the need and was very helpful. So we were dealing with two different systems within the same organisation!

When we faced tough situations but were right in our arguments he would bat on our side, but help resolve the issue without offending the rule book experts on the other side!

How much ever you innovate, and manage well, getting things done from other departments in the Watch Division viz. Marketing, Finance, HR and others was always challenging because of the hierarchies. KY would notice this and talk to me saying I had done my job very well, but this was life there, and that would help me feel better.

Once he said, HGR why don't you travel to HMT Ranibhag and Delhi along with Citizen Executives for official discussions which will help you get both learning and a break? He ensured that I stayed in five star hotels along with them! (Five star hotels were way out of my limits at that time.)

Yajnanarayana as an Entrepreneur:

I joined Titan as the Head of After Sales Service in 1986 and served for 16 years in that function. During these years I met KY who was by then an established vendor partner for straps.

This time I saw in KY, a very smart businessperson who was hungry for more success and I thought he wanted to make money and become rich! But when I went to his factories and met people I realised his noble motive -- to help with employment to so many people coming from remote villages. They were happy, enthusiastic and energetic. It was a Wow moment for me!!

After Customer Service I joined Manufacturing and was heading Supply Chain & Manufacturing for eight years. During these years KY demonstrated that he could always rise to the occasion when required, through innovations and the ability to take risks (investment). He was very quality and cost focused, and wanted us to depend on him for import substitution in straps.

His employees and engineers always looked up to him and had very good words to say!

Later, I got to head the Watches & Accessories business as CEO, and during those years my observations about KY were- he was a respected, performing (accolades winning) and Innovative Entrepreneur and could speak well in our Vendor-Partner Meets. He was very constructive in his feedback to the company.

He is indeed special in many ways in my view!

-HG Raghunath

It is not an easy task to explain the path of a 30 plus years' eventful journey in a few pages. The Editors have captured the major milestones and management philosophies that drove the strategy and operations at various stages shown in the next pages.

The way it is presented, it looks like straight forward growth and a smooth dream ride. But hardly any success in any endeavour comes through smooth journeys. "The results of success are public. Whereas the efforts that go behind it are private." These efforts take the shape of different decision making at different stages:

- 1) *What ventures to enter?*
- 2) *Whom to partner with, and who would be the potential competitors?*
- 3) *Can we get the sweet spot of growing a new segment and grow by innovation (which later management gurus would call 'Blue Ocean Strategy')?*
- 4) *How can we focus on our strength and increase value to the customer rather than on raw strategies to target competition?*
- 5) *Execution strategies*
- 6) *Responses to unexpected situations*

We will be creating supporting material on the journey of the Sona Group as educational material for Case Studies for Management courses. Contact us at businessasyajna@gmail.com on how to coordinate usage of the material for Educational purposes.

There are many measures to quantify business. Topline, Bottomline, Profit ratio, Percentage market share, Size of the assets, Return on Employed Capital, Share Price, Market Capitalization etc. It is not claimed that the Sona Group is champion in any or many such aspects. NIT-K has been a bed of creating business leaders and

entrepreneurs. Some of the Alumni have built businesses which are bigger in scale than the Sona Group profiled here. To a large extent, it also depends on the sectors that the entrepreneur decides to enter. Some sectors are big, and some are niche. The size or fiscal parameters are not the qualifying criteria that make the Sona Group different or worthy of study.

We propose that the reason that it is worthy of study is because of the business decisions taken along the journey and use of various avenues to achieve social objectives. This is what makes many appreciate the group as can be seen in the warm sharing about Yajna and the company. We will highlight with an example. Here is a sample of the standing instructions to the factory supervisors on its recruitment policy and benefits plan:

- 1) Any young widow who needs to work, pick up automatically. Extend offer and explore which task she can contribute to.*
- 2) Wherever possible, Transport, Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner as part of overtime work planning are provided free of cost. These are not subsidized at cost facilities where employees must pay a nominal rate. These facilities should be totally free. Cooks can be employed on payrolls to ensure this.*
- 3) Any applicant he/she, if meets the eligibility of age to work, irrespective of education level, should be given a chance.*
- 4) If we can put up a plant that can be run by all women, that should be priority.*
- 5) Maintain a network of senior village women who can be the channel to take the message of opportunities in Sona Group factories to anyone in need.*

The net result is for all to see. More than 50% of the workforce in the company are women. Why is it important to recognize this?

There are some industrial sectors that are a natural fit for mass employment of a women's workforce. The Textile industry is one such. The percentage of women in the workforce in that sector is much higher than elsewhere. Strap making using heavy machinery and employing a variety of designs is not a natural fit. In any

industrial process planning, it is possible to design procedures that can use automation heavily and increase capital expense and reduce manpower needs drastically. Or have processes with investment in appropriate technologies to make machines and manpower work in harmony and create lots of employment. That is determined by the overall corporate objective set by the Entrepreneur. We credit the Sona Group with planning with the latter approach.

People over profit

In subsequent pages, we will document many such initiatives that furthers the overall objective of social impact in addition to business profitability and growth. Most of the needs of employees are taken care of by the company. So, it is no wonder that at the end of the month, many of the workers spend money on mobile recharging to send the remaining money to their parents in their villages in other states from which they migrated to Bengaluru for work. So, success in any part of India spreads positivity to many other parts. The impact of the Sona Group's success is thus far and wide.

For an industrial house, it is easier to have one or very few design types and a high production volume of these few products. That factor is missing in the strap industry. The company has to design and manufacture hundreds of types. Each is produced in small quantities at a time. This calls for a lot more effort in design, inventory management, production planning and factory operations.

The following photo shows just a few such samples.



This is shown to share with readers as to what is involved in making steel or plated straps. Mastery of operations of the stamping machinery is at the centre of the operation. Each strap is made by joining tens of different links. This gives the right combination of flexibility and strength. Each link should have an associated custom designed die to be used in the stamping machines. Tens of these individual links are put together carefully and in order, and then clamped together. Stamping operations call for use of lubrication. Thus, there is need for washing, polishing by buffing, etc.

For gold plated or bi-tone (some gold, some metal colour) or black plated straps, there are additional steps of deposition.

The purpose of this paragraph is not to delve into the intricacies of strap making, but to show how the Sona Group went about choosing to create more employment, provide livelihoods to as many others as possible, over profitability.

Now these operations can be fully automated to a large extent if one so wishes. One can make assembly robots that can run the factories. It may call for higher capital expenditure, but one can construct overall operations with the least number of employees.

Instead, Yajna and his team designed a production plan that does have some heavy machinery and worked out some of the operations that can be done by women from the nearby village as a cottage industry, or as sub-contractors to the factory operations. This is just an example to demonstrate that high profitability was not the main driver or at the heart of the strategy of the company. Instead, the *core value was to use industrial enterprise to achieve a social objective, wherever possible.*

This right combination of machine and manpower is the theme that is taught to interns and students who visit various factories from time to time.

Here are some details of the timelines of the growth of Sona Group of companies and some of the customers, over time:

Journey of Sona Group and Management Philosophy



Sl.No	Year	Strategy/Products/Key Learnings
1	1987	Start Sona Plating : Gold plating on straps using Electroplating. Project led by Vasanthi Kammaje assisted by Diwakar.
2	1988	Overcome teething difficulties and focus on customer satisfaction.
3	1989	Start Sona Band in Attibele. Develop Expertise in Metal straps. Key Leaders: Ravikumar, Shashi Prakash, Ravi Prakash, Venkatesh.
4	1990	Replace imports of Bi-Colour Straps.
5	1991	
6	1992	a) Import machinery & expand capacity. b) Become Supplier to TITAN.
7	1993	a) Start Sona Horological in Hosur, a Unit to be close to Customer. Key Leaders: P.Laxmidhara & Radhakrishna Bhat. b) Start Kammaje Industries in Veerasandra. Import Machinery & expand capacity. Key Leaders Jagadeesh Upadhyay & Balakrishna.
8	1994	Massive expansion of capacity. Subcontract to Women under Vishwa Karyagara scheme.
9	1995	Peaceful resolution of 1 st and only strike in the History of the group. Person who led the strike got totally transformed and became a devotee and social leader.
10	1996	

Family support is key ingredient to success

Initial team is key to success

Proper risk assessment and gutsy strategy needed

MSME should break into big league

Achieve social objectives with industrialization

Be courageous to face situation beyond control

Journey of Sona Group and Management Philosophy



Sl.No	Year	Strategy/Products/Key Learnings
11	1997	Start Sona Leather in NS Palya, Central Bangalore. Vertical integration for Leather straps. Smart, "Jugaad Engineering" and Indigenous machines development. Key Leaders: Somashekar, Narayana Rao, Madhu Karanth & assisted by Naveen.
12	1998	Start Leather Remborded Straps manufacturing Acquire Machinery & Raw material of M/s Hirsch
13	1999	Unisoft India started as foray into Engineering and software services.
14	2000	Start Sugama Industries in Tumkur. Leather straps for Replacement market. Key Leader: Jayalakshmi
15	2001	
16	2002	
17	2003	Developed cap folded solid look alike straps.
18	2004	
19	2005	
20	2006	a) Adopt Ion Plating Technology. Key Leader: Hanumantha Reddy. b) Design and start manufacture of Make in India Buckles.

Look out for horizontal and vertical integration

Dealing with relations & partners is an art

Trust women, young and street smart manpower

Have "we can do it" attitude.

Support others and universe will support you back

Innovation takes you to new trajectory

Journey of Sona Group and Management Philosophy



Sl.No	Year	Strategy/Products/Key Learnings
21	2007	Expansion of PVD coating of metal straps.
22	2008	Key aspects in succession planning.
23	2009	Acquired machinery from the closed watch straps manufacturing unit of Titan.
24	2010	Enter Watch Assembly. Acquired machinery from Chennai based assembly unit of Citizen. Major contribution to Sonata Brand of watches. Key Manager: Prakash & R.Iyengar.
25	2011	
26	2012	Consolidation of operations.
27	2013	
28	2014	Exploit & explore adjacencies.
29	2015	Deepen international buying & selling relationships.
30	2016	Start Kammaje Unit II for Black Plating.
31	2017	Acquire Banda Leather Strap Unit. Start Banda Sona Bracelets Ltd, Hong Kong. Technology and skill transfer from China to India for High Value leather straps. Opening of International operations. Key leader: Chandrashekar (CC).
32	2018	Custom services by Deepra. More involvement with entrepreneurs of DPS Technologies.
33	2019	Add. 50K Sq ft capacity expansion & deepening expertise across all units and verticals. Start Precision Component Manufacturing Unit .
34	2020	Explore different types of strap technologies.

Right level of automation is the best strategy

Low cost with huge volume is viable business

Extract best of machine and manpower & trust them

Have confidence to compete with the world

Expand customer and solutions base

Change with times, especially on technology



The companies in the manufacturing space supported by him such as DPS Technologies are coming along well, and hopefully will chart a similar growth trajectory in the future.

Different Manufacturing Plants





Different Manufacturing Facilities





We list some of the customers and brands of the group for those interested in the field of horology to be aware of, and for further study if needed: HMT, TIMEX, TITAN, MAXIMA, FOSSIL, Q&Q, Adriatica, Pierre Ricard, Fastrack, Sonata, etc.

The success of the group has been recognized through many awards and peer recognitions. We will not go into the long list.



Madhsudhan Karanth & Radha Krishna Bhat of the SONA Group receiving the award at a function graced by (L-R) Gaurav Gupta , IAS, leaders Sadananda Gowda, BS.Yediyurappa and Jagadish Shettar

Here is a sharing from BG Dwarakanath (BGD) who was in HMT and later retired as COO of TITAN, an undisputed leader in the Watch industry in India and the crown jewel in the Tata group of companies, who has seen Yajna for decades. He holds very heart-warming feelings for him, while he makes a reference to the *Vishnu Sahasra Nama* and Yajna.

As a background, we will only share that by the Hindu way of life as originated in India, there are lots of prayers, lots of spiritual literature, lots of avenues for one's inner journey and religious approaches to living. They centre around three concepts of *Sristi*, *Sthithi* and *Laya*. That is, creation, sustenance and repurposing. The divine elements of Brahma represent Creation. To the divine representation of Vishnu is attributed the sustenance of the world, while Maheswara is the name given to the universal force of destruction and repurposing.

Vishnu Sahasra Nama is considered a garland of prayers to the Lord in Vishnu's form. It comprises of a thousand names or ways of describing Him. It is a highly lyrical collection and is heard in homes of millions on a daily basis.

The writings of BGD have been reproduced in the link:
Contribution from BG Dwarakanath (Page 154).

It is indeed heartening to read such fond recollections from one leader in the industry about another. But it is not the case of just one. This sentiment of goodwill and mutual respect is what we came across in many of our interactions.

Another illustrious leader who continued to keep the TITAN flag flying high is Bhaskar Bhat who also served as MD of TITAN. In his own way, he sent us a hand written note which we reproduced at the beginning of the book. An interesting anecdote with regard to this writing is that he undertook to write this without any correction, and without interruption, in one go. We appreciate his efforts.

Here is a demonstration of the dictum, “Extract the best of machine and man power, and trust them.” A question to the readers: What would you do if your main distributor, in the early stage of your company's growth misplaces Rs. 60,000 worth of straps (a very big sum at that time) and that too under unusual circumstances which your immediate leadership team is not able to believe? Many of the managers wanted immediate action on the concerned, but Yajna chose a surprisingly alternate action. Read on to find out what Vikram Bhat has to say, in the link:

Contribution from Vikram Bhat (Page 217).

We want to share another example to illustrate the ability developed by Yajna to use the right balance of Heart and Brain, right balance of Emotion and Logic in decision making. Here is a sharing by Lakshmidhar: “Another employee by name Venkatesh is still working at Sona Band Attibele since 1995. During one incidence of theft at Sona Band/ Kammaje Industries I made the mistake of targeting him as one of the culprits, which he had denied, and subsequently had very systematically proved his uprightness, and enabled us to catch the real culprit. Here I want to say that based on our feedback, any owner would have taken a decision to terminate the services of Venkatesh, but it did not happen that way due to Sir's involvement, and timely advice by Sri. KY Sir to me to have patience before taking such decisions. Today Venkatesh is still working with the same high dedication, involvement and trust worthiness, and taking care of three units of the Metal Strap production activities of the Sona Group.”

It should not be mistaken that anything can be passed through under Yajna's nose. Those who know him closely are aware that that is hardly the case. It is the exact opposite. He is a taskmaster and leader who delivers and demands results from others.

We have chosen to highlight just a few of the examples of his ability to be RIGHT about people though prime facie, circumstantial evidence points to the contrary.

Almost no one can claim that they got everything RIGHT. But undoubtedly in 50 years of professional experience, Yajna made more correct decisions and used a few not so good ones as learning lessons, which he shares in private. Lessons from these incidents, and his sharing about them have been of immense value.

From time immemorial, with the Sun as a source of light, Humanity has been aware of the time of the day. But the time-piece or watch that is carried around (worn around the neck/hand or as an easily movable instrument) has a recorded history from the 16th century. There are various products, from those suited to everyday wear to adventure to exploration, to even those taken to the moon. Switzerland in particular has many famous brands which are fine pieces of precision mechanical engineering. However, post World War, the innovation driven economy of Japan gave the Quartz watch to the world. This in a way made watch a mass market product. The Chinese success in low cost, acceptable quality manufacturing has been another important page in the history of horology. Let us hear about efforts by this MSME entity to expose employees to these international centres, as narrated by the head of one of the units.

“Sri. KY Sir, about a decade ago, told me --why are only we making foreign trips? Why don't you make arrangements for Passports for our experienced employees? I wondered why, and for what reason? After that Sir told me that we should send them to the Hong Kong or Basel fair in Switzerland, etc., to attend the Watch exhibition. Finally, it happened in 2006, when we sent ten employees to the Hong Kong watch exhibition. Now it is a regular practice, and over 50+ experienced/trusted working employees have been given the chance to visit a foreign country by our Sri. KY Sir.

Also, in order that we inculcate leadership development, product knowledge, and foster behavioral changes, Sri. KY Sir has sent me and almost all the senior

employees to most of the Vendor meets conducted by customers like Titan, Timex, Fossil, Maxima etc., to places like UK, European countries, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Malaysia, France, Switzerland, etc. In view of this, today almost all the experienced employees have grown up to the extent of handling any responsibility, which Sir was waiting to happen since the 1990's.

In order that we learn discipline, details of customer satisfaction needs, Quality, 5S, Kaizen, morale building, leadership qualities, dedication, commitment, straight forwardness, family responsibility, etc., Sri. KY Sir insisted that we regularly conduct management technique classes by stalwarts like Sri. Ravindranath Belle, Ex – Vice President of Mico, Sri. Ashwath Narayan, etc., since 2000 itself.”

In the earlier pages, we described what we referred to as the “*Jambavantha Effect*,” i.e., the art of motivating others, giving necessary support and making them achieve more. Here are a few paragraphs to showcase one more of such impacts made by Yajna.

No industrialist ever develops all by himself. He is always part of an ecosystem. He participates in it, derives benefit from it and contributes to it. This strengthens the whole system. Here are some paragraphs on a similar exercise and successful impact on overall business development.

It is recognized that western India is an important region and centre for manufacturing. Some towns and cities have developed a high brand value for themselves for particular products. Examples are Surat, Morbi, etc. Rajkot is one such important centre which has made a mark as an industrial hub. In the area of Horology, among other things, they were well known for brass cases. We understand there were 70 or 80 manufacturers operating in the MSME sector from there.

The consumer market and the industry use both brass and stainless-steel cases for their products. In particular, many of the products from TITAN, come in such cases.

Yajna visited Rajkot many times, developed a working relationship with many of the manufacturers, and encouraged them to invest in quality and variety of designs in their product portfolio. He helped in product design and prototype development.

And using his existing relationships on strap samples, helped getting samples of brass cases also approved for bulk production from TITAN. Thus, Rajkot too got added as one of the cities of operations of the SONA Group.

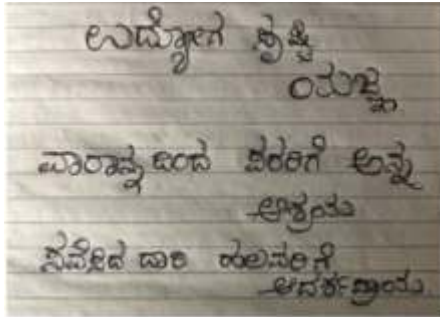
Going a step further, in a win-win arrangement for suppliers, the Sona Group and its customers took up complete responsibility including watch assembly-- Cases, Straps and Watch assembly services. That in a way almost completed their bouquet of services as an OEM supplier to the popular brands in the watch market. The movement part of the watch is totally different technology, and is usually a bought-out item.

There are many who credit Yajna for making significant contribution to Rajkot's watch industry and that was in the back of the mind of the jurors at *TRADEPOST* magazine when they chose to confer the Lifetime Achievement Award on him.



Associates from the Rajkot region are grateful for his moral, financial and all other forms of support in terms of getting market access and for boosting their confidence to take on new challenges and change with the times, as needed.

Ravi Prakash has submitted a detailed 10-page writeup in his local language, Kannada. The heading of the same is as follows:



From L-R: Ravi Prakash,
Laxmidhara, SS Swamy,
Yajna and Shashi Prakash

In spite of our command over our vocabulary, we desist from attempting to translate or trans-create one word in the second line. “*Vaaranna*”. This is steeped in local culture and any translation into English will not do justice. The two parts of this complex word are “*Vaara*” which is day of the week and “*Anna*” which literally means rice, but figuratively means food or nourishment in the broad context.

Imagine a poor boy, but with potential. There are many who want to help him but themselves do not have the means to support fully. So, a system gets worked out where the boy will eat in seven different houses in a week--one day's food in one house, so he takes turns to nourish himself in different houses and study. The burden on the charitable family also is reduced. One can imagine the impact on the psyche of the beneficiary of the system. The social relationship and true meaning of the idiom, “It takes a village”, and the gratitude one feels to so many that gets developed often leads one to resolve to do well and continue the tradition of giving back. People who were *Vaaranna* boys doing well later is considered the ultimate expression of Rags to Riches story.

So, a rough translation of the above could be: “Creator of Work, Yajna. Journey of Rags to Riches and Enabler of so many livelihoods. An Ideal for others.” When Yajna read this, he opined that the use of the term *Vaaranna* Boy was an exaggeration, and the situation was not that bad. If we can resort to Kannada, “Kastadha Jeevana => “Life with difficulties” is more appropriate. But in the spirit of not editing the essence of any contribution, we have retained Ravi Prakash's contribution as translated to English and recorded, accessible at the link: *Writing from Ravi Prakash ((Page 220).*

We have spent a lot of time accompanying Yajna on many business meetings and here are some observations:

1) Proper Advice: Youngsters get carried away with their ideas, they have selective listening and are overconfident of achieving business success. This is a shortcoming among first generation entrepreneurs, as can be seen in the low success rate of startups. I have seen Yajna get a good handle of the business proposal being presented, the key elements that will make it succeed, and most importantly, the THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE FAILURE. This highlighted part is very valuable, and can guide the budding entrepreneur fill up the holes in the overall plan. This can only come from the deep experience and wisdom of having studied/being involved with many businesses. On one occasion, I heard an acquaintance of him commenting with a spin on the popular proverb, “There are no leaves untouched by a goat in a garden. There is no business unknown to Yajna.”

2) Selective risk taking: I am aware of many fellow entrepreneurs who have been helped financially, often on extremely generous terms, by him. As in any venture, a few have succeeded, and a few have not panned out the way they were envisaged. He takes everything in his stride and takes these as lessons learnt. I am amazed at his ability to explore involvement in other ventures in addition to his core sector operations, especially if it helps others in general, and all the more if it can help other ex NIT-ians, Surathkal in particular.

3) Integrity: As is known, Sona Group's core operations have been in manufacturing for other brands/principal companies. He is acutely aware of the need for the success of the brand for the success of his own manufacturing operations. He has earned a name for building up a very synergetic relationship as manufacturer and has always contributed to the success of the brand.

4) Sharing the results of his success, and encouragement for cultural activities: I am aware of his involvement in many social projects. He has contributed and led projects for fund raising for social causes such as for renovation and support to centres of praying and education. In addition, at an individual level, he encourages activities that can keep and grow our rich culture. I got a chance to learn the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and Vedic recitation from my grandfather. When Yajna learnt about it, he was very keen to read my summaries, and listen to my renderings. I am grateful for his words of encouragement. In Sanskrit there are names for various forms of fire, including the origin of his name- from body heat to what is used in havan. Yajnanarayan is considered to be the presiding deity for that energetic fire that accepts various sacrifices. So Yajna Narayana is a most appropriate name for him, given his energy levels in his age bracket.

5) Frankness: Sugar coating things is like using pain killers. Masking the situation does not help in the long run. This has been a problem in business efficiency. I have found Yajna Sir has developed a style which avoids this problem. He is very open and frank when sharing feedback. People who know him understand where he is coming from. It comes across as the criticism of the situation, the issue at hand, and not about the person *per se*. Many who have received his feedback know that they are meant for positive improvement and are not with any bad intention.

In an interconnected economic world, one is expected to be well networked and widely travelled to achieve success in the highly competitive business environment.

You may have seen or can imagine Yajna in suit and boot in foreign countries, along with dignitaries and important business persons. He is equally at ease on the factory floor, rolling up his sleeves and checking on machines, raw material quality or the final product.

He is also a hands-on person and involves himself in projects. The following picture taken while volunteering for the Swachh Bharat cleanup day is memorable. This mission launched by Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has struck the right chord with the population. A cleaner India is one step that is needed to make India join the comity of advanced nations. He has been implementing these measures in all his factories.

He is equally comfortable in a five-star hotel or a roadside eatery, mingling with the masses. We do not want to delve too much into this aspect beyond making the point that he is not alone in this kind of behaviour. There are many to look up to. We just want to highlight that society in general likes people with these traits. It is something that youngsters should try to incorporate. Yajna is like the **“ThumbiDha Koda”**, a full



vessel making no noise in the famous proverb that was mentioned in the earlier pages to represent people conducting themselves with humility, despite the high position they are in.

'Customer is king' is the paradigm that drives all business. Let us conclude this chapter by reading the contribution of R Rajagopalan, Vice President & Chief Manufacturing Officer at TITAN Company Ltd, gleaned from his decades' long experience of customer-vendor relationship:

Contribution from R Rajagopalan

“Titan Company Limited (Titan), a joint venture between the Tata Group and the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO), commenced its operations in 1984 under the name Titan Watches Limited. Titan is one of the largest integrated own-brand watch manufacturers in the world. Over the last three decades, Titan has expanded into under-penetrated markets and created lifestyle brands across different product categories. Titan is widely known for transforming the watch and jewellery industry in India.



Titan is one of the flagship companies in the highly respected industrial conglomerate, the TATA Group.

One of the important contributors to the success of Titan Company Ltd is our excellent vendor development programme.

We source a variety of materials and services such as metals, engineering plastic, tools, consumables, case components, specialty movements, watch heads, straps, bracelets, hands, dials, plating services, packing logistics, and outsource activities for the manufacturing for our watches.

Our vendors are spread across the length and breadth of the country, and we have preference for domestic and eco-friendly suppliers.

Pioneering innovation, international design ethos, customer-oriented values and top-notch service have always formed the cornerstones for brand Titan.

Performing vendors have seen their businesses with us grow substantially over the years. Vendors with long relationships exhibit good management practices, production processes, quality systems, competitive pricing, cost efficiency, and delivery of products on time, continuous improvements and high service standards.

A high level of integrity in the conduct of business, adherence to the Tata code of conduct, especially in dealing with HR, POSH, Green Energy practices, Safety and Corporate Social Responsibility are imperative.

In this context, we are happy to acknowledge and place on record Titan's long association with Sona Group Companies started and run successfully by entrepreneur Mr. Yajna Narayana Kammaje, known widely in the Indian horology industry as Yajna.

Mr. Yajna has provided visionary leadership and guided the Sona Group to achieve excellence on the above parameters. Specifically, I am happy to highlight a few of the achievements:

- 1) The focus on Product development, resulting in steady introduction of new features and products across many customer segments.

- 2) Smart investments in capability as well as capacity expansion to be in lock-step with Titan's growth curve. His belief in reinvesting in core manufacturing industries.
- 3) Mr. Yajna's active participation in the overall vendor ecosystem as a mentor and key spokesperson.
- 4) The high level of trust created across levels between Titan and various units of Sona.
- 5) Development and deployment of a well thought out strategy to be close to Titan's main factory.
- 6) And many other acts and deeds beyond just a supplier relationship.

The journey has been long. As Titan grew, Sona Group has been putting all its resources and efforts to meet the requirements of our product range, upgrade quality standards, operational systems and procedures, and most importantly in the right technology at the right time.

We started with the procurement of stainless steel straps, vertically integrated the Plating facility for gold plated straps with different colour versions. Our relationships steadily grew both in business volume and variety, and the manifestation of trust has resulted in Sona emerging as a natural choice for establishing an exclusive watch assembly facility for Titan.

We treat Sona Group factories almost as an extended arm of our industrial infrastructure. To attain this status, Mr. Yajna and his team have put lots of effort to comply with our various requirements. We are happy that the Sona Group is considered as an esteemed preferred vendor partner and have been rewarded with many coveted awards as a mark of appreciation of our win-win relationship.

We are happy to learn about the endeavour to write a book about Mr. Yajna. We wish great success to this well-deserved effort and continued success to him and his extended family of Sona Group's ecosystem.

Best Regards,

R Rajagopalan, *Vice President & Chief Manufacturing Officer*

TITAN COMPANY LIMITED

Watch Division, No 3, Sipcot Industrial Complex | Hosur | Tamil Nadu 635 126.

Yajna is a regular speaker at many seminars, events and conferences. His often quoted sentence at his public speaking sessions is his heartfelt gratitude and acknowledgment that the key ingredient to his success was customers like TITAN. The warm sentiments expressed by officials of TITAN is greatly appreciated by all concerned.

Food for Thought from this Chapter

(Especially for Young Readers):

- ★ Can you analyze the calculated risks you took in life? What were the rewards? What were the experiences? What were the lessons?
- ★ What are the basics, comforts and luxuries you need for your lifestyle? What level of expenses do you need to go on with life?
- ★ Can you do a scenario analysis for a short term v/s long term tradeoff?
- ★ More than your net worth, it is your “network” that will decide your success in life. How would you go about building your network of contacts?
- ★ In addition to what you know, it is important to realize whom you know. Whose wisdom you can tap on. Who can advise you?
- ★ Have you heard the saying, 'Your attitude decides the altitude you reach in life'? What are your core beliefs, dominant attitudes?



CHAPTER 4

Experiences from the Business aspects of the SONA Group

We come to what we believe is the central portion of the book. There's so much we can learn from his journey. The following are based on various writings about him by contributors, and hours of focused discussions. What made YNK successful? What lessons can others learn and incorporate? What business strategies were at work? The style of writing will be like a commentary on a broad topic with some new info, some stories, some business comment. The appeal to adopt these in your professional and business journeys is implicit.

Proper Work Ethic

One fortunate thing for India was the start of many public sector units in the core sector. But the often-criticized work culture that came with it turned many into loss making entities. We do not subscribe to the view that EVERYTHING is wrong with PSUs. There are many pockets of excellence and they need to be emulated. Yajna believes it is the work ethic, one's attitude, that is the most determining factor in success in life. Just an example: When Yajna was in HMT, he used to be on the rounds of the factory, sharp at 9 AM, walking around in the Watch unit. Obviously, that led to everyone being on time. It would have been very easy to fall into the predominant culture and be lazy and push papers or be seen to be doing something and take home the salary. This is just an example. Not just Yajna, wherever there is success, it can be attributed to the proper “Work Ethic”.

Attention to Detail

Especially in the MSME sector, it is very important for the Founder, Proprietor, Risk taker to be AWARE of happenings all around. “Attention to detail” helps.

This can take many shapes and forms. How does one collect information? Is it direct or indirect? What is the effort involved in this activity? Yajna puts extra effort in being in touch with as many aspects of business as possible.

The same attention to detail comes in handy in a board meeting or analysis of the business while taking major decisions on expansion or exploration to adjacent businesses. Most business plans look good on paper. There are many things to get excited about. There may be 95% to 97% things that are correct in it and point to success.

This wisdom is something that entrepreneurs supported by Yajna also realize and find value in their interaction with him. He draws their attention to the remaining 5% or 3% that were overlooked in the overall business plan. These may be wrong assumptions, wrong expectations, or even wrong projections.

Comprehensive view of Manpower

India produces many Technical personnel (Engineering, Diploma & Vocational Training). There has been too much focus on the employability of this formally educated manpower. But what about alternate resources? Those who could not get into the formal stream of education? Those who can only work part time? In Yajna's group, there is only 1 Ph.D (his elder son who drove the Innovation & Design Centre for some time), and very few Masters or high-end Engineering degree holders. But he has a large number of “not formally educated” manpower, but who are great learners in the world university. They have the hunger to succeed. An entrepreneur should spot them and empower them. Success is assured when there is focus on a “comprehensive view of manpower”.

Aim for Innovation, right timing, price point and be ever ready for growth

Many old timers may recall the Gold Control Order. That severely regulated the supply of gold as an input to the industry. This has had a deep impact on the business of gold straps for the watch industry. Recall that the speed of liberalization increased 1991 onwards. That led to growth in most sectors, which led to a huge

consumption pattern in the Indian population. Demand for gold plated straps is one such outcome. But alas, India is not self-sufficient in gold. Conventional electroplating deposition of gold consumes around 250mg of gold per strap. With an increasing order book and the existing controls on gold as an industrial input, it would not have been possible to grow at all. It was a chance encounter at an industrial exhibition that Yajna spotted a PVD (Pressurized Vapor Deposition) machine at reasonable cost. When business demands, one should be ready for quick action. He went by his gut feel and booked a machine worth Rs. 1.5 crore on the spot! This ion deposition technology brought down the gold requirement per strap drastically. This adoption of advanced technology, at the right price point, in time, was what enabled the SONA Group's growth. The same machine at a higher cost would not have been viable. We have studied many case studies on innovation. It is the timing and the cost of adoption that has the biggest impact on the success or failure of a company. We appeal to readers in general and to management students in particular to delve more into such studies on this front, across sectors.

Harish Bhat, Brand Custodian of the Tata Group and senior executive who has worked closely with Yajna highlights a similar sentiment in his contribution. ***“I recall an episode from the Annual Vendor Meet of Titan, several years ago. I had just completed a presentation to all our vendor partners, about the growth voyage ahead of us, setting out a target of achieving sales of more than 15 million watches within the next five years. This was a significant growth target, more than doubling our sales base in a highly competitive industry. Yajnanarayana met me immediately after this session, to say how enthused he was with this ambition, and how he would ensure that his own company met every single requirement to support Titan in this growth. A few months later, he also briefly discussed with me the specific steps he had taken to prepare for such growth. And I do know that he made this a reality, over the next few years.”***

In his earlier roles in the Tata Group, he has been Managing Director of Tata Consumer Products Ltd., and Chief Operating Officer at Titan Company. The complete Contribution from him can be accessed at the link:
Contribution from Harish Bhat (Page 158).

Give special focus to Cash Flow

Lots of businessmen come to Yajna to discuss their problems and issues. One common thread he sees in many of them is “cash flow problems”. All managers, workers, are busy. Production is in full swing. Customer orders are flowing. You can see a healthy top line. Good projected profit too. But there is a struggle to pay salaries at the end of the month. That is one area where Yajna helps with advice to tide over emergencies. The so called 'Payment terms' are the biggest barrier to increasing India's growth rate. Frankly, this is not in the realm of something that the government can do much. This has to be solved as an issue of the overall culture and environment of the Industry. An appeal goes out to all the powers that be to change this aspect, and wonders will happen in the next phase of growth. There is absolutely no reason for a big company to delay payment to suppliers/downstream companies when they can, allowing some lower-level official to withhold payment. The Sona Group is fortunate to have customers who have an exemplary track record on payment and are role models for the industry. With that benefit, the group has achieved a similar reputation in payment to suppliers to improve their cash flows.

Take a Long-term view

The following examples illustrate how the SONA Group took decisions which had a short term negative impact, but had long term benefits. Strap making is a labour intensive activity. It was not easy to recruit large number of workers to fuel the growth. So what was the option? We can only vary the popular adage and coin a new one: “If workers do not come to the factory, take the factory to the workers”. A plant was opened in an industrial area still under development near a village far away from his residence. There was NO ELECTRICAL POWER CONNECTION to industrial sheds in that area yet, as it was still under development. The Secretary, Industries Department jokingly chided Yajna for going there so early, and expressed helplessness to provide electricity immediately, in spite of his best intentions. So, the unorthodox decision of using a DG (Diesel Generator) for all factory operations was taken. Needless to say, this impacted overall profitability. But this at least solved the issue of access to labour. Fortunately, it worked out very well in the long run. The city grew, roads got built, transport infrastructure improved and it became a story of all is well that ends well.

This story also symbolizes the multi variable optimizations that businessmen must

constantly work on. It is difficult to get all the stars of labour, capital, material, customer access, aligned easily. Taking gutsy calls on these is what makes a winner. What is to be noted is that all these decisions were made in an era of high cost of capital, where interest rates even touched 20%!

There are lots of stories around the horse shoe. The phrase, “finding a horse shoe and thus ...” gets used in business discussions. The interpretation of this to highlight the effort that goes into buying a horse just because its horseshoe was easily available. That refers to coming across just a piece of an overall business plan and needing to make intelligent guesses on all the others. Because there is an element of luck associated with this, often it is used in a positive context. Yajna too has taken a few decisions in this mode. Most of these decisions have worked out well.

An example is that of a lady entrepreneur Smt. Jayalakshmi, who was banking on an order from a reputed customer. But for reasons beyond her control, the orders did not materialize, and she was left high and dry. In a case of 'We have found a horse shoe, let us buy a horse,' Yajna supported her, started a new factory to be run by her as an alternate line of work and that experiment worked out very well as well. The entrepreneurial lady turned out to be the proverbial horse-shoe around which a viable business could be built.

A few other decisions taken in this mode have not worked out as expected. A few are still work-in-progress. They are lessons for him, and through him, to others.

All things considered, the risk factors have increased, and stakes are very high now. So Yajna suggests that we apply the right combination of brain and heart, i.e., logic and emotion in decision making. One should consider as many factors as possible and decide.

Do Succession planning

No human being is on this planet eternally, So, plan for EVERYTHING. Consciously, we have not featured many of the blood relations of Yajna's extended family. But a few of them who are relevant to the discussion on strategy and business aspects need mentioning. The foundation of his success was his excellence

in learning at KREC/NIT-K and thus it is no wonder that Yajna did not spare any resources when it came to providing educational opportunities for his two sons. His elder son Ravi Prakash Kammaje, Ph.D., earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Engineering. He then pursued research and obtained a Ph.D in Computer Science. He has studied at centres of higher studies literally across the globe. His studies spanned Bangalore, Australia, USA & UK. He also got a job and work experience in Corporate America. Business leaders will always be assessing the scope and limitations of their existing businesses while also exploring opportunities in adjacent or other sectors. Given his elder son's expertise in Software, it was tempting for Yajna to start a company in this field, tapping on his expertise. The timing was also right, with a strong foundation being laid by pioneers in this field like TCS, WIPRO, INFOSYS, HCL, etc. Unisoft India, a software and engineering services company was an outcome of this thought process. However, the primary responsibility of Engineering Delivery was with SS. Swamy, a professional in Design Services. Ravi worked closely with him as project lead. Given Ravi's focus on research in the Graphics area, and given the limited exploitation that was possible in the Y2K business opportunity, not too much was invested in Unisoft. At a later stage, Ravi contributed to the SONA Group's horological core business activities by leading a team of software engineers and developed an MIS app (Manufacturing Information System). His other impactful project is an online app for personalization of straps as a service. He is the go-to person on Technology matters. Relevant to this paragraph is Yajna's foresight to plan a new business for a possible succession plan.

The second and younger son is Gautham Kammaje whose studies also spanned Bangalore, USA with some course work in Australia. He specialized in supply chain management. He also gained experience working in Corporate America in the air conditioning industry for three years. Prodded on by Yajna, he moved back to Bangalore in 2009 and has been part of the Sona Group operations.

This stream of investing in formal education and continuous learning has developed rich competencies. Yajna is proud to say that he seriously thought about and implemented the broad contours of a succession plan when he touched 60. That does not mean he is not active in business activity. He visits factories daily, and attends many business related events more out of passion, and not out of compulsion to douse any fire! These are taken care of by relatives and professionals running the factories.

Yajna is often seen enjoying social gatherings with absolutely no worries about the factory. His friends' circle notice this and appreciate his succession planning efforts.

Never let a crisis pass. Invest more

The year 2020 turned out to be a year of unprecedented health and financial crisis due to the COVID pandemic. What started in Wuhan in China engulfed the rest of the world in just a few months. This by far had the most repercussions on many aspects.

Just a decade before, significant parts of the world saw the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis which primarily started in USA due to the mortgage crisis.

A few years before that, at the turn of the century in 2000, the Technology sector saw a boom-bust cycle of the highest proportions.

Just a decade before that, India saw a huge crisis in foreign currency reserves that forced the country to pledge gold. And two decades before that was the Oil crisis. And a few decades before that, the World Wars... The list goes on and on.

The capitalistic economy has been characterized by cycles of boom-bust, inflation and deflation. It is only the quantitative numbers used to describe the events that vary.

Relevant to this section is how the Sona Group responded to some of these events. It is a material fact that the highest level of investment in capital expense happened around 2008! It is due to a mix of a conscious decision to increase investment, or the consequence of strategies already in motion. Because of savings from profit and not squandering it on an extravagant lifestyle, Yajna and family had the resources when the right opportunities came by, to capitalize on.

It is easy to quote the clichéd business statement: 'Never let a crisis go waste.' But due to a combination of circumstances, this has become true for the group. It came in the shape of new market entry, new product introductions, pursuit of new customers, infrastructure expansion, new business relationships. There is enough material for multiple case studies in this aspect. We urge the concerned learner to pursue this stream of study.

Target healthy mix of Risks & Rewards

We conducted multiple discussions to find out if, preceding these important decisions, there were any enforceable commercial commitments from customers that would have helped to make the investment decision easier. The firm answer was, NO.

Any growth calls for taking risks of this type. The Big Customer may give 'indications' to vendors on possible support if such and such scenario works out. He may promise a high probability of business if circumstances pan out as expected. An element of risk is always on the table – this needs to be kept in mind in investing in times of crisis.

We can sum up the business lesson from these aspects by modifying the adage, '*No Pain, No Gain*' to "*A little more Pain in bad times, can lead to a lot of Gain*"

Focus on the core business. But be open for related lucrative fields

It is easy to imagine that success in the core horological business was the ticket to prosperity for the Kammaje family. What came out in interviews was that close to 80% of the profit was deployed in the core business. And 10% was ear-marked for investment in related or unrelated businesses.

As a strategy, this has led to Yajna and his family entering into one real estate venture or the other every few years. This also got mentioned in some of the contributions from his associates.

Another transaction was an industrial complex bought from a European businessman who was running an operation in Hosur. Its closeness to the other existing factories was a plus. The completion of that transaction also helped that businessman to come out of a crisis he was in. That dovetailed, with Yajna's nature to be an *Abhaya Hasta* (a helping hand) to people in trouble.

Another one pertains to a land parcel that got converted into a commercial complex in the middle of the city. Sona Towers houses a bank in a prominent locality.

We found that many dots got connected by virtue of having a portfolio of assets spread across different areas. But the main factor that drove us to write these paragraphs is one sharing to the effect that “rental income from these will help us continue the factory operation, should our core operation face an emergency for a few months.”

Business cycles are very common. Unfortunately, with that comes massive hiring and cut down of workforce as a consequence. Here is a group that built buffer assets which would yield a regular income and strengthen the overall finances of the group, so that employees need not be laid off.

There is nothing unique about buying attractive real estate from time to time. But conscious planning for it as a buffer for core operations is worthy of mentioning.

This emergency was indeed faced during the lockdown and temporary halting of production to prevent the spread of the corona virus in the second quarter of 2020. Mention is made elsewhere in the book about how hundreds of employees were taken care of, during this period.

The construction of some real estate assets was undertaken by his close associate Ganesh Rao and his son Subramanya. The quality of construction, at the right cost, and on time construction made them the automatic choice for expansion of infrastructure for many other factory complexes. There is a reason to mention it. He is one more beneficiary of the “*Jambavantha Effect*,” the art of encouraging others and giving them some support. Yajna gave them a chance at a most crucial time, and that enabled the father-son duo to establish themselves well.

We want to make this the second central theme of the book, the first being '**Business as 'Yajna'**'. We pose this question in the Food for Thought section. Whom can you uplift and become the Jambavantha in their life?

Go for higher value and rise above the competition

One snippet involved gold plating. The success of deposition depends to a large extent on the cleanliness of the surface. Even a microscopic dust particle, moisture, oil, or any surface impurity can cause huge quality problems.

Cleaning technology thus became a very valuable service in the manufacturing of

straps. This can be considered one branch of applied chemistry.

As is well known, Switzerland is the centre of high quality, branded watch manufacturers and “Swiss watch” has become synonymous with uber luxury.

Supporting this industry are products from NGL Tech, with high quality cleaning products. Though its operations were based in villages in the outskirts of Bangalore, in terms of approach to quality, the world was its field of operations, to bring in the best.

Sona Group was probably the first one to adopt this technology in India with direct import of the product from Switzerland. This competitive advantage could have been further exploited by working out exclusive supplier arrangements. But as a contribution to the ecosystem, through Yajna's reference, a distributor was appointed in India who went on to serve many customers (including Sona Group competitors).

This is just one example. Another example can be that of how the Sona Group views and acts with smaller competitors. Given the strength of the group, it is relatively easy to get a competitive advantage over other smaller players. Instead of adopting this approach, there are instances of some product spaces being vacated and windows opened for competitors to fill that space.

The banyan tree is quoted as a symbol of a giant that never allows any other plant life to come under it, by blocking off the sunlight. For a group to grow without bringing up others and purely at the cost of others is not an ideal strategy in the long run.

The Sona Group has strived to be a *KalPaVruksha* (a heavenly tree) that enables a lot more life forms under its shade. We appeal to those successful in businesses to aspire to this exalted role of an umbrella under which many beautiful things flourish.

The world should be one's oyster

The adage, “The world is your oyster” refers to the availability of opportunities and innate capabilities in all to achieve any goals they set their eyes on. Referring

to the beautiful pearl inside the oyster this is often said in a positive context.

The more we study the journey of the Sona Group from 1987, this saying has sounded true. The following journey is a testament to this:

- ◆ Initial success in gold plated metal straps
- ◆ Entry into metal strap manufacturing
- ◆ Massive expansion in capacity
- ◆ Entry into Leather strap manufacture and its expansion
- ◆ Support to case manufacture
- ◆ Watch Assembly
- ◆ Design watches and propose to bigger brands
- ◆ New technology adoption for gold plating
- ◆ Pioneering entry into Black plating

So, what else is left to be achieved in the field of Horology? The company's own brand and operations in foreign countries?

Yajna has been very clear that the strategy of the company is to be a contract manufacturer and serve the principal watch brands like Titan, Fossil, etc. There never was, and unlikely that there will be a watch brand from the Sona Group in the current business model of operation. His favourite example is that of MICO-Bosch. They are by far the most valuable sub system suppliers to the automobile industry. But will it be a good idea to launch their own brand of automobiles? One should never compete with one's customers. Business success depends on clarity of strategy, and the decision not to ever launch their own brand is one such move. An appeal to all business readers. Do you have a crystal-clear clarity on your business strategy?

On the matter of exports, Sona's products have found markets abroad and it is a net foreign exchange earner. In further pursuit of value addition, the Sona Group started operations in Hong Kong through the acquisition of part of the Banda Group and thus Banda Sona was formed. This facilitated the expansion of international operations. More exports to the world market are expected as an outcome of this strategy. The world should indeed be one's oyster.

By the way, the business acquired from Hong Kong also empowered a lady businesswoman. Using business as a vehicle, apart from primary products in Horology, empowering women has become a secondary outcome. Kudos to that.

Food for Thought from this Chapter

(Especially for successful Professionals & Business persons):

- ★ What cultural values do you live by? How easy or difficult is it to make it the DNA of the Enterprise?
- ★ Have you done broad or detailed succession planning? Are you assured of your enterprise outliving you?
- ★ Can it carry on for generations?
- ★ What is the mix of family members' contribution and that of professionals outside the network?
- ★ Can you be the motivator, a “*Jambavantha*” in someone's else's life?



CHAPTER 5

Share success with employees: “It takes a village”. Value of Ecosystem

**“WEALTH IN THE HANDS OF A WISE MAN IS LIKE WATER
IN THE CENTRE OF A TOWNSHIP. USEFUL TO ALL”.**

KR Upili quoting his favorite couplet from the Tamil Saint Thiruvalluvar and its translation into English

The sharing of the success of business, charitable or philanthropic activities can be categorized into the following categories.

- Extra support to employees beyond salary and statutory payment
- Support to fellow Industrialists in the same sector
- Various kinds of assistance to budding Entrepreneurs
- Assistance to NGOs and social service organizations
- Service to social groups that he belongs to

Coming to

1) “Extra support to employees beyond salary and statutory payment,” when the Editors read all the contributions, one word that can sum up his underpinning attitude is that of *Abhaya Hasta*. Sorry, there is no proper English word that captures the essence of this Sanskrit phrase. It also brings with it a confidence that comes from a feeling of “He is there... He will help us in ANY emergency or need.”

For example:

- 1) My kids have reached a milestone. Need admission to colleges. Ask Yajna Boss
- 2) Elderly person needs medical attention. Yajna is there to help.

The following narration sums up this sentiment:

” In the year 1997, when my father had a heart problem, Sri. KY Sir advised me to bring my father from our native Punaroor to Bangalore. With Sri. KY Sir's co-brother Dr. Vasanth's direction we admitted our father to St. John's Hospital, Bangalore under Dr. Pradeep Shetty. Dr. Shetty was a classmate of Dr. Vasanth and subsequently my father underwent bypass surgery with lots of objections from my close relatives, as at that time my father's age was around 72 years. At that point when I was seriously worried, Sri. KY Sir supported me all through, giving me hope, and more than that helping me by extending all financial support for the surgery / hospitalization to the extent of Rs. 1 lakh. The success of the surgery and recovery of my father would not have been possible at all at any cost, but for Sir's timely help. After Sir's help for the bypass surgery my father lived for another 19 years. Sri. KY Sir helped me like a God during those times, which I will always remember. Also, Sri. KY Sir gave me his vehicle with driver to take food from my residence in Hosur to Bangalore every day to the hospital which nobody would have done with such a broad mindedness except Sri. KY Sir.”

- 3) I have reached a milestone in my life and it's time to build a house. Yajna Sir is there to help.

There are many houses named 'Yajnashraya' which are the result of support extended to long timers in group companies.

- 4) Marriage in the family. Go with Invitation to “Boss” and you will not only comeback with confirmation of attendance, but a lot more!

A big portion of the marriage expense is taken care of.

- 5) Employee gets married. Need some help to settle down.

There are many instances of them getting an out of turn bonus.

Modern day financial planners may argue that some of these are best planned by financial products, especially insurance products. But the reality in the MSME sector is that, in addition to formal products for life planning, the responsibility falls on the Proprietor, Founder Director, Malik, the Boss, who is an elderly figure (avoiding use of the word fatherly to also acknowledge many lady entrepreneurs who have contributed to the MSME sector in similar style). It is this synergetic relationship that has been the predominant work culture in many units, much different from the western model of hire and fire, rewards and retribution regimes. The comfort factor that workers derive is immense and goes towards their productivity and commitment to the group. There are so many who have served in the group for decades. Often the salary levels may not be very high, but the overall benefit one derives by dedicated long term service in successful MSME sectors is significant and worthy of pursuing as an alternate model of company-employee relationship. The success story of the Sona Group makes this case stronger, or worthy of study at least.

But what about the few who get so inspired by YNK, and learn so much and get confidence to do something on their own? Here are notes on “Support to fellow Industrialists in the same sector”. Let us start off reading about some of the stories from Lakshmidhar which enabled Vasita Engineering and Vasita Industries driven by him: “With a guilty feeling I approached Sri. KY Sir, giving him the hint that there was an opportunity to do a job work -- of watch case machining for Titan -- and requested that I wanted to do it myself. With his permission, I did not want to lose such an opportunity. Without a single question Sri. KY Sir said go ahead.”

A few other stories: An ex-employee, Perumal, left Sona and established a company called Sleek Bands in 2006 for the manufacture of metal straps for Titan. Their after-sales service department has been extended all help by KY Sir without considering them as a competitor. This company has around 50 employees and supplies around 50K metal straps per month even today. As Sona didn't get an opportunity to supply leather straps to Titan until 2004/2005, when a friend of Sona's ex-employee Perumal approached him to get an entry, Sri. KY Sir requested the after-sales services department of Titan and got them an entry in 2000 itself -- i.e, almost four years before Sona began supplying to Titan. Normal human beings don't do this when their chances are bleak but our KY Sir's helping nature made it

possible for M/s Ambis Enterprises, Hosur, to make an entry without thinking of competition to the same leather straps product. Today they still speak of their gratefulness, stating that they could produce around 50K straps a month and employ around 40 workers because of Sri. KY Sir.”

So far, you have heard from fairly well educated, English speaking, well travelled, accomplished professionals. Let us now introduce you to Smt. Nilamma, from Chandapura Village near the factories at Attibele, Veerasandra and Hosur. Do recall earlier reading about the Corporate milestones, and the group's focus on involving women, semi skilled and unskilled workforce in its operations. Nilamma is a go-getter in her own right in her village. Any villager who needs a job to make ends meet, *Step 1* is to meet Nilamma. *Step 2*, they get absorbed in one of the factories (if the age limit eligibility is met). Talk about a modern management paradigm: Hire for the attitude, and train for the skills. This has been the process at play for long. Willingness to work hard is the main criterion. Training to do the job can be taken care of!



Also taken care of in most cases is breakfast and lunch, and dinner if overtime is scheduled. And accommodation. No kidding here. Right in the centre of the city, and adjacent to the factories, YNK has built quality buildings with multiple rooms to accommodate workers. And this includes separate hostels for male and female workers. This is also a good business strategy to save travel time for most. Others not housed by the factory provided accommodation have transport arranged to and fro. The head of the factory once recalled: “The main expense of our workers is mobile phone recharge to talk to their parents back home!”

There are hundreds of people employed through this approach, trained and given a viable livelihood option, including Nilamma's own daughter. Students can even note this as Entrepreneurship at the village level.

One more anecdote we would like to share. Nilamma was also involved in getting a temple constructed in her village and invited “Boss” and other managers for the inauguration event. Possibly some help was also extended to this cause.

Interestingly it included the donation of LED lights that illuminated the temple premises, from one of the units supported by YNK. He also encouraged leaders from his group to attend the inauguration, and many of them have fond memories of a feast with all the villagers, and also visiting the house constructed by Nilamma through her success as manpower sourcing contact for the Sona Group.

Temples hold a special place for YNK. He believes in places of worship, the environment they create, and the positive effect they have on us. He feels sad to hear or read about violence and bad behaviour of humans, inspite of opportunities to lead a life with a higher purpose.

The Covid pandemic hit the world towards the end of 2019. Its intensity became severe in 2020, and disturbed the lives of millions of people worldwide. It infected and killed millions. It had a deep impact on the finances of many families and companies, as production was halted by the lockdown which was necessitated to prevent further spread of infection.

During this period, all employees of the Sona Group were provided food and shelter for around 55 days and at the earliest opportunity, special bus arrangements were made to transport around 450 workers to their hometowns in far off states like

ಮಾನವೀಯತೆ ಮೆರೆದ ಸೋನಾ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆ
450 ವಲಸೆ ನೌಕರರಿಗೆ ತವರಿಗೆ ತೆರಳಲು ಬಸ್ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ



Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, etc., after seeking due permissions from the concerned authorities.

This act of social responsibility showing the humane face of the enterprise is appreciated and mentioned in many of the sharings submitted for this book. Press coverage of the events of 20th May 2020 documents very emotional scenes when workers were to

temporarily leave the factory, with promises to come back when possible. After the pandemic came under control, at the earliest possible opportunity, as many of the workers as possible were brought back to the factories in the spirit of bringing back a semblance of normalcy. Needless to mention, the return journey was also facilitated by the company, wherever possible.

With proper background provided at various stages, we reproduce below the contribution from his NIT-K batch mate, S.P Kudva: “Of course, knowledge is power, but knowledge needs to be shared for the benefit of society and posterity! Whenever I interact with Yajna, I get reminded of the couplet in the *Dasa Sahitya*: “*Kereya neeranu kerege chelliro*,” meaning to say that water drawn from the pond needs to be thrown back into the pond, which in other words has a hidden message that whatever we have drawn from society needs to be given back to society. Though I am so close to Yajna, frankly I have lost count of the awards that he has won for social service, philanthropy, upliftment of society and contribution to education and culture. “The gift of the hand is silver and gold, but the heart can give which neither silver nor gold can buy.” – I have seen this attribute in Yajna, especially during the recent pandemic when he came in support of the migrant labourers in his factory. Not only did he arrange for the safe passage of migrants to their destination, but also provided food and shelter for those who decided to stay back.”

Now we are coming to the last segment, the “*Various kinds of Assistance to budding Entrepreneurs*”. It is a lot, and worth a chapter by itself!

Food for Thought from this Chapter

- ★ What do you think is the main purpose of being in business on your own?
- ★ When you have spent decades of your life in business, what do you want to be remembered for?
- ★ What does winning in business life mean for you?
- ★ In any success, how much is your role? How much is due to the team? How much is thanks to the luck factor, or the universe-created circumstance that enabled your success?
- ★ How much effort did you put to earn money, fame, goodwill?
- ★ Do you earn the intangible silent thank you, and heartfelt wishes for your welfare?



CHAPTER 6

Non-Watch Business Experiences

Successful businessmen will constantly be analysing as to how to fully exploit the potential of the existing business and exploring opportunities into new areas. YNK's forays into other activities can be categorized as follows:

- 1) **Intrapreneur support:** Where the Businessman takes the risks but the unit is run by a strong domain expert. Unisoft with Swamy as the key driver is an example of this kind of activity.
- 2) **Economic opportunities provided by the Growing Economy:** Some activities in infrastructure development can be considered under this segment.
- 3) **Support to other entrepreneurs through minority shareholding:** The story of Ramprakash Holla and others demonstrate this kind of venture.
- 4) **Support as contribution to Nation Building:** Many generous acts of support with least expectation of returns-just to help others tide over problems and survive.
- 5) **FOMO, or the Fear of Missing Out:** These are opportunities which look attractive but risky. Experiments to try out and decision to continue or close are taken based on the initial experience. Forays into Solar Energy and LED lighting can be considered such examples.

Please get introduced to Unisoft (India). This is the venture that YNK supported. The area of business is Engineering Services. In a way, observers feel it was an

experiment to find out if Engineers freshly coming out of college could be trained to fit the Corporate mode and deployed profitably. After all, such an experiment worked in the making of straps. Swamy, a senior engineering professional with vast expertise and proven track record led the initiative. Through their efforts, hundreds and hundreds of engineers were recruited, trained and deployed. Ingersoll Rand was their major customer. The company was incorporated in 1990, barely a few years after leaving his PSU job.

But alas, the attrition rate in the Engineering Services industry is a factor that all technocrats face. YNK was not very happy with the attitude of engineers to get trained and quickly leave. Suspect hiring practices are legendary in this industry, where poaching senior engineers from the competition is quite common. Associates recall that it was his wife Vasanthi Kammaje who consoled YNK, asking him to see the big picture, and look at it as a contribution from Unisoft to the cause of building an Ecosystem. That indeed turns out to be the case, with many former Unisoft employees now turning out to be contributing members in the Engineering Services Industry.

Unisoft's own growth was getting constrained by the high attrition rate. Hence further investment levels were cut down. However, it was destined to comeback and we will get back to that later.

What is interesting to the narrative is, how was the business run? What were the experiences of the people? Let us read what Vidyadhar, who contributed a story of his long association with him has to say. His story, involving many personal stories are available in the link:

Contribution from T. Vidyadhar, Ex Colleague in HMT and Unisoft (Page 196).

Imagine this. The business achieved only moderate success. But people associated with it were left with the feeling, “I got a lot more from the Company.”

Here are recollections from Dr. Souptik Mukherjee, an alumnus of NIT-K who also worked as Business Development Manager in Unisoft. Later, you will realize that Yajna has connections in the social service organization, RSS. Dr. Souptik refers to some international causes dear to him in his contribution. This can be accessed at the link: *Contribution from Dr.Souptik Mukherjee (Page 199).*

Giri Karanth worked closely with Yajna, Swamy and Dr. Ravi Kammaje at Unisoft. He is a trained lawyer and knows how to put arguments and points across. Here is his sharing from his interactions in the link: *Contribution from Giri Karanth (Page 204)*.

For the next story, we want to introduce Ramprakash Holla. A brilliant Mechanical Engineer who has mastered the working of CNC machines and started the company Distinct Productivity Solutions, which makes products for the auto sector. Products are of great quality and a good part of the production is exported. But the company was starved for funds, and bank lending limits had been maxed out. The MSME sector is full of stories like this, especially in their early years until their track record is built. The nation is not giving enough attention to early-stage funding for the MSME sector. More attention is paid on funding of startups in the tech sector. YNK and others have come to the rescue of many, by providing a helpline to entrepreneurs in the MSME sector. Ramprakash and his team best represent the “*Jambavantha Effect*” that we explained before. The story of his chat with Yajna which triggered him to change from a job to becoming an Entrepreneur is documented here at the link: *Contribution from Ramprakash Holla (Page 201)*.

As is seen here, Yajna is not a passive investor. He takes an active part in meeting customers as needed. He participates in the SWOT analysis of business as an advisor, and uses connections to bring in expertise to fill in the gaps.

In order to formalize systems to fund innovation, and also to foray into the world of angel investing, YNK has joined Aruha Technology Fund administered by StartupXSeed. <https://startupxseed.in/>.

Budding entrepreneurs often approach Yajna to pitch their ideas and seek various forms of support. They always go back with some benefit or the other, such as good review comments and guidance, some relevant connections, or even angel funding in some cases. We will profile some of these as they hold many lessons and could be useful for cross-learning.

One of them was a team with a passion for environmentally friendly projects in the area of waste management, Solar Energy, Water and LED Lighting. One of the projects scoped dealt with the problem of used automobile tyres. Readers may have

seen pictures of old tyres stacked up in dumpyards which resemble multi storey buildings spread as far as the eyes can see. Recycling of the same can be done, but only a small percentage is disposed off responsibly. It is a worldwide problem, the impact of which will be seen in the future.

In poor countries, these are burnt as a source of energy and it is extremely polluting, as can be seen from the thick black smoke emanating from it. Inhaling these fumes is not healthy, and it is bad from that aspect too.

Yajna was introduced to the technology of Pyrolysis. This is the process of thermal decomposition of materials at elevated temperatures without oxygen, often in an inert atmosphere. It involves a change in the chemical composition. The word has its origin from the Greek words, pyro "fire" and lysis "separating". If tyres are burnt in a pyrolytic chamber in an inert environment and the resultant fumes/gases are condensed, furnace oil can be produced. Just a web search for "old tyre to furnace oil" will yield a lot of relevant searches. Billions of tyres are dumped every year, worldwide. In India alone, lakhs of tyres are disposed off, every day. Most of it is not properly processed.

A complete techno commercial analysis was undertaken for this project. As part of this project, a visit to China was also undertaken. Some units in operations were studied. The idea was novel, and would be a positive contribution to waste management. These plants would have stringent environmental restrictions. A team was entrusted to get all due approvals from the Pollution Control Board to operate with all safety guidelines. The industrial land owned by him on the outskirts of the city was also evaluated for feasibility, for the operation.

Depending on the volume of the chamber and the number of shifts of operation, the raw input needed for a profitable operation was calculated. The idea was to convert tyre into furnace oil and thus convert old tyres into more recycled by-products which could be re-used.

As was documented before, Yajna is not one to get carried away only by the positive side, but looks at all angles to make the project feasible. Further analysis of this project revealed that the lack of centralized procurement systems, extremely high transport costs and a vastly distributed collection effort would make this project unfeasible.

India does restrict the import of waste tyre. Green activists too make every effort to make it difficult to import them, again rightly so, as it will only further burden the system in India.

Raw material availability at affordable cost to achieve optimum capacity utilization was identified as a problem that would be faced, sooner or later. Thus, this project of tyre-to-oil conversion was not taken up. Instead, some other ideas of these entrepreneurs were supported.

The first-hand visit to China to understand the operation and technology was something that the entrepreneurs associated with the idea appreciated. By the way, the visit to China was not made just by him. It also included the concerned entrepreneur, whose travel was supported by him, even before his association with the SONA Group. The reason to document this incident is to show the effort that Yajna puts in evaluating projects, in some cases purely as an investment to learning, and in some cases as exploratory investment for a possible association.

Now, let us introduce Anup Pai, Ravi Haldipur (NIT-K, 1996 batch alumni) and Ravinder Mahori (NIT-K, 2011 batch alumnus). Later they went on for higher studies and projects at many international destinations like USA, Poland, Iran, etc. They have been into multiple entrepreneurial journeys and the latest venture is eSamudaay with the mission and vision to empower local commerce with a technological solution. Their focus is on Rural or Tier 2 entrepreneurship. The following snippets are taken from their website, and quoted here: ***“eSamudaay is a Platform for entrepreneurs to start and operate a business towards measurable goals. Entrepreneurship with training wheels to begin with. And the whole world of opportunities awaits, once the training wheels come off.”***

Wherever NIT-K Alumni, entrepreneurship, empowerment topics are discussed, the connection with Yajna is not far off. They get connected, either to exchange ideas, and possible association. Whether it is for angel funding or connections, or just a review, or in the nature of support, is besides the point here.

What is exciting is the idea we are pursuing. They want to use this book to kindle entrepreneurship. This book serves multiple purposes: To document a journey, to share strategies that have worked for the group which can be of use to others, to

recall fond associations with the college and further enhance alumni interactions, document a few recommendations to be adopted by budding entrepreneurs. Most of all, our aim is to be a trigger to create more Yajnas in the future decades.

How about distributing thousands of copies of this book as a coaching tool to budding entrepreneurs? It is universally recognized that there is good interest in this direction among Indians. Just a little more orientation and coaching will sharpen the saw and enhance the chances of success. We as editors are glad to get connected with the eSamudaay team.

The book can be given as reading material before a pitch session to angel investors or venture capital groups. Those with potential can be taken up for further support. These are some of the ideas that Anup, Ravi, Ravinder and his colleagues in eSamudaay will explore. It is easily conceivable that Yajna can conduct many motivational sessions. They can also use the power of social media for faster dissemination of messages of entrepreneurship and professional excellence. Let us wish them well.

On to the next story. How do you conclude an endeavour as not successful? There are multiple facets to this question. One viewpoint is not getting the expected results within the time frame. The other is, not meeting the quantitative criteria as expected. Another could be delay in getting results. Or it could be an initiative which caused a loss. An activity which did not cause monetary loss or add profit, but took a lot of time away from other possible productive undertakings.

Whatever be the measure for declaring something as a failure, there is a joke that goes that when one does not get success by their criteria, they get “experience”. They become lessons to be remembered. We profile some of them as they teach us many things.

Yajna met a few entrepreneurs who were passionate about distributed energy generation through roof top solar installations. Solar energy is very exciting as a renewable, abundant, and environmentally clean energy. There are two ways this idea is getting played out. One is through huge solar energy farms where panels are installed over acres and acres of land. The energy so generated is pumped into the grid. This incurs transmission and distribution losses. Given the long distances

between the generation units and consumption centres, this is not an ideal engineering solution.

More exciting is roof top solar. Many urban households are dotted with solar water heaters. To a large extent, subsidies from concerned government departments have made these devices popular. They capture the heat and provide hot water on already hot and sunny days! There is a significant percentage of population which believes in a cold water bath. It is thus debatable whether roof top solar water heaters are really a necessity.

However, there are enough arguments for roof top electricity generation and local consumption. There are good schemes also to export to the grid and earn some money and recover the investment made by the consumer. Here, the transmission losses will be the least. Germany is one country which has taken up this route, also as an environmentally conscious step.

Yajna got convinced and supported the venture. The concerned teams mastered the execution of the projects. One such installation was installed at one of the factories of SONA Group of companies. Yajna is a 'hands on' person in many aspects. He wanted a first-hand feel of the solution sponsored by him. One installation was at a nursing home in Mandya in Karnataka state. This was the first such installation, and was designed for the comfort of patients and to overcome problems due to electricity cuts. There was not much profit, as the main components such as solar panels, invertors, battery are bought out items. Local value addition is in engineering and project execution. A few such projects were executed, almost on a no profit, no loss basis.

Solar roof top photovoltaics-based electricity generation and consequent benefits are somehow not seen as a basic requirement in house planning. Consumers subject commercial proposals to very strict return-on-investment criteria. It takes many years for consumers to save enough money on their electricity bills to recover the money spent on their roof top installations. Consumers are not willing to pay a premium for altruistic causes like clean energy, less pollution, etc.

That led the team to quickly realize a lesson that the world is learning. Any system will become cheap if all its constituents are cheap. In this case, except sunlight,

nothing else was cheap. So this business venture could not be scaled up, and the entrepreneurs were advised to pivot and move on to other businesses.

The lesson learnt in this venture was that if the input raw material cost is itself @ 80% of the overall selling price, the scope for efficient operation profitability is very less, unless it is done on a massive scale.

In many companies, there are formal designations starting with entry level positions to Managers, Directors, Vice Presidents, CEO, Managing Director, Vice Chairman, Chairman, etc. Whereas in the MSME sector, often driven by an entrepreneur, formal designations are meant only for business purposes. The drivers of the initiatives are treated more like the head of the family. They are often referred to by various names. 'Malik' is one that is popular in North India. In the Sona Group, the name BOSS has stuck, while referring to Yajna. His peers have called him variously -- KY, YNK, Yajna are popular. But many also refer to him as ***Boss.***

And who is Boss's Boss? Of course, there are other share holders and business co-owners with whom he works. But he has high respect for the opinion of those senior in age, and those with more experience. He is keen to learn from anyone, irrespective of age.

Shown here is his first cousin Smt. Sharadha Karanth whom he jokingly refers to as 'my BOSS'! What has she done to earn this title? The present day Yajna is a person endowed with lots of resources. But in the 1980's he was the one who borrowed lots of money (but fortunately spent that responsibly) and made lots of progress. She loaned him Rs. 5000/- towards marriage expense when Yajna married Vasanthi Somayaji. Yajna recalls, ***“My Sharadakka who happened to be the 1st SSLC passed lady in the family took up a job at KEB (Karnataka Electricity Board) around 1965. She took care of the entire family. I have great respect for her.”***

The reason to write this personal anecdote is to highlight the importance of being grateful. The attitude of gratitude is something budding entrepreneurs should incorporate. Everyone has a lot to be grateful to others, whether one realizes it or not. If we incorporate this attitude, we become better human beings.



Yajna acknowledging the help provided by Sharadakka, at one of the functions.

Yajna has formed a panel of experts from different fields to listen to pitches from budding entrepreneurs. They may be at the pre-launch stage, or for scaling up. Here is a page on how this team goes about assessing the ideas. This can be summed up as multiple P's.

1) Person: The background of the individuals behind the initiative. Their accomplishment in prior assignments can be just one of the inputs. This could be on the academic front or in previous jobs. The main aspect to look for is coachability, or how good they are in the learning aspect.

2) Passion: Studies of successful people have brought various “quotients” into the lexicon. Starting with Intelligence Quotient(IQ). When more and more intelligent people failed to excel in handling people, including themselves and the situations, Emotional Quotient (EQ) became the popular buzzword. When their behaviour and interaction with extended stake holders became paramount, Social Quotient (SQ) became an important measure. In fact, we are aware of research and a case study with the A-Z of Quotients! But beyond all these, the firm belief of Yajna and his review team is that it is the Present Passion of the budding entrepreneur that will determine the chances of the success. Passion behind the idea should be visible.

3) Product: What is the essence of business? Answer: Create a product that people are willing to pay money for and buy. This is the wrong definition. We can

demonstrate this with the example of the cigarette, with no offense to smokers. To a large section of the population, the cigarette is a product that only harms health and the world is better off without this product. There are many such examples, if we agree this to be the essence of business. On the other hand, the essence of business should be to solve the problems of humanity. A product or service should attend to a problem and should help in the overall improvement of life. That is how Yajna and others view, if the proposed idea has any merit. The world also has recognized this principle, with the number one reason for failure of startups being 'No product-market fit'.

4) Profit: It is profit in business that enables the creation of more employment and growth to serve more. For centuries after commerce got organized, the pursuit of profit has been the sole purpose of business. In recent decades, driven by the new age economy, there are other parameters. Scale, Market share, Valuation have entered the lexicon. Lots of financial resources have chased ideas driven by these considerations. For Yajna, it is shocking that some entrepreneurs expect valuation of Rs.10 crore for just an idea and some Power Point slides and a very basic progress on the business front. What a contrast, compared to the earlier times. While Yajna may evaluate ideas of this type, Yajna and team markedly prefer to support ideas with a solid plan for profit, even if it is small and expected to grow only in the future.

5) Potential: This is a measure of TAM (Total Available Market). Yajna ventured in the field of Horology which is a smaller segment of the economy compared to other segments. But all principles of business are the same. It was big enough to expect significant prosperity and spread it. The economy has grown. The sizes of various markets have grown. Now the potential for growth is more. The team will be eager to evaluate on how entrepreneurs plan to exploit the available market.

6) Promise: Expectation of Returns on Investment. Hence, also called the Exit plan. For many Angel Investors and Venture Capitalist groups, this is in fact the primary consideration. At what multiples can the next round of investment be brought in? For what time frames should funds be parked? This is indeed important. But frankly, this is not the major consideration that drives Yajna while supporting ventures. He can be considered as a long-term investor or supporter. Of course, returns are important. But we found this to be a back-of-the-mind issue, not the primary, first or over riding topic that engages in discussions.

We hope this serves as a good guide for those in the market wanting to raise funds for their business ideas.

Food for Thought from this Chapter

(Especially for successful professionals and senior business persons)

- ★ Are you at the right point of exploitation of your core business v/s exploration of adjacent businesses?
- ★ What adjacent opportunities do you notice that you plan for expansion? Are you worried about FOMO? Fear of Missing Out?
- ★ Which hot sectors or growth opportunities did you miss in the past? They do not matter now. What lessons have you learnt from them?
- ★ Do you interact with youth and others to get the “pulse” of various groups?
- ★ Have you challenged yourself and others to grow and achieve what was initially thought not possible?



CHAPTER 7

Joining hands with Associates & Social Service Organizations

Coming to the topic of assistance to NGOs and social service organizations, there are many that Yajna has extended project based or continuous support.

YNK's wife Vasanthi Kammaje is daughter of Arakala Krishna Somayaji. He was an active leader in the pan India social service organization, the Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Sangh, popularly known as RSS. (<https://www.rss.org/>) Sevak means one who serves. It is known for youth empowerment through Shakhas, i.e., centres for assembling every day to ideate and address various aspects of character building. There are many sister organizations under this umbrella and it is an institution that the country is proud of. Their response during times of natural emergencies is exemplary. Needless to say, that culture has rubbed off on both Vasanthi and YNK.

YNK cherishes great friendships with lots of leaders of the RSS. One of them is Dr. Kalladka Prabhakara Bhat, a respected personality who has dedicated his life to social service. The school run by Sri Rama Vidya Kendra Trust in Kalladka caters to the education of the most deprived segments of society. Yajna can correlate to this cause as someone whose own education happened through staying in the house of teachers and other families, away from home. YNK is one of the well wishers of this school, and has extended and marshalled others to extend support for causes like this.

Though he is not active in its day to day activities, YNK considers himself a contributor in other ways. Many of the projects of the RSS, especially in the area of education are dear to YNK.

Along similar lines, Smt. Vasanthi Kammaje has been associated with the Vishwa



L-R: Smt.Vasanthi, Yajna, Harshendra Kumar Heggade (brother of Veerendra Heggade of Dharmasthala), Dr. Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat

With fellow devotees in a prayer event



Hindu Parishad (VHP), a social organization that has contributed to spread *dharma* and is involved in thousands and thousands of social service projects all over the world.

It is always sensitive to talk about matters touching on caste. But we are convinced that we can make an effective point. English is very ineffective in many aspects of intellectual pursuits, especially when translation is involved. Just imagine if the Indian word *Jaati* is translated into the English word 'species' (instead of caste). We all belong to one human species (*Manava Jaati*). We all are ONE. That is also the true essence of the Indian ethos and culture. That is what has guided YNK and his family.



Vasanthi Kammaje sharing stage with Ashok Singhal who served in the VHP for many decades.

The rest of the groupings, caste *per se*, can be treated as a matter of sociological convenience in administration and human potential development planning.

The following are some theological schools of thought that have their origins in India:

- 1) ***Adwaitha***. The school of thought that espouses that there is nothing but divinity and ALL, meaning all in all aspects are nothing but a reflection of “THAT” which pervades the universe. The most prominent spiritual leader espousing this school of thought was Shankaracharya. We urge people to conduct their own studies in the native language. But to link to existing nomenclature, this is referred to in scholarly literature as 'Non Dualism'.
- 2) ***Dwaitha***. The thought which is often referred to as 'Dualism', which appeals to humans (a creation of divinity) to pursue true Divinity (the creator). The leading spiritual guide for this school of thought was Madhwacharya. This school of thought has a rich *sampradaya* that it has contributed to.
- 3) ***Visishta Advaita***. With its main spiritual guide being Ramanujacharya, this is the other school of thought. *Visishta* means special, one with unique characteristics. In a way, this celebrates unity in diversity of shapes, thoughts and practices around divine facets.

There are many variations of such schools of thought, with Buddhism (appeal to pursue inner peace and realization), Sikhism (pursue spiritual growth through the Guru's teachings), etc.

The purpose of these lines is not to deviate to a discourse but to introduce a wonderful social grouping called Koota Maha Jagathu or Kota Brahmins or Koota Brahmins to which YNK belongs. Its followers have adopted Guru Narasimha as their “Guru & Deity”. Interested readers can learn a lot from the website <http://kootabandhu.org/>

Village Saligrama near the town of Kundapur serves as the centre of this movement. They generally carry surnames like Herle, Upadyay, Karanth, Aithal, Adiga,

Maiya, Udupa, Navada and are among those who have contributed immensely to society through their contribution to the field of Literature, Science, Technology and Industry.

All three main theological thought lines, *Adwaitha*, *Dwaitha* and *Visishta Advaitha* mentioned above have flourished independently, but in a broad sense are branches of the same root. Unity among all these is also a source of strength. In that effort, a combined conference was organized, by name Vishwa Koota Sammelana. This had an attendance of over 7000 intellectuals, industrialists, academicians, administrators, and people from all walks of life. That effort is something that Yajna is proud of. He moderated a discussion with leading industrialists and businessmen with probably the largest panel on a single stage. He is glad to see similar efforts continuing over the years. Slowly but surely, it is hoped that these efforts will yield solid results.

We come back to the main narrative by sharing a contribution from P. Venkat Rao, ex-president of Koota Maha Jagathu who shares more details of the same. He originally submitted his writings in Kannada, the local language of Karnataka state. This has been translated as faithfully as possible. The translated version can be accessed at the link: *Contribution from P. Venkat Rao (Page 193)*.

We could have prepared a list of all social service projects associated with Yajna. That is not needed for the main thesis of this book. Here are snippets from the letter from P. Venkat Rao.

1. “When we started Narasimha Prathisthana through our Angasamsthe, he started giving scholarships to more than 200 students per year, spending money from his company.
2. He supported our Sri Guru Yogananda Trust through many ways.
3. When we started to build Sri Yoganarasimha Prarthana Mandir building for our Uttarahalli Angasamsthe at Govindarajanagara, Bangalore, he donated a huge sum and only because of his support could we finish the project in time.

4. When we thought of hosting the second Vishwa Koota Sammelana at Bangalore, it was he who stood with us and encouraged us to go ahead with our plans and ideas. When the estimation of the programme rose to Rs. 70-80 lakhs, he just said, "You go ahead and plan the programme. Think how best we can organise it. My friends circle is large and I can bring the funds. If I fail I will give my own. I am there with you. Don't worry." These encouraging words from him brought great success to the programme. Being the Chief Secretary of the programme he used his contacts and experience and we could invite some great personalities as chief guests and in total could make the programme a grand success. On many occasions, when we found some glitches in organising the programme, we used to turn to his industrial and organizational acumen and would get the direction and guidance to solve tricky situations.

5. We saw his commitment to Lord Narasimha and to the community again when he became the Trustee of the Managing Committee of Sri Saligrama Gurunarasimha Temple. He brought in a new look to the temple and made everything very systematic. He tried his best to make the temple a 'Shree Kshetra' so that a large number of devotees would visit the temple. Having witnessed the development of the temple, many are motivated to contribute and be a part of the ongoing and future developmental works of the temple."

Gurunarasimha Temple Activities



The original version of the same is reproduced at the link :*Writeup in Kannada by P Venkat Rao. Koota Maha Jagath President. Leader of the Kota community (Page 233).*

The Rotary International (www.rotary.org) is a worldwide organization with Clubs spread all over the free world. They are organized as Zones, Districts and Clubs. Rotarians focus on doing socially relevant projects in areas of Education, Health, Environment, Youth Empowerment, International peace. Rotarians contribute their Time, Talent and Treasure in the service of humanity. Their biggest contribution is that of eliminating polio in most parts of world. India has been free of polio since 2014. This is a multi-stake holder project with the ministries of Health, local level administrations, WHO and NGOs contributing to the cause, primarily through fund raising, awareness and helping on the National Immunization Day, where the famous two drops to save are given in thousands of booths to children below the age of five, giving them a new lease of life.

YNK was part of the Rotary Club of South East (RBSE), which is part of Rotary District 3190. He led its team of social volunteers as President.

YNK has fond memories of projects in literacy and helping the physically challenged. One of them was a project planned and executed at a local club level. It called for the distribution of wheelchairs to the needy segment. He was one of them who liberally contributed to worthy causes.

He was a Rotarian for ten years. The time commitment needed to continue the high level of service could not be made, so he discontinued. This has been a problem for Rotary worldwide with around 1.2 million active members for a long time. Lots of new members join, but many become inactive year on year, and become 'Friends of Rotary', but not active members. Thus, YNK too remains a well-wisher for the organization and has helped Rotarians in professions and other projects.

Here are recollections of Past District Governor Rtn. UB Bhat:

”Hats off to dear Yajna for his indomitable courage and self belief, which propelled him to a higher level of achievement..... We are very happy and proud.

As desired by dear Yajna, I am adding my memoirs of Working Together in RID



3190 (6 Revenue Districts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) during 2008/09, as we tried our best to Make Dreams Real for 10,000 children studying in 230+ government schools, through Rotary's Free Notebooks Scheme, with Yajna heading the Balavidya Committee as the District Chairman. The entire Team cherished the humility and unassuming simplicity and commitment of Chairman Yajna for the Cause and we did deliver the Best Results, as planned, though it was an economic year of disaster due to stock market dynamics!!!

Summing up, I can only conclude that opportunities for Working Together in Service Projects to Make Dreams Real for Others come very rarely with simple Samaritans like Yajna, and We are ever Grateful to the Lord for His Choicest Blessings!!!! May the Lord continue Yajna's Journey of Service.”

U B Bhat Dist Governor RID 3190, 2008/09 Bangalore.

(Editor's Note: Extremely sorry to record that Rtn. U.B Bhat passed away on April 18th 2021. He made time to prepare this letter while attending to many medical related issues and submitting it a few weeks before his passing. We really appreciate it. We pray for his soul to attain Sadgathi, eternal peace.)

We want to highlight one facet about social service. There are some projects which need lots of funds to bring the project to reality. For e.g., building a hospital or an old age home.

There are other projects needing similar overall level of funding, but will impact many more beneficiaries through operational support. An example can be paying the fees of hundreds of children to study, or supporting families to survive. The impact is direct and visible. Yajna's preference is for this mode, though he has supported both types of projects. His preferred mode is through anonymous donations to institutions, which in turn deploy them to help a large number of end beneficiaries --e.g., use Rs. 5 crores to benefit 5000 or 50,000 beneficiaries, as operational support is better than for one item of capital expenditure.

Why do donors and philanthropists do acts of charity? There are many who want to do good in society. Often it is to earn good Karma. Sometimes it is for publicity for the self or institution, especially if it is part of the CSR programmes of companies.

Here is an example of the great joy that Yajna experienced. He had been donating to a scholarship programme of a school. At one of the functions, the institution made it known that so and so had been sponsoring the education of many girl children for years. Later, one mother came running to thank Yajna. She shared how these funds had been benefiting her daughter. But she never knew who the donor was. She used the occasion to thank him profusely. The gratefulness and sincerity in this mother's words greatly touched Yajna. There are some moments which are immortalized as priceless. In our interviews, he shared this as one such example of the “Joy of Giving.”

As was mentioned earlier, the MSME sector is the biggest employment generator and has taken industrialization to the nooks and corners of the country, and is a significant contributor to exports. As part of ancillary industries, it has enabled important sectors of Industrialization to happen in India. As a trade body and think tank, the Laghu Udyog Bharati (LUB) is a proud national service organization in this sector. Tracing its history, the website mentions, “Laghu Udyog Bharati is a not-for-profit pan India organization with the aim of empowering Micro and Small enterprises in the country, since its formation in 1994. Today, it has the distinction of being one of the largest industry networks with branches everywhere.”

It has a lofty vision and mission, as boldly stated on the website:

- Encourage Entrepreneurship
- Empower Micro & Small Enterprises achieve global competence and competitiveness in Manufacturing
- Encourage effective utilization of Natural and Local resources.
- Clusters Development
- Capacity building of Human Resources through Skill Development
- Aims at providing required facilities for the growth and development of Micro and Small entrepreneurs by providing a platform to exchange new ideas, best practices and collectively tackle problems facing both industry as a whole and entrepreneurs in particular

Yajna is a firm believer in networking and subscribes to the view that his/her network is as important as network for a budding Entrepreneur. He is an active member of the Karnataka branch of LUB. SONA group employees, supervisors, managers are beneficiaries of various educational seminars that are conducted by them. India has made its mark in the IT and ITES sectors worldwide. But a similar level of excellence and size of impact in Manufacturing is a chapter that is waiting to be written. More and more effort is needed in this space which will be touched upon in the last chapter titled: India can excel in Manufacturing, Make in India and Atma Nirbhar Movements.

Yajna served as Vice President and his contribution was to encourage the First m=>Micro to migrate to preferably LARGE or at least bigger M => Medium. He believes in the ability of many of the members. Some members and similarly talented people can handle projects worth thousands of crores under the umbrella of a bigger company. They are capable of building companies of bigger scale on their own. It is only when you aim higher that you are able to see opportunities and take decisions to capitalize on these. High risk and high reward investment in multiple ion coating machines best demonstrate this strategy of being ready for growth.

During his term as an office bearer of this premier body, he drove the Indian Manufacturing Show, the details and the benefits of which are fondly shared in this contribution from Team LUB.

Yajna Narayana Kammaje: A Leader Extraordinaire

“He is a Visionary. A Leader Extraordinaire. A Mentor Par Excellence, a Generous Philanthropist, an Active Educationist and above all a Man with a Golden Heart...

Many young and now veteran entrepreneurs owe their success to him. Just a small interaction was sufficient for him to understand what the young man/woman had in mind, and he would provide them with practical ideas to start the venture blindfolded. In the years to come, the venture would have blossomed into a full-fledged enterprise. Thanks to his deep understanding of the human psyche, he would zero-in exactly into the future success of the young aspiring entrepreneur.

Ideation, Innovation and Precision Execution is the embedded **MANTRA** that he has not only been practising himself all through his years of service to the society, but also preaching them to innumerable entrepreneurs.



The man whom we are referring to is none other than **Shri. Yajna Narayana Kammaje**, popularly known among his peer group as “**YNK: A Man of Steel**”.

Shri. Kammaje started his entrepreneurial journey way back in 1987 by establishing the Sona Group of Industries.

Shri Kammaje established the privately held Sona Group by setting up Sona Plating at the very start of his entrepreneurial journey. Driven by his infectious zeal to succeed, over the past two decades, Sona Group has truly diversified and grown consistently as a leading contract manufacturer of watches and watch components for leading national and internationally renowned brands like Titan, Fossil, Citizen, Timex, Maxima to name a few. Apart from being associated with over 300 national brands as a provider of brand promotional watches, today the Sona Group has expanded its presence in the Real Estate sector as well.

Born two years after India gained Independence, Shri. Kammaje holds a postgraduate degree in Electrical Engineering from NIT Surathkal. Starting his career as a Trainee Engineer with DICCC (Department of Industries & Commerce) he soon rose to the position of Assistant Director. After serving the HMT Watch Division for close to two decades, he voluntarily resigned as Deputy General Manager, to pursue his dream as an entrepreneur. This led to the founding of the Sona Group.

Shri. Kammaje has chaired many trade and business bodies and Government Advisory, Consultative and Task Force entities in the State in his three decades of social service.

The most prominent being the role he played in establishing and modelling **Laghu Udyog Bharati-Karnataka Chapter (LUB-K)**. As Founder Member of **LUB-K**, he has relentlessly spent hours of personal time in the last two decades hand-holding and guiding the organisation, which today stands tall and is recognised as the Apex body for the MSME sector.

Shri Kammaje has been the architect of **India Manufacturing Show (IMS)**. Under his stewardship, **LUB-K** started the **India Manufacturing Show (IMS)**, the flagship bi-annual manufacturing business Conference and Exhibition show in Karnataka which is akin to International Manufacturing Technology Show (IMTS) hosted by the USA, where the latest trends in manufacturing processes and technological advances get showcased on a single platform.

Besides all these humanitarian traits and entrepreneurial prowess that indeed glorify and underline his technocratic side, he has a soft corner for rural development. The support he has provided to his village in Dakshina Kannada in terms of the social upliftment of several downtrodden by way of education, schools, scholarships, financial assistance, renovation of temples, etc., amply showcases that he is a man who cares and is concerned about human values.

He is an Awardee of more than two dozen coveted recognitions at National, State and Corporate level institutions. Even though people around YNK are proud of the many achievements of their leader, pride has never touched him. In fact, he stays miles away from that. A very humble person, today he perhaps does not have the time to look back and is busy engaged in focusing on the wellbeing of the society, his employees, his customers, his Alma Mater, Alumni and of course his own family. Indeed, he is a *Man of Steel...*

LUB-K family is very proud to say that he is our Founder and Mentor and never fails to stand like a rock behind the organisation. We wish the very best in all his future endeavours.

From Team Laghu Udyog Bharati-Karnataka (LUB)



HVS Krishna & team hosted Ram Madhav on a visit to LUB

The instances of Yajna providing project specific support are many and are too numerous to mention and document. Given the overall focus of the book to focus on the “Social impact through the Entrepreneur”, listing all the beneficiaries is not even the main focus of the Editors. As a sample, is the sharing by Prof. (Dr.) K.B. Linge Gowda, Former Director, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology. The doctor's note can be accessed at the link: *Contribution from Prof. (Dr.) K B Linge Gowda (Page 207)*.

All these achievements are not possible without a harmonious, cordial working relationship with members in the Ecosystem like bankers, suppliers, contractors, service providers, agents, representatives, government authorities and of course workers and customers. Some of these are reproduced in the chapters discussing business aspects.

Yajna is very active in networking in industries and institutions beyond his core sector. Here are recollections of MG Chandrashekar who served the Government of India as Scientific Secretary. Please see the link: *Contribution from MG Chandrashekar (Page 210)*.



Yajna with NR Shetty (2nd from left), Ex MLA Vijaya Kumar (3rd from left) and others at a social service organization event.

“As an industrialist, he is part of many trade bodies and is very active in visiting many foreign countries as part of trade delegations, for attending conferences and customer visits.”



Top Left: Trade Delegation to Dubai

Top Right: SK Guru Prakash, Singapore Minister Vivian Balakrishnan & Yajna

Bottom Left: As part of the Trade delegation to Isreal.

Bottom Right: Robert Hirsch, a fellow manufacturer in the Watch industry and his sons

Memories from international trade fairs & interactions with leaders in the society



Recall the earlier Food for Thought, where we highlighted that one's network of contacts is as important as net worth in some respects. In a survey of successful people and their habits, one habit that was found to be common was eagerness to meet people and learn from them even if there was no immediate business transaction at hand. We observed this in our interactions with Yajna. He is eager to meet people from all walks of life and universally, these are very pleasant interactions.





With Shri. B. S. Yediyurappa at various occasions



It should be "Team INDIA" when it comes to working together and serving the Nation



With Shri. Santosh Kumar Gangwar



With Shri. Anant Kumar Hegde



With Shri. K.H. Muniyappa



With Shri. Anna Hazare



Inauguration of Samaya Bharati. With Governor of Karnataka Sri. Vajubhai Vala and Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka Sri. Ashwathnarayan. Senior journalists Mihir & Hemal Kharod also on stage on the occasion



Receiving SME100 award from Sri. Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Industries, Government of India



With reputed Scientist, Ex Director of IISc, Bharat Ratna Prof. CNR Rao

Food for Thought from this Chapter

- ★ You CAN help others. All it needs is attitude. What causes are you passionate about that you will support?
- ★ Money is just one vehicle to help others. There are many ways. What other resources do you have that you can contribute to be of service? Time, Talent, Sharing, Caring, Moral Support?
- ★ Being part of a bigger organization is an easier way to channel your wish to serve. What organization or service community suits you?
- ★ When you do help others, what do you expect in return? Admiration? Gratefulness? Just a happy feeling?



CHAPTER 8

Everyone can grow. Let it not be by chance. Plan for it

We come to the most important and crucial chapter of this book. The focus of this chapter is to appeal to readers in general, especially young readers. The aim is to empower, enrich their thinking, appeal to aim big and get the seed planted: “If Yajna can do It, maybe even I can do it. If he, from the point where he had to struggle to get money to transport the dead body of his mother, could come up to the level of heading multi- crore business groups, may be I can also overcome my real or perceived challenges.”

And an appeal to put effort to convert that seed of possibility into a reality over a few years, or may be over a few decades of effort.

At the time of writing this in 2021, notice the changes in the ground reality of India:

1) India's growth story: India is now in the 5th place in the world ranking of nations by GDP. It is no longer considered a poor nation at a broad level. Ever since Independence, efforts have been ongoing to reverse the poverty perpetuated by many centuries of exploitation. Hundreds of millions are supported through targeted policies and efforts, and poverty levels are reducing year by year. The percentage of population at sustenance levels is now negligible.

2) India is a land of opportunity: Growth is seen in just about all sectors and the complaint is no more about growth, but the rate of growth. That translates to business opportunities for any existing business and for newcomers.

3) Easier access to capital: As was discussed in the earlier chapters, a loan of a mere Rs. 2 Lakh was difficult to obtain at the start of the enterprise. Also, it needed the pledging of his mother-in-law's gold. Later on, Indian Bank became the

instrument of enabling the early chapters of the Sona Group. The reality now is way different. The banking industry has grown by leaps and bounds. There are various avenues to raise money for budding entrepreneurs.

4) Cultural change to risk taking: There used to be a time when any job related to the government or government sector was the most sought-after goal to pursue. Over a few decades, that was replaced by the pursuit of jobs in high growth sectors like IT & ITES. Now the trend is for startups, creating new enterprises, experiments in the marketplace. There is higher risk-taking ability, to an extent facilitated by parental support. Gone are those days when risk aversion drove most of the decisions. It is now a growth mindset that drives most activities.

5) Cultural Change towards Failures: Nobody wishes for failures. We appeal to the readers to pursue any goal with 110% effort. But the reality is that some of the efforts may need more time which may not be available. Some ideas may need more resources, which may not be possible. Others may get derailed by situations beyond their control. There was a time when there was no understanding of failures, there was no appetite to accept failures, and unnecessary stigma was attached to it. Gone are those days. Of course, wilful default or lapses by carelessness are never looked at kindly. But failure in spite of the best effort is taken in stride and encouragement provided to try out new ideas or to pivot and make changes to give the next best shot at success.

6) Mood of the Nation: There used to be a time when businesses were looked at suspiciously. They were targets of negative lines of thinking. Gone are those days. Now an honest businessman is a hero, a role model. Economic growth is seen as the only panacea for achieving many a nation building objective.

So, what are you waiting for? What is holding you back? If you so decide to pursue the path of growth and own up to make progress, the following advice culled from many talks with Yajna will come in handy:

Recipe for Success # 1. Integrity

The number one quality needed for success is Integrity. The excitement we created in the previous pages should not give the impression that there is a world of

opportunity out there and all one needs to do is to jump in and success will follow. Stories of successful entrepreneurs is one of struggle, full of uncertainties and expectation of great results only after the challenges are overcome.

Any aspiring professional or entrepreneur must overcome the temptation to take short cuts to success. There is also a culture that may tempt an individual to do wrong things just to achieve some benefits in the short run. There could be any number of justifications to deviate from the path of honesty and upright behaviour. Maturity is to understand that these will not help in the long run. They may help in short term growth but will not lead to long term development. In the world of business, there are many financial dealings involving multiple stake holders. How you deal with them determines your character. Your morals, guiding principles will decide the kind of foundation on which your professional or business life is built. The stronger they are, the more enduring the structure that will be built.

There is an adage *Atha Raja, Thatha Praja*. It translates to “Like king, like citizens.” This must have been constructed in making a case in statecraft for the King to be upright. Only with an upright king can you expect citizens to inculcate good values. This applies to anyone in a leadership position. The culture set at the top of the institution/company is what gets percolated down to everyone.

We have titled this book ***Business as 'Yajna'***. 'Yajna' in Sanskrit is "to worship, adore, honour, revere" and appears in early Vedic literature. A business journey should be a form of spiritual practice to achieve higher goals. Honest effort to succeed in business, enjoying its fruits and generous sharing of the same can be a form of Yoga – the Raja Yoga form described in the divine *Bhagavad Gita*.

Successful business-people are profiled for their comfortable life and glory achieved on many fronts. What is often missed out is the struggle and sacrifices that one needs to make to achieve these great results. It is often said that the result of success is public, but the effort behind it is private.

In Kannada literature, there is a celebrated poem series called *Manku Thimmana Kaggga*. It is even given an exalted position by being called the '*Kannada Bhagavad Gita*'. In one of the poems, the great poet and author DV Gundappa mentions, “*Jeevana Draksha Rasa Valla*.” To capture the essence of life is not as easy as

chewing a grape. The sweetness of life cannot be obtained without effort. Later lines go on to explain that the life journey is more like extracting sweetness from sugarcane, which needs lots of effort to pluck the sugarcane, to crushing it with your teeth. (Forget the ready made sugarcane juice shop for a minute.) Business life is also similar. One should prepare to struggle if called for, to achieve long term success.

What we learnt from our interactions with YNK that we can pass on to budding entrepreneurs as the *First Principle*:

Prepare for that Form of Life, and develop Integrity as the Core Principle to Guide You.

Recipe for Success #2. Empathy and Care

All businesses are people's business at the end of the day. One must master the art of dealing with people. We do not feel good writing this line. 'Deal' with people? This nomenclature itself is a sad commentary on how the smartest of all creations have become too complex for their own good. They are born with infinite possibilities. But along the way, a lot of good and some bad gets accumulated in a person's subconscious. The success of business to a large extent finally boils down to the art of bringing the best out of people.

Management theories speak about multiple M's to make business successful: Materials, Money and Machines, Men, etc. While all are important, it is undoubtedly the human capital that is the most important. One sentence we keep coming across in the many writings about him is Yajna's attempt to bring out extraordinary results from so called ordinary people. The way to achieve this is to be compassionate, care for people and show it by your talk and actions, filled with empathy.

There is a statement in social science on how to assess people. It goes thus, "Study how they coped when they had nothing, and how they behaved when they had everything." Yajna's life can probably give data points for both phases.

Yajna is a firm believer in the value of the Ecosystem and each company is just one of the contributors to create the environment for success. Bankers, suppliers, contractors, service providers, distributors, agents, representatives, workers, and customers are important pillars on which the business is built. Each of them is in a different power equation when it comes to a commercial relationship.

When one is in a position of power in a relationship and consciously decides NOT to exploit, it is Empathy in action. When one makes payment promptly, in spite of any level of personal struggle, it is Empathy in action. We can give many examples. But what impressed us most in interviews is a sense of personal responsibility that Yajna took in believing that maintaining hundreds of families of workers was HIS personal responsibility. The relationship does not end at just paying the salary and meeting statutory commitments. Readers may recall how he is a sort of *Abhaya Hastha* (a helping hand in dire emergencies) that employees bank on for support for education, house construction, response to health crisis, etc.

Budding entrepreneurs will come face to face with the challenge of human relations. The lesson that we want to document is that good habits of interacting with people need to be cultivated over time. It needs continuous attention. Incorporating belief in good behaviour towards others is fundamental. Being cynical about people does not help in the long run.

One associate appreciated Yajna as having some elements of the divine form of Lord Rama, i.e. having ideal qualities and aspirations, and some elements of the divine form of Lord Krishna, with the right kind of worldly approach to get tasks completed. One trick Yajna revels in is in “acting angry”! There are times one needs to show anger to extract the best from people. But that should never be uncontrolled, it should not hurt your own health, and definitely should not hurt the relationship. Yajna repeatedly mentions, “Argue or shout, but never make enemies.” Well, that is easier said than done, and can be core material for many assertive behavior trainings. What we learnt from interactions with YNK we can pass on to budding entrepreneurs as the ***Second Principle***:

Don't fake relationships, have genuine concern and empathy in mind in all interactions with everyone concerned.

Recipe for Success #3. Continuous Learning

This is probably the most important advice that budding entrepreneurs must incorporate. In school and college education, there is one big advantage that the syllabus is set by someone else. To a large extent we must follow it. Once we complete studies and join the workforce, there are formal training departments which will create the pedagogy for skilling for a role in an industry. But a time will come in everyone's professional life that the syllabus set by others will stop. One must create one's own personalized learning system.

There are various kinds of learnings that one must keep up with. Foremost are the skills of your core domain. All branches of knowledge see new discoveries, new inventions and effort is needed to catch up with the core skills of one's chosen domain. In Yajna's case as was seen in the earlier pages, staying abreast of the ion gold plating technology made a lot of difference. He entered the sector at the right time. If he had stuck to only electro plating as a technique for gold plating for watch straps, his enterprise would not have made that much progress. As a matter of fact, it would have probably failed, as happened to many others in this sector.

The second branch of knowledge that one must be up to date is on what is happening in the economy. Economy is by far the widest branch of study in social sciences. Any new invention, any new discovery, major lifestyle change, any politico-social change in the near and far term can have an impact on one's work. These changes happen very fast and can literally pull the rug from under the feet of people, companies, and institutions. Sona Group is facing one such situation now. The focus is shifting from leather, metal and plated straps, because wearable devices are adopting different strap technologies. The response to this situation is beyond the scope of this writing. The purpose of bringing this issue up was to emphasize to young and budding entrepreneurs on the importance of continuous learning.

The third aspect is learning about people. By far the most complex of all! How we deal with people is influenced by a lot of factors. Our own upbringing, the social situation, history, and one's own emotional and social quotient and often present mood. Are you showing interest in the “happenings” in the life of your colleagues, workers? They cannot be treated as robots meant for production or a business at hand. Some enquiries about their family goes a long way in building rapport. In our

interviews, this aspect came out. Though Yajna is the head of the company with hundreds of employees, he tries to learn about workers, supervisors. This is not only good for relations, it is also good for business. In the spirit of the saying, 'a stitch in time saves nine,' early warnings about employees can be spotted and responded to in time to prevent major developments.

The next aspect of learning is about YOU. What are your strengths? What are your shortcomings? What growth are you achieving as a person? What good habits are you cultivating? What habits or beliefs can be limiting factors? How can you overcome your shortcoming or at least reduce its negative impact? How about appropriate team formation work? It is universally acknowledged that no one is perfect. Instead of worrying about shortcomings excessively, one should focus on putting one's strengths to work. But keep an eye on the other things.

One can work out the correct continuous learning mechanism. Technologies that enable learning anywhere should be understood and adopted appropriately. This can be through regular catching up with the financial press, relevant trade publications, conferences and seminars, interactions in trade bodies. There has been proliferation of television and social media as channels of continuous news coverage. One must work out the ideal allocation of waking hours for various tasks important to you. It is important to spend time on the following aspects: profession, family, hobby, health, social circle, and some time for self contemplation.

Learning can be the common thread linking all these activities.

Recipe for Success # 4. Hard work of a different kind

This is stating the obvious. There is no success without hard work. But the reason to make it a separate guideline is to bring out some nuances associated with this advice. What are the faculties one must deploy to achieve success? Common to all is time. Everyone gets the same quota of seconds is a clichéd statement. The other resource is the right combination of age and health. Next, your skills. Add to that your other existing financial resources. The biggest of all is your intellect.

What came out in our discussions with Yajna is the concept of what the management adage captures as “firing on all cylinders”, i.e., don't bank on just one thing. Put all resources to work.

Tap on multiple avenues is his outlook. If one is struggling, it may be that you are NOT deploying all your resources properly.

Physical labour alone is not very rewarding. We should smash the concept of long hours at work as hard work. The essence of this advice is to involve in intellectual hard work. The other name for this is an appeal to be creative. To be innovative. It is a much harder form of work. This also dovetails with the previous advice of continuous learning. To innovate, to create, to leapfrog over the competition, one needs to be up-to-date on the knowledge front. In a way, the hardest work that Yajna has done is to risk it all and transform from plain electro chemical plating to gold plating, and take calculated risky bets on a few expansions. After that, it was relatively easy to develop people to implement this vision.

Intellectual hard work is also the key ingredient in the new age economy that we are in the midst of.

Recipe for Success # 5. Right Type & Level of Contentment

It is debatable as to who achieves more in life. One school of thought is that those who are discontented are driven to achieve more, pursue bigger targets and aims, and achieve more. If we go down this path, it can become slippery very soon, as no amount of achievement is likely to cause that elusive feeling of contentment.

The alternative thought is, it is better to be contented, but still strive to achieve more and reach higher and higher levels of contentment.

Does being contented cause lethargic behaviour and therefore be an impediment for further progress? Should an artificial deadline like retirement age be a marker to declare contentment? How nice if we can say, I will work until I am 60, and then stop.

The reason to pose these philosophical questions is to capture the essence of our discussion with Yajna on what his outlook is, on aspects like contentment, joy, happiness and the uniquely Indian notion of *Ananda*, which can roughly be translated to be a state of ecstasy, continuous joy, no matter what happens around you.

Listening to him reminded us of a cute video circulating in social media that captures the existing belief that all results start off with hard work, and that it drives one to success, and it is that success that leads to happiness. The second half of the video appeals to the viewer to reverse the order. Be happy first. That state of happiness will obviously lead to working harder and obviously more success will follow. The purpose of that motivational video was to highlight that happiness is a state of mind that should drive the rest of the activities.

At 70 plus and with lots of achievement to his credit, one would expect him to step back, relax and be content with having run the race so far and hang up his boots, as they say. But alas, that is not the case at all. He is plotting what to do next. What business venture to enter? What should be the plans for expansion that can create more employment?

Being clear about WHY one is doing WHAT one is doing gives clarity to the plan. On overall analysis, Yajna claims to define two types of contentment. One, with what you must have to be contented. The second is to derive contentment from the value you have added to others. The recipe is to be contented with the first one, easily. But always be more on the side of not being contented, on the second. More can be achieved, is his core belief in terms of service to others. Yajna thus belongs to a generation that does not believe in retirement per se.

Why does this fit into the chapter title, Everyone can Grow? To plan for it? It is to appeal to not pursue only short term goals, or dream of quick-fix, or lottery to success. Budding entrepreneurs should not become flashes in the pan. They should not be contented with small achievements when it comes to team and other stake holders. **Aim higher**, aim for bigger successes. The world has lots of problems that need to be solved. Just you and a few members in your family doing well should not be the license for being fully contented and stopping efforts for higher achievements that everyone is capable of.

Recipe for Success # 6. Right attitude, Never Give Up

From a long time, we have been trained to have a “never give up” attitude. The ingrained advice is that success comes to those who show persistence. We have all heard motivational statements such as “You are not defeated when you fall. You are defeated only when you refuse to get up again.”

Contrast that with a few recent paradigms like, 'Fail fast to discover right strategy', or 'Right passion to pursue' or 'Right thing to do to solve a problem'. This has become extremely important in the recent start-up driven growth. What if the company is pursuing a product idea that is facing tough challenges of acceptance in the market? The number one reason given for failure of start-ups is what is referred to as the absence of product-market match. Some advisors suggest that you try out many ideas and if some ideas don't work, then drop them soon and move on to the next idea. There are many cases where it is the second or third idea that has flourished. If they had persisted only with the first idea and never given up, maybe they would have lost more money and time.

There are also cases where two players were pursuing similar ideas. One of them gave up and the one who persisted made history. We can see examples of that in the history of SONA Group too, where a particular low profit product was continued for a really long period for strategic reasons, when it made more sense to change direction.

According to Yajna, when the impact is only personal, it is much easier to decide on changing course. But when the endeavour that you are working on has many stake holders, it is better to take a longer time to make a commitment. But once the commitment is made, pursue that with all the energy and never give up after that, especially if the cause has a bigger social purpose.

Food for Thought from this Chapter:

- ★ What is your technique to sharpen the saw, upgrade your skills?
- ★ How much time do you spend on doing routine work and how much on innovation?
- ★ What action item can you take on the list of formula for success?
- ★ Can you rub in “integrity” as a culture into your known circle?
- ★ Kaizen is Japanese for continuous, even incremental improvement efforts used for product improvement. Do you practise Kaizen in life?



CHAPTER 9

India can excel in Manufacture, Make in India & Atma Nirbhar Movements

In this chapter, an attempt is made to contribute some food for thought over the ongoing national initiatives like Make in India and Atma Nirbhar movements. These are very important in the current stage of Indian history. The generally accepted view is that no country has gone from an agrarian economy to a service economy without going through the manufacturing phase. India is no exception. Surely, India has made progress on this front and the future holds a lot more promise.

Governments at various levels have been doing what is feasible in terms of making ease of doing business a reality. In a way, the ball is in the court of industrialists and industrious people to take the initiative forward. It is almost, “If not now, when?” kind of environment.

Many positives were documented in the earlier pages. Let us look at what we need to look at as a nation to make it get into the list of developed countries.

Shun Negativity: Seize the moment

Utopia is an imaginary land which is perfect in all senses. By that yardstick, not many countries come close to utopian ideals. India is no exception. It has its share of positives and negatives.

But if you open most newspapers or online media sites, there seems to be an obsession with negativity and near-complete lack of celebration of the good. This has been lowering the stature of the nation, and having a bad impact on the psyche, and is rubbing off on to many sectors.

Contrast that with the internationally prevalent view that the 21st century most likely will belong to Asia in general and possibly India in particular.

There is a study which says that any movement will happen if a significant percentage of the population believes in it and acts on it. That sense of urgency to capture the opportunity is the need of the hour. *Carpe diem* as it is said in Latin, is the first main ingredient.

That movement towards self-confidence has started in right earnest since liberalization in the early 1990s and has been going through a bumpy ride ever since. Now is the time for a decisive positive turn. If not now, when?

Land Closure: Land being so costly is not healthy for industrial growth

Agriculture, manufacturing and service are the main sectors of the country's economy. Land requirements differ for each of the sectors and its availability has been a challenge.

Undoubtedly, agriculture needs the highest amount of land. Innovations like poly house, vertical farming, multi-storey farming, etc. are driving to reduce the demand for land and to make management of agriculture easier.

The service sector has lesser demand for land and is often concentrated in urban centres. The commercial real estate boom has to a large extent taken care of this sector. But the increasing rentals are a cause for concern, which are mainly catering to multinational companies and hampering all round development.

The availability of land for the MSME sector is met to a large extent by designated industrial areas. But the cost of the land is so prohibitive that it is becoming one of the biggest costs in many business plans.

Just to put it in perspective, when Yajna started his self-employment journey, the first phase of expansion called for investment in plant and machinery to the tune of around Rs. 60 lakhs, when land cost was just @ Rs. 2 lakhs. Now the cost of land per acre itself goes to a couple of crores, depending on accessibility and distance from population centres. As a percentage, machinery costs have come down. This is not a healthy mix.

Coming to mega industries like steel, power, refineries etc., the difficulties faced by the Tata Group of companies in getting land at Singur, West Bengal is well documented. There are many cases like that.

Given the agrarian nature of land holding, it basically comes to the issue of diversion of land from agriculture to industrial use with a fair benefit passed on to the farmers.

This aspect is something that all planners are aware of, and experimented through owning, leasing, renting models. Sona Group has been fortunate in being in business since 1987 and could expand easily so far, as investment in land was done early. Life is not that easy for a budding manufacturer who wants to start a new factory now.

An appeal goes out to all concerned to make breakthrough progress in this input to further industrialization in India. Yajna and his team believe this is one key input for the *Make in India* and *Atma Nirbhar* initiatives to succeed.

Some ideas at work include direct purchase of land from farmers at the market rate by the industrial houses without any intermediary or profit sharing or state purchase, and the formation of industrial parks. Some innovation and consensus among all stakeholders is needed to make a big impact.

Each Indian should lift at least ten others: Smash the Indian crab story

This is the next recipe for the future stage of industrialization and growth. In a sad commentary on the lack of Indian teamwork, or the lack of support to each other, there is the Indian crab story. Though told in jest, even an element of truth in this should make Indians sad. It goes thus: A sea food exporter sent a pack of crabs but did not shut the lid. When the inspector asked him for this odd behavior, the witty answer was, 'They are Indian crabs. If one tries to escape up, others will pull it down. So, the top lid not needed.'

The time has come to change this story. Let us title it, **Each Indian lift at least ten other Indians**. It is beyond doubt that the Indian economy has grown in the decades

following Indian independence. That has lifted India to among the world's top six by GDP as of February 2020. That in turn has produced the rich, upper middle class, and middle class, and eliminated dire poverty for all practical purposes. A lot more is due to be done. Some of this progress happens by trickle down economics, some of it by targeted policies, some of it by conscious charitable and philanthropic efforts.

When Yajna read all the nice things said about him, he wondered if he was worthy of all this praise and good words spoken about him. That was when it struck the editors that the reason for all that goodwill was not because he had become more resourceful, but because he had made a conscious effort and used his endowed resources to bring up others.

There is a famous sentiment in Indian culture, which in Sanskrit goes thus “*Paropa KaRarTha Edam ShaRiRam*”. Translated, it means “the sole purpose of this human body is to serve others.” In a way, Yajna has lived by this motto. Many may be aware of the term '*ikigai*' which is explained in Wiki pages as “compounds two Japanese words: *iki* (生き) meaning "life; alive" and *kai* (甲斐) "a reason for living; a meaning for life; what makes life worth living.”

Our ancestors in our *Sanatana Dharma* had already given a clarion call on what should be one's mission: i.e., to serve others.

Of course, wealth earned through honest means gives immeasurable joy and comfort. But the joy is much more when shared with others. Yajna is not aware as to when this giving started. It has become a sort of addiction now. Anyway, this tendency to help others is good. So, here is wishing more will get addicted to this good habit.

It is time for the nation's *Ikigai*, everyone's *Ikigai* to be “to serve others”. We would like to coin a mission. Each Indian should proactively lift those below them in some social parameters. It can be 10, 100, 1000 or millions as per the role given to you.

To sum up, the time has come to quash the Indian crab story once and for all. This way, all of us can rise up.

Financial Closure: For 2% crooks, 98% are suffering

The cost of capital or rate of interest is one factor that drives lots of consumer behaviour and the risk appetite of businessmen and industrialists.

We recorded in the earlier pages that when Yajna started his business journey, the rate of interest was as high as 20% and also that capital was difficult to come by.

It is time to record the sea change that has happened in this aspect over the decades. The biggest beneficiary of the same is the consumer loans segment with reduced interest rates on vehicle loans, housing loans and consumer durables. Undoubtedly, this has driven consumption and has created the fabled middle class and upper middle-class base.

Has the same benefit reached the commercial loans segment? Yes, but not to the same degree. The cost of capital *per se* has come down for starting businesses. By restructuring some of the existing loans, it has helped existing business too to cut down costs.

But the problem now is accessibility. In the earlier pages, we wrote about the struggle that Yajna went through to get a loan of Rs. 2 lakhs from Indian Bank. That too after providing gold from his mother-in-law as collateral. We are sorry to note that accessibility to funds from the formal banking sector, especially to the MSME sector is still a work-in-progress, and is one of the impediments for the conception and growth of businesses.

The famous ingredient for a formal loan application is three years' balance sheet. Conceptually, this means that the first three years do not come under the priority sector. This has been left for funding from the informal sector of personal loans, past savings and help from relatives.

Yajna has seen the following difficulties in all his interactions:

- 1) *Funds to start the business*
- 2) *Working capital needed for expansion after initial success*
- 3) *Funds for further investment for growth*

We are aware of the difficulties of the banking sector. Especially NPAs that have been hurting this most crucial financial sector. But to a large extent, it is driven by a small percentage of unethical big businessmen or wilful defaulters. But because of this small percentage, the large percentage of honest MSME sector leaders are suffering.

Unfortunately, the buck is made to stop at the bank manager's level. This has also the bad side effect of a complete risk aversion closer to retirement time, for fear of losing retirement benefits due to NPA loans during his or her watch.

Can we as a nation work out a culture of honesty and responsibility when it comes to others' money, and make accessibility of funds the second wheel for lowering the cost of capital, to cycle faster?

Change in attitude: Strive to do right and learn lessons from mistakes

If one prepares a list of the big impediments to the rapid progress of India, infrastructural shortcomings usually tops the list. While it may be true from a narrow economic standpoint, Yajna has articulated at many public fora that what India really needs is a change in the mindset, change in the culture. A positive change on this aspect will trigger faster industrialization and better results from the existing Industrial Infrastructure.

He articulates this by juxtaposing four possible combinations of **“You & I and Right & Wrong.”**

Time is by far the costliest resource of all. How much time is wasted on the following activities?

Proving **“I am Right”** (when in fact you are wrong)

Proving **“Someone is wrong”** (when in fact they might be right)

He often quotes an example of his experience in Japan when he had gone there as part of the quartz technology transfer mission. He said it was amazing to see

Japanese workers owning up to their unintended mistakes and taking them as lessons to excel the next time.

It is good to strive to do the right things, taking the right decisions, timing it right, taking the right calls, etc. But it is unreasonable to stick to the stand, **“EVERYTHING I DO IS RIGHT.”**

It takes humility to accept that one did wrong, learn the right lessons from it and move on. In many developed countries, the culture in the industry is to own up to their mistakes. Whereas in India, a lot of time is spent in proving oneself right even when all data points to the contrary. And in taking equally obstinate positions when it comes to others.

Many times, right and wrong are subjective, and are not binary states to conclude. While it may be a matter of endless debate in social sciences or in the theological arena, it is not so in the industrial arena. With clear objectives worked out and clear metrics, the scope for ambiguity is much less. Who has performed, who has not, who is doing right, who is erring, are relatively easy to decide. But so much productive time is lost between workers and supervisors due to disagreements on these aspects.

We as a nation should usher in a culture where mistakes are not covered up, mistakes without malicious intent are treated as great learning lessons, and strive towards excellence.

Abstract as it may seem, this culture change is the need of the hour. This will also change the adversarial relationship between workers and management.

The world will help only if you own it: Call for a high sense of personal ownership

In the course of many interviews, we asked how Yajna chose people to support and extend a helping hand. We went through many examples to find a common thread.

In social sciences, there is a model called **DABDA** model. This is often applied to the stages of response to illness or overcoming grief. It refers to **D**-> *Denial*, **A**->

Anger, B->Bargaining, D->Depression, and finally, A-> Acceptance. Allow us to re-interpret this model to how everyone copes with the problem/difficulty faced, and what stage they are in.

If one ACCEPTS the situation and takes personal responsibility or ownership of the situation, then nature has a way to help those striving to solve the problem.

That is the thread we found common in many of the cases. Those facing difficulties, those going through tough times, instead of blaming others or destiny, decided to do something, take some action. Reiterating the adage, 'god helps those who help themselves,' the connection got made to Yajna, and he did support many of these cases.

Documenting all those who got help from Yajna is not the purpose of this writing. Instead, we want to cull out nuggets that came from discussions with Yajna. If there is someone who feels totally helpless, it is only because he/she has not tapped into his/her own potential of self-help.

If they own it, there are more chances of their cases being seen, their cases getting support from unexpected quarters.

And this thread is also relevant for budding entrepreneurs. Less the blame game, the less finding of excuses, less banking on others, more and more are your chances of success or finding a helping hand.

Thus, here is a call for taking high level of personal responsibility. That is what makes one deserve, and many good things will follow thereof.

Invest in the Ecosystem: Big companies should nurture smaller ones

As was recoded in the Introduction, Yajna and his group of companies represent the MSME sector. The success of the group, as was noted in Yajna's thank you note owes a lot to Titan, a highly valued brand and principal customer. In a way, the vendor management programme of the house of Tatas enabled the growth of the Sona Group.

If one surveys the struggles of some companies, often the cause of many problems is payment terms and delay in payments, especially from big companies to small companies. With lower credit limits from banks, this further stretches MSMEs. It puts severe constraints on how much growth can be achieved.

Also, this includes payments from the government to the private Industrial sector. A web search reveals that this amounts to lakhs of crores of rupees. The government is working on clearing the backlog.

Change in the “payment culture” for products and services delivered will do wonders to the existing industrial environment.

Aim for the World: Let us excel at the world level

The expertise of Information and High Technology specialists has brought laurels to the country and billions of dollars of export income. It has brought huge brand value to the Indian engineer/professional. If one studies closely the success of these sectors, it clearly points to one trend: “compete with the best in the world and excel”.

This thread is common across all sectors. If excellence is achieved at the world level, it can lead to higher valuation. Indian doctors and the medical fraternity are another example. India can achieve this level of excellence in many other sectors.

One way is to overcome our approach of building a low quality solution for India but a high quality solution for the world market. High quality should become part of everything we manufacture and sell.

Don't get carried away by euphoria

The word “hard-nosed” businessman has been coined for a good reason. Though it has multiple connotations, the most relevant one refers to someone who makes decisions based on practical considerations, after a thorough analysis, and not get carried away by a sense of euphoria.

It is believed that in a capitalist economy, boom and bust cycles are embedded in the

very nature of its working. This also shows up in stock markets in the form of volatility, bull and bear cycles. Many economic systems are marked by inflationary growth, deflation, cyclical patterns and irrational exuberance, a word made famous in the 2008 financial crisis that hit multiple regions of the world with extreme negative consequences.

The ramifications of these events have huge implications for those in business. One advice we heard in our interactions with Yajna was to incorporate all good qualities that come with being a hard-nosed person. These include a well-developed mind of one's own, mastery over relevant data, ability to take advice from others but decide on merit, take time to consider rather than rush into decisions.

This advice sure comes from practical experience of success in many ventures and failures in some. Readers are well advised to incorporate this practice in their professional and business journeys.

Perfect blending of old & new: Our vast cultural background can be a source of strength

Yajna is a keen listener of commentaries on scriptures, and writings on modern interpretations of age-old values, as articulated in the *Sanathana Dharma* that we are blessed to be born into. He strongly recommends hearing famous commentators like Dr. Gururaj Karajagi.

Here is one famous stanza from the *Manku Thimmanna Kaggera* of world famous writer DV Gundappa.

ಹೊಸ ಚಿಗುರು ಹಳೆ ಬೇರು ಕೂಡಿರಲು ಮರ ಸೊಬಗು!
ಹೊಸ ಯುಕ್ತಿ ಹಳೆ ತತ್ವದಿ ಒಡಗೂಡೆ ಧರ್ಮ;
ಋಷಿವಾಕ್ಯದೊಡನೆ ವಿಜ್ಞಾನ ಕಲೆ ಮೇಳವಿಸೆ!
ಜಸವು ಜನಜೀವನಕೆ-ಮಂಕುತಿಮ್ಮ-೫೨೨

*Fresh leaves backed by old roots make a tree, a beauty;
New tact backed up by old principles mould righteousness;
Noble words of saints blended with art of science!
Heralds success to mankind—MankuThimma—522*

The essence of this paragraph is a call to adopt a scientific modern outlook and approach, but at the same time, internalize and adopt the core values passed on through generations from time immemorial. India as a country scores high on this aspect. The ability of citizens to adapt to changes, incorporate newness from all parts of the world is something that is worth noting. Conversion to an industrialized nation within a few decades after independence exemplifies this.

Extending the same to the adoption of social values, there is concern as to whether we are going overboard. Are we “adopting the worst of the west?” For example the changing attitude we see towards old age and caring for the elderly. Is there a case to strengthen the CORE personality? That will make outward success a lot more enjoyable.

The same principle can be extended to Indian managers' approach. Management and leadership style can have a unique *Bharatiya Samskriti* stamp to it.

Harmonious Growth: All sectors of the economy should grow harmoniously

Let us illustrate this with the example of engineering. Just as various ingredients make for a tasty dish, different branches like electronics, electrical, mechanical, civil and other branches complete the skill set needed to drive industrialization. It is not a healthy trend if there are growth opportunities in only a few branches, and there is an extreme gap between different vocations.

This is well documented since earlier only engineering and medicine were the two main options considered worthy of pursuit by students. Other streams survived but did not thrive.

We are not making a case for equality among all. That is an ideal socialistic agenda. What we learnt from YNK was that the very wide gap between vocations was becoming a concern. It has always existed in many countries. But an excessive gap is detrimental to the overall economy.

How to reduce this gap is the focus of the next advice.

Growth v/s Development: Growth is temporary, development is permanent

It is very important to understand the distinction between these two related words. One of the reasons for the respect for Yajna's industrial enterprise is its successful completion of 30 years of existence.

Contrast that with other companies that grew rapidly but vanished from the scene for various reasons.

Which one deserves more respect? Temporary growth or a well-developed platform that can enable sustained and well controlled growth?

There is a highly respected group of companies that has completed 100 years of existence. Yajna's pride lies not so much in that there was growth and temporary prosperity. It comes from the satisfaction that the group has been built to last, and can be counted on to survive for a long time.

There is a reason that advanced countries are called developed countries. They have built systems, cultures and processes that can be counted on to ensure continuous growth. Contrast that with some regions which have seen explosive growth often driven by specific commodities, whose long term viability remains a question.

India as a country should strive to institutionalize the development agenda and not just pursue short term growth. That process seems to be well underway currently. All concerned should contribute to this.

Talking about harmonious growth -- the best habit that we should develop is to live in harmony with Nature. There is something that attracts lots of professionals to agriculture, to grow plants, trees and get an element of the farmer's life in them. Yajna is no exception. He does dabble in it.

The reason to also share this is to document another ingredient needed for harmonious growth --to be environmentally conscious. Yajna strives to make his factories reduce, reuse, recycle, repurpose, reorient resources, as much as possible. Adopting renewable energy generation and installing water treatment plants in the

factories even before they were made compulsory are examples. These aspects also helped in factory certifications for export purposes.

Yajna with his younger brother Narasimha Rao visiting their agriculture project



Adopt the best from everywhere: What can India give to and take from the rest of the world?

By our exposure to various aspects of the world, our interactions with a wide variety of people and systems, by the travels that we undertake, we learn a lot about the world at large. We should be eclectic in adopting the best from various places and incorporate them in our life as appropriate. This is what Yajna has striven to do.

During the COVID-19 pandemic that challenged so many aspects of the world, the special emphasis was on building body immunity. In this context there was special attention to the Indian systems and ways of living that can provide a boost to body immunity.

Adoption of Yoga, a holistic form of exercise and development was one such example. The other is the role played by traditional medicinal plants. Amla, Turmeric, Tulsi, Ashwagandha, spices etc in small quantities are known to have many positive effects. Aren't we losers if we don't adopt these widely? Should we not spread this message to the world?

It is to be noted that India's vast repository of traditional medicine is based on plants. That is sustainable, more environmentally friendly. (In contrast, the other equally vast culture of traditional Chinese medicines is based on animal extracts. There are many indications that this very aspect contributed to spreading the problem.)

India of today is no longer a nation on a survival mode. We are discovering many positive aspects every day. A call goes out to all to take the best that India has to offer, to the world. And in the same spirit, adopt the best that the world has to offer.

Let us kindle the true spirit of *Vasu Daiva Kutumbakam*. i.e., treating the whole world as one big extended family. To learn from, to live together and to prosper together. It is these lofty goals propagated by Indians that are beacons of hope in these times. The adoption of these great philosophies is what makes all aspects of our life a 'Yajna', a spiritual journey that leads to the upliftment of the self. Business as 'Yajna' is just one aspect of it.

Food for Thought from this Chapter

- ★ What are you willing to contribute towards “Go Local”?
- ★ Ideate on dependence, self sufficiency and inter-dependence?
- ★ What can you contribute to nation building?
- ★ What power inside you can you deploy to help others?
- ★ Can you expand your sphere of influence to deliver more impact?



CHAPTER 10

YAJNANARAYANA KAMMAJE

The Karma-yogi with a Futuristic Vision



Mihir Kharod
Editor in Chief, TradePost

“A Karma-yogi who takes a resolve and works accordingly, without bothering about 'success' or 'failure', will eventually reach his goal.”

~Sam Veda~

The watch industry of India has been privileged to have been blessed with some incredible personalities. They are doyens who have illuminated this industry with their faithful hard work and sincerity. These industry stalwarts have coloured this sector with the pride of place that it finally enjoys today not only within India, but also in many other countries of the world.

One such impressive, fascinating, and remarkable personality is **Yajnanarayana Kammaje**, the **Founder President and CEO** of **Sona Group of Industries** in **Bangalore**. His journey in life and through time is almost like a fairy tale come true – a difficult one to imagine or surmise. But even if one is to retrospect about the life this **Great Gentleman** has so far led, it is perhaps as tough to even begin to comprehend or understand the mettle he is made of. **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** is a self-made man, who had a vision about the future of the watch industry of India, many decades ago. He set himself upon an incredible journey in time, which he traversed in the finest manner possible and with tremendous conviction, to reach where he is proudly placed today. It will not be wrong to state that to write about

him, is like placing a **Lamp before the Sun**, because **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** is no ordinary person by any stretch of imagination. He is a person with a very powerful and enigmatic aura surrounding him, one that none can either miss, ignore nor set aside.

A Modest Beginning.....

Going back to his life's journey and how it all began, the story has it that hailing from a very humble background and a modest childhood which he spent at a village hamlet in **Dakshina Kannada** and schooling over there, **Kammaje** completed his BE (Electrical) followed by an M.Tech. degree he acquired in Industrial Electronics in 1973, before joining **HMT** in Bangalore. This was the beginning of a working life, which was to later become and in time to follow, one of the most illustrious careers ever, which one can elucidate upon. It was this stint of his at **HMT**, which over time, made him so passionate about watches, that eventually drove him to select this product line that he finally chose to remain with, and made it the dream project of his life-to-be. It may be recalled here, that at the time he started his working career with **HMT**, India did not really have a watch making industry in place or to write home about, barring a handful of private players such as **Indo French Time Industries** and some others, who neither had the huge financial resources to invest, nor the required manpower to truly get going on a fully operational manufacturing unit which could turn out quality watches in large numbers. It was the then **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru** and **Industries Minister Manubhai Patel's** vision of putting up a fully-equipped watch manufacturing factory in India, which finally got realised in the form of **HMT Watches**. What happened thereafter is history!

Over the many decades that some very enterprising personalities have dedicated and committed their entire working lives to a particular cause, they have not stopped to think even for a single moment, how and where they would finally end up. But, with clear targets and objectives set in mind, they have embarked upon a journey, which has finally taken them to their dream destination. As they say, it is easy to preach and sermonise, but it is very difficult, when it actually comes to performing a task or set of tasks and finally achieve what one had planned to achieve. In such a situation, it is an even bigger as well as an equally herculean task, when it comes to running a large company or a conglomerate of companies and finally piloting it to reach where one wished it to reach. If one were to analyse these

personalities, it would definitely not be easy to do so, because such individuals have a completely different bent of mind. Their mind-set is forever engaged in planning and contemplating on some new idea, some new venture, or some or the other assignment, which is different from the usual. In a way, these are the sort of people who think and act very differently. Most importantly, they are endowed with a very deep insight which leads them to develop over time a foresight, which places before them a mission to accomplish. And examples have it, that such missions have never been a cakewalk! They have always been saddled with impediments along the route, which had to be eventually overcome.

Yajnanarayana Kammaje (or **YNK** as he is fondly addressed) is one such personality, who never stopped at anything throughout his life. His zeal, his vision about the future of the watch industry and his undiluted love for watches, kept him going forward. Like him, one has to be a thinker, a planner and above all a dreamer. To carry one's group on the road to prosperity and alongside also carry the teams such that the group ultimately becomes a successful and thriving business agglomerate, is what most such personalities have forever and successfully done. It is to these wonderful people, that a huge credit is owed, for taking their companies to unimaginable heights, a credit that is indeed due to them for this lifetime contribution that they have constantly made, in ensuring that their companies or group of companies have finally made it to a level of excellence where they always wanted the group to ultimately reach, and which several others would envy.

The Start of a Great and Historical Career.....

Yajnanarayana Kammaje actually began his working life at **Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT)**, a Public Sector Undertaking, attached to its watches manufacturing division, which later became a very successful unit of the company. A part of one of the earliest batches to have joined **HMT** along with many other stalwarts of horology like **Messrs I.K. Amitha, Hari Rao, B.G. Dwarkanath** and **H.G. Raghunath** who later made it big in the **World of Time**, **YNK** however was a shade different from the others in his group, in terms of what he wanted to do and in the process building his own future. A restless individual at heart, working hard being second nature to him and burning the midnight oil went hand-in-hand with him, as he graduated to becoming a **Deputy General Manager** at **HMT**, in 1987. While with **HMT** he also pioneered the entry of **Quartz** watch technology into India through **M/s Citizen Watches, Japan** in the year 1979-80, as until then **HMT's**

forte lay only in Mechanical watches, which were the watches of that era. **YNK** was the chosen one, who along with a small team, was deputed to travel to Japan, and undergo training at **Citizen's** plant, where he acquired deep knowledge about quartz watch technology.

And then an Ambition to Do More and Grow, Got the Better of Him.....

At the time, **HMT** employed the use of metal bands for its watches, which in a way had turned into the hard-earned manufacturing forte of **Yajnanarayana**, because over the time that he spent working with the Public Sector Giant, he was also able to acquire a deep knowledge and considerable expertise in the manufacture of such bands. But **Yajnanarayana** wanted to do more, to do something that was apart and way different from the rest of his colleagues. Unfortunately, the quality of metal watch bands available in the Indian market in those days was quite mediocre, other than their availability itself, which was also at question and causing a considerable demand and supply gap in the country, in terms of high-quality metal bands and their rising demand. Even though, in India at the time, there were dozens of small units based in and around Bombay engaged in the manufacturing of metal and leather watch bands, none of them could really turn out quality bands, as the manufacturing technology of these itself was outdated and primitive, besides the fact that they were manually made. But, soon enough, with the emergence of **Titan Watches** as being the undeniable future of quality watch products in India, the requirement of high-quality stainless steel bands came up, apart from the fact that some models were also required to be plated. At the time, plating too on stainless steel bands was yet another area which needed a big push and where the technology itself had to be hugely updated and brought on par with internationally acceptable standards.

This was when **YNK** smelt an opportunity and stepped in to go headlong into the manufacture of stainless steel bands as well as put up his own unit to plate stainless steel straps. After serving the **HMT Watch Division** for close to two decades, he voluntarily resigned as **Deputy General Manager**, to pursue his dream of becoming an entrepreneur. Although by sheer dint of hard work he rose to a high position at **HMT** backed by a handsome salary and a secure and stable life, he was hardly the sort of person to be satisfied with just that, as continuing anymore over there, he was unable to realise his own personal and cherished dream of being able

to render some sort of help to the Society around him and amidst which he lived. Stagnation set in, while serving a corporate career was simply not his **Cup-of-Tea**. He was a **Dreamer** and a **Wild One** at that, whom none could ever apply brakes upon. His modest background made him very empathetic and genuinely concerned towards and about people who were not so fortunate as him and who did not have the opportunities or the resources to study and come up in life owing to shortage of money and financial woes. So it was, that he said goodbye to his cushy career at **HMT** and leveraged an opportunity to get into watch strap manufacturing, with the meagre savings that he had made. He grew up bootstrapping and struggling with the sole purpose of succeeding in life some day in the future and thus provide employment to many.

A Beginning thus made with Sona Plating.....

Yajnanarayana Kammaje (YNK) founded the privately held **Sona Group of Industries** in 1987, by setting up **Sona Plating** at the very start of his entrepreneurial journey. Thus, a beginning was made. This was also the making of a **Brilliant Businessman-to-Be**, who astutely followed his intuition, which was perhaps giving him early signals, as to where the horological industry of India would eventually head. Being a technocrat as well in his own right, besides nurturing a rather strong commercial sixth-sense, he commenced his journey into the **World of Time** with plated bands and then steadily graduated into the manufacture of high-quality stainless steel straps for **Titan**. Following these initial moves, **Yajnanarayana** never looked back in time, as his business continued to expand and grow. He soon added leather straps and the assembly of complete watches to his rapidly growing product portfolio, while at the same time enhancing the quality of his products and services. It was also his dream project to be able to make, supply and service all horological verticals that dealt with watches, under a single roof. Soon enough, sensing that here was an entrepreneur who was more than capable of delivering results as per the company's growing requirements, **Titan** extended an opportunity to **Yajnanarayana** to make and supply some of **Sonata's** models. Commencing with **100,000** pieces per month, he focused his efforts on further increasing these numbers to **300,000 Sonata** and **Fastrack** watches per month. If one hence looks at the big jump he focused his efforts on, admittedly, this was not an easy one. It speaks volumes about the **Gentleman's** passion and drive to race ahead in life. It also makes him a person, whose thinking and vision about the future was always crystal clear, not just about himself as an entrepreneur, but even as much about the **Group** he has so painstakingly raised and

the teams that work for it, which he so successfully leads today, with his head held high.

Apart from all these qualities about **YNK**, which make him the person he truly is, there is one more quality about him which also needs to be applauded and acknowledged. In these past years that the **Sona Group of Industries** has continued to expand and make its own place, he has not kept himself confined to India alone. In order to compete with international brands and offer quality watch straps at good prices both within India as well as to other countries, he has also gone beyond India to acquire a company based in China now named **Banda Sona**. And perhaps he is the only entrepreneur within the Indian Horological Industry, who has had the will, guts and grit to do so! The takeover of this Chinese company has thus presented before him an ocean of new opportunities in the realm of quality watch strap manufacturing, while perhaps, if a likewise opportunity comes his way for watches too sometime ahead, that could also hold a tremendous potential for the **Group's** future. He also sees a good potential in watch cases.

In short, there is not a horological product or component that has ever escaped the eyes of **Yajnanarayana Kammaje**, while the **Group** also steadily continues to establish itself in high-quality plating business and is already engaged in plating for some international brands such as **Fossil**.

Today, thanks to him, **Sona Group** is an engineering conglomerate, catering to the Indian and International watch industry. Precision component manufacturing being the **Group's** forte, it enjoys high credibility amongst major watch manufacturers in India and abroad. This positioning is a result of the company's capability to deliver products with innovative design and surpassing the required quality levels.

The **Group** has well established state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities backed by a strong tool-room infrastructure. Skilled manpower is another area where the company holds an edge. From a single unit company way back in early 1992, today the **Group boasts of 5+ units** with an aggregate employee strength of more than **800 heads** and a respectable fixed asset base and net worth. The **Group** companies are a major source of supply for **Titan Company, Timex Group India, Fossil India** and **Maxima** for more than a decade now. Besides this, he also exports his products to countries outside India.

While **Kammaje** had to invest all his knowledge and foresight during these past

years into expansion and growth, he also spearheaded the initiative of establishing a pan India marketing and sales network, to distribute wrist watch straps and accessories. Under his leadership, the **Sona Group** has grown to occupy a leading position in strap manufacturing and supplies both to OEM and Replacement markets in India. The product portfolio covers a variety of straps for the watch industry, be they in steel or leather; gold plated or Ion plated; semi solid link, mesh or sheet metal. Thus, **Sona Group** serves as a “**One-Stop-Solution**” for straps required by the watch Industry and consumers. Not limiting himself to Indian markets he has acquired the international brand “**Banda**” with technical know-how for the manufacture of high- end leather straps, to cater to overseas markets.

Appreciations and Accolades

Conferred with several awards such as: “**Outstanding Performance Award**” in the year **2008** from **Titan Company Ltd.**, **Timex Award** for “**Best Leather Strap**” category for the years **2015** and **2016**, **TradePost** “**Technocrat of the Year 2006**” Award, **TradePost** “**Movers of Time**” Award **2010**, **Felicitation by the Watch Trade Federation 2018** and **TradePost Lifetime Achievement Award 2019**, among others, **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** continues to move on, on his **Journey of Time**.

Over Three Decades and Continuing to Count!....

Driven by his infectious zeal to succeed, over the past **3+ decades**, **Yajnanarayana Kammaje's Sona Group** has truly diversified and grown consistently as a leading contract manufacturer of watches and watch components for leading national and internationally renowned brands like **Titan, Fossil, Citizen, Timex** and **Maxima** to name just a few. Apart from being associated with over **300 national brands** as a provider of brand promotional watches, today **Sona Group** has expanded its presence in **Real Estate** as well.

On **6th May 2017**, **Team Sona** and its **Founder President & CEO**, Industrialist **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** organized a celebratory evening in **Bangalore** that was attended by Customers, Vendors, Associates, Employees and well-wishers on the occasion of completing **30 eventful years** in the service of the horological industry. For an **entrepreneur**, who commenced his bracelet making venture with very humble and modest beginnings **30+ years** ago, it was no easy game to not only walk up-hill and set up a Company which all along has been involved in doing healthy

business with its clients, but over these long and trying years established a name and a reputation for itself, which has not tarnished any, even for a single moment or day, in all these years, and in fact, has continued to maintain it steadfastly until this day.

The **Gentleman** we are referring to, is none other than the prosperous industrialist **Yajnanarayana Kammaje, Chairman** of the **Sona Group of Companies**, who has brought with him a very rich experience of the watchmaking industry, which he has utilized very gainfully to entrench his own Company, with a solid foundation, which has only grown stronger with the passage of time. A **Gentleman** given to the highest humility standards and levels of propriety coupled with kindness and concern for the people around him and those with whom he has associated all along these years, be they friends, family, employees or customers, he has lived his life as a man of stature, knowledge and integrity throughout his life. Hailing from a humble family he did not allow the deterrents stop him any from his **vision of realizing his goals in life**. A man of **simple living and high thinking** exemplifies **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** to the hilt.

Kicking off the Grand Function in celebration of the **Group's 30th Anniversary**, **Mihir Kharod, Editor-in- Chief** of the reputed **International Watch & Clock** magazine **TRADEPOST** traced the history of the industry and highlighted the fact that India is among the very few countries worldwide, with an industrial base in place, covering almost all aspects of the **Watch** industry, thanks to **HMT** to begin with, and later built upon by **TITAN** and others, followed by several **MNC** brands. He recorded the entrepreneurial zeal of **Sona Group** and the value it attached to vendor development in **Rajkot** as well as his long association with events of the industry. **TRADE POST** also presented a memento to **YNK** to mark the auspicious occasion.

Various guests spoke about the early professional life of **YNK** as a colleague at **HMT** and later on as an associate of **TITAN**. Prominent among these were: **Hari Rao, Retd. Sr VP, Titan, B.G. Dwarakanath, Retd. R&D Head, Titan, Shantaram, Retd. CMO, Titan and Jagannath, Retd. GM Marketing, HMT**. The talks also included snippets from decades of friendship. They spoke of the then prevailing scenario and how taking a plunge into Entrepreneurship in the late 1980's was indeed a very bold move to even try going ahead with. But, with both his sons **Dr. Ravi Kammaje** and **Gautham Kammaje** having returned to India after their academic pursuits abroad, and having begun to play an active role, it was an occasion to celebrate.



Sona Group 30 Years Celebration - Group of Management and Invitees

Representing **TITAN**, its **Chief Manufacturing Officer Raja Gopal** lauded the key role played by the **Sona Group** in the overall production plans of **TITAN** and shared statistics which established **TITAN** as the biggest customer of the **Group**. Watch Assembly forms a key part of this Industry and often not outsourced to contractors. It is to the credit of the **Sona Group** that they could prevail upon **TITAN** to deliver this service to them also for a select range of **TITAN's** projects.

Other key officers who could not attend the event due to the travel and schedule mismatch passed on their compliments and best wishes to **Sona Group**. **Fossil** was yet another customer who graced the occasion and **Rajesh Babu** received a memento on behalf of the Company.

Accepting the compliments on behalf of **Team Sona**, **YNK** traced the story of how a gap analysis in the market convinced him to take the plunge in 1987 and profusely thanked one and all who contributed to the **Group's** success. The Guests also got to listen to customized strategies all along. They also got a glimpse of the initial struggles of the **Company**, especially in obtaining funds and how financial systems have since changed in decades and now the Banks are even chasing the **Group** to extend funds to it. He made a special mention of the important Vendors in the **Group's** journey and hoped that **Sona** and its Vendors should be looking forward to decades of a fine working relationship and celebrating success jointly. A short film

about the inception of **Sona** was shown to the audience on the occasion, and is available for viewers to watch on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/hB4MntPyw8k>.

On this occasion, long serving employees were felicitated and a video based on interviews of employees was also released and viewable on - <https://youtu.be/TlIFgoiuUHY>.

As coincidence would have it, the event also coincided with the **40th marriage anniversary** of **Vasanthi Kammaje** with **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** as well, which added a further fervour to the eventful evening, and gave an occasion for all family members to also join the event. This and an interspersed dance and music entertainment programme, made it a memorable evening. On the occasion, the **Bangalore Horologist Association** presented a memento to the **Group** which was gratefully received. The Office Bearers also staged a **Mock Wedding Repeat** which was befitting the occasion. Various speakers mentioned about PSR (Personal Social Responsibility) shown by the Company's leaders after achieving success in its core operations. Few beneficiaries like Kidwai Cancer Institute and others thanked **Team Sona** for their support.

Finally, **Sona Group** thanked all those who attended the event as well as all those who passed on their Greetings for the occasion to **YNK** and were not able to attend the celebration due to travel and other schedule problems. To conclude the **Anniversary Celebrations**, **Sona Group** said, "We truly honour our relationship with all customers, vendors, employees and are equally grateful to all our well-wishers. The Group re-dedicates itself to serve the industry, continue socially responsible pursuits and looks forward to playing a key role in the future. We solicit your continued encouragement, support and guidance in our future journey as well."

An Entrepreneur who Created Entrepreneurs

One of the most praiseworthy traits about the personality of **YNK** is the fact that he is also an **Entrepreneur's Entrepreneur**. Although a highly successful industrialist on his own steam, he has done something that is generally very rarely seen, experienced or even witnessed. He is perhaps one of the only ones who has not only travelled to other watch making destinations of India to enable the horological industry of the country grow, such as **Rajkot** in Gujarat, he has also worked extremely hard on a personal level to get-to-know and place many **Rajkot's**

horological component manufacturers, help them come out of their home ground and establish themselves as responsible vendors of components to the big corporates based in other parts of India, including to his own **Sona Group** as well. This is a quality about **YNK**, which sets him apart from the rest, as while he likes to grow with time, he also encourages and ensures that the others engaged in the same industry also grow in their respective spheres of business activity, alongside. And to this extent not only has he succeeded with flying colours, but he also enjoys a very healthy and good relationship with each and all of them.

A Group that is Self-Automated

Today, with his son **Gautham Kammaje** having got involved full-time in the **Group's** business ventures along with his team comprising **Madhu Sudan, Radhakrishna** and **Vikram** in India, and his other son **Dr. Ravi Kammaje** working for the **Group's** products in the US, **YNK's Sona Group** has attained the status of having become **Self-Automated**. **YNK** has to now only oversee the Company's progress at large, without having to indulge much in its day-to-day operations, as it moves forward smoothly into the future and reaches even greater heights.

Yajnanarayana Kammaje – the Maverick of the Indian Horological Industry, speaks his mind.....

*In 1987, I was **DGM** at **HMT**. At that time, **HMT** used handmade metal straps. When other players like **Titan** entered the market, there was a rising demand for more sophisticated straps. I could sense a clear gap in terms of the availability and quality of these straps in the market. The opportunity beckoned, since plating on stainless steel was a big technology at that time. We harnessed the power of technology to provide this service. Then, there was no looking back. The journey started with plated straps, but soon we incorporated many verticals. We manufactured stainless steel straps for **Titan**. Business started growing. We improved our quality and services. We started manufacturing leather straps. There was one vision - we should have everything required to make watches under one umbrella. Finally, there was the integration of making a full watch. **Titan** gave us the opportunity of making some of the **Sonata** watches. There has to be trust and transparency. It started with **100,000** watches per month and now we even design select watches as well. Now, for **Sonata** and **Fastrack** our target is much much bigger. We have been mindful about the growth and opportunities that have come

our way. The liberalization of business in the early 1990's really opened up things for business. Easy availability of goods and transport facilities paved the way for more business. Our product features and quality had to compete with imported stuff, and that situation really honed us completely. That has made us rise to the occasion. **Titan** is the undisputed leader in the field of watches in India and we are bonded with them. There are many opportunities in this market. But I don't understand why other people have not entered this business. I don't find a sea change happening, except for the styles. I think that our organized market must avail of these opportunities in India as well as the world. Yet, there are issues that plague the market as well. Demand will be consolidated in time, as per my view. I think duplicity is also something that is also affecting our industry negatively. I don't understand why we are so silent about it!

*Smartwatches... They are very clearly impacting the industry. Most of the youngsters are wearing tech wearables. Many people don't use watches. Women still use watches as accessories, as compared to men. I think high-end watches would still be unaffected due to the brand value of country-specific brands.

*I hope the GST implementation is done with 100% sourcing. I also wish that in the SME sector we have compliance with the GST. The mindset of an Indian to pay taxes will have to start. It is only then, that we can have a level playing field. It is important to change the culture and attitude of the people. If you go to Germany or Japan, no one thinks of cheating to not pay taxes. But, here, in India, we have a different mentality. We think we have done a great thing by buying something without paying tax! Our reward and punishment systems are not in place. Meritocracy has to be rewarded, and non-performance punished. Digitalization has led to great progress and I feel it will effectively be changing the Indian ethos. I do hope that the Government integrates these aspects in the mindset of the people!

*We are growing at 10-15% year-on-year. I am also looking outward to explore opportunities. There are many possibilities. For example, we bought over a company based in China, with the understanding of taking over existing clients as well. That initiative has led to new inroads in the realm of straps manufacturing. If a similar opportunity presents itself for watches, I think it should hold great potential for the brand. I also see potential in the watch cases business. We are well equipped in India to handle manufacturing and supply to many countries the world over. We

are able to deliver quality at a good price. We are slowly getting established in the plating business for a few international brands such as **Fossil**. Our minds cannot stop, and we are constantly evolving and looking at opportunities. I am also plagued often by the question - when will India's brand value for watches be comparable to that which exists around the world? I think in India, we are satisfied quite easily, in the early stages! In China the philosophy is to conquer the world. As an industry, we need to work on that and have higher expectations of ourselves!

Hence, the journey has been long and fulfilling for the patriarch of the **Sona Group**. But, for the **Man with a Great Vision**, this is just the beginning. The road may be paved with different challenges now, compared to the ones in the past, but there is no stopping him and he never will!

The Sona Conglomerate Today.....

The **Sona Group** is an engineering conglomerate, catering to the Indian and International watch industry. Precision component manufacturing being the **Group's** forte, it enjoys high credibility amongst major watch manufacturers in India and abroad. This positioning is the result of the company's capability to deliver products with innovative designs and surpassing quality levels. The **Group** has well established state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities backed by a strong tool-room infrastructure. The group companies are the major source for **Titan Company, Timex, Fossil** and **Maxima** for more than a decade. **YNK** has had to place all his knowledge and foresight during these years into expansion and growth. He spearheaded the initiative of establishing a pan India marketing and sales network, to distribute wrist watch straps and accessories. The Company under his leadership went on to occupy a leading position in strap manufacturing and supplies both to OEM and replacement markets, in India. The product portfolio covers a variety of straps for the watch industry.

The entrepreneurial skills of **YNK** further enthused the company to build its own SPM machines needed for expansion. The design and machine building capability has furthered the progress of the company. Under **YNK's** leadership, the **Group** until date also trained around **10,000** unskilled workers to become skilled workers and to dedicate themselves into the service of society in a broader way. He set up the first only **“Women entrepreneur”** SSI unit at Attibele, in Bangalore District, for the most backward industrial belt to self-help the neediest of the area by employing

around 100 women. The Government of Karnataka realizing the above potential of the Company, approached **SONA** to start a **Women** only training program under the “**VISHWA**” scheme of **KSSIDC**.

Having gained substantial component design and manufacturing strengths, the Marketing skills of **YNK** have opened up yet another opportunity for the Company to foray into assembly and marketing of Watches under corporate gifting and contract manufacturing to OEM manufacturers. The successful entrepreneurship is the result of his past tenure with many reputed organizations in India where **Yajnanarayana** held various senior management positions. Project management and marketing became his strength. He has also shouldered the initial assignments in the area of R&D, Production and Corporate Planning. Overall, the combined experience spans over 40 years. The successful professional career path is the result of his distinguished educational background, where he emerged as a topper in both M.Tech. (Industrial Electronics) and B.E (Electrical).

Yajnanarayana Kammaje - The Philanthropist

As yet another un-missable part of his overall personality, **YNK** has also occupied himself in many philanthropic activities by devoting some of his time to a few Trusts which are engaged in providing education and financial support to economically weaker sections of the society. Since its inception, **Sona Group** has fulfilled its social responsibilities contributing to the welfare of its employees, their families and other social needs. In his personal capacity as well, he supports the higher education of deprived students through many scholarships. If one is to take a look at the innermost qualities of **YNK** as a **Good Samaritan**, the list of what he has done in the past and what he continues to do even today, the list is endless. He has lifted the lives of close to a thousand lesser educated women from the clutches of stark poverty and provided them with the means of livelihood. He has achieved all this by providing them with the necessary training and jobs at his factories, enabling them to earn a regular income for themselves and their families. As a matter of fact, some of them have even become entrepreneurs and are today regular and respected vendors to the **Group**. He has also provided training and employment to many educated youth, particularly from **NITK**, who were not picked up by any Company during campus interviews. He set up incubation centres to encourage Fresh Start Ups and also brought many budding entrepreneurs into the limelight. **YNK** has worked relentlessly towards establishing the **NITK Alumni Association** and to give it a strong foundation since the completion of his Post Graduation. Fifteen years of his leadership as the **President of Global Alumni** were very crucial in

providing this body with the right direction. **NITK Suratkal** has conferred the “**Distinguished Service Award 2010**” on him for significant contribution towards his Engineering College by planting thousands of trees, his initiative for a Green Environment. Besides all of these humanitarian traits that indeed glorify and underline his philanthropic side, is the help he has provided to his village in **Dakshina Kannada** in terms of the social uplifting of several downtrodden, by way of education, schools, scholarships, financial assistance, renovation of temples etc. The most distinguished “**Aryabhatta International Award**” was also conferred upon him in the field of **Social Services** during the year 2009.

To sustain long-term business and the company's financial health, one has to think of diversification even in a situation like the present day economic slowdown. **YNK** has successfully achieved this by promoting a manufacturing company (Distinct Productivity Solutions) of high precision machined components exporting to European countries. Even though people around **YNK** are proud of the many achievements of their leader, conceit has not touched him at all, and in fact, has stayed miles away from him. A very humble, kind-hearted and lovable person whose concerns for the lesser privileged are exemplary, all through his life he has not only trusted people around him, but he has also taken many risks, although with a cautious approach. **YNK** is also endowed with a terrific sense of humour, which is most-of-times displayed very discreetly and suavely. Today, he perhaps does not have the time to look back and be content with past laurels, because he is kept busy and engaged focusing on the wellbeing of the society around him, his employees, his customers, his Alma Mater, his Alumni and of course, his own family too. Understanding the ideals in life followed by **Yajnanarayana Kammaje** is not easy for anyone to be able to do or even begin to emulate, because he is a **Karmayogi** in the truest sense. He personifies more than just excellence in action; for him work itself transforms into worship, not just for self, but for societal good! Having turned **70** some time ago, an occasion celebrated by the **Sona Group** employees with simplicity, they all got together and wished him a happy future and growth for the **Group** in the coming years.

“Simplicity is complex. It's never simple to keep things simple. Simple solutions require the most advanced thinking.”

~Richie Norton~



CHAPTER 11

Reproduction of letters from contributors

1) Contribution from BG Dwarakanath

Executive Coach. Former COO, Titan Company

ಭೂರ್ಭವಸ್ತುಸ್ತುರುಸ್ತಾರಃ ಸವಿತಾ ಪ್ರಥಿತಾಮಹಃ |
ಯಜ್ಞೋ ಯಜ್ಞಪತೀರ್ಯಜ್ಞಾ ಯಜ್ಞಾಂಗೋ ಯಜ್ಞವಾಹನಃ ||೧೧೬||

ಯಜ್ಞಭೃದ್ಯಜ್ಞಕೃದ್ಯಜ್ಞೇ ಯಜ್ಞಭುಗ್ಯಜ್ಞಸಾಧನಃ |
ಯಜ್ಞಾಂತಕೃದ್ಯಜ್ಞಗುಹ್ಯಮನ್ನಮನ್ನಾದ ಏವ ಚ ||೧೧೮||

ವಿಷ್ಣುಸಹಸ್ರ ನಾಮ



YAJNA for me

*Bhoorbhuvasvasta-rustarahsavitaprapi-tamahah |
Yagno yagna-patir-yarjvayagnango yagna-vahanah || "104"
Yagna-bhruityagnakrutyaageeyagnabhuk yagna-sadhanah |
Yajna-ntakrut yagna guhyam anna mannadaeva-cha || "105"*

The moment I recite these two shlokas from the *Vishnu Sahasra Nama*, another name YAJNANARAYANA automatically comes to my mind. While I would not go into the details of the shloka, the summary is that Yajna means Omnipresent, *Sarvantharyami Bhagawantha* (Supreme Power) in the form of knowledge of all forms. As the name suggests, our Yajna too is present in many *avatars* and has occupied almost all the possible areas that one could think of in one's Life - a Technocrat, a Technologist, an Entrepreneur, a Social worker, an HR expert, a People's man, Religious worker, Philanthropist..... the list is endless.

While many of his friends and colleagues would have written about Yajna's achievements, I would like to share a few instances / anecdotes where Yajna has demonstrated his Stamp of Excellence.

He joined our R & D team at HMT Watch Factory in 1974 and was perhaps the first Electronics Engineer to join and therefore all eyes were on him. His first assignment was to attend to one of the shop floor production machines that was used to remove the imbalance in the oscillating balance wheel mechanism. The machine had frequent failures and electrical experts were breaking their heads to solve the problem. Yajna, after two or three days of study, solved the problem with some modifications in the circuit board as well as by ensuring proper earthing of the delicate machine. Soon he became the reason for many Red Eyes in the maintenance department.

He was always a 'ready to help' man. His brand new Priya Scooter purchased in 1977 (rare commodity at that time) was readily available to me for my use while many owners at that time would not even allow others to touch their scooters! His confidence in others is another trait. He left his Fiat car under my care for months when he was travelling abroad. It is obvious that I used the car for many miles.

He was the blue-eyed boy of IK Amitha, Big Boss of HMT Watch Division and therefore moved to HMT Watch Directorate in 1980 along with IKA to take care of Corporate Planning and new projects. Amitha's confidence in Yajna was so high that the responsibility of establishing the QAW Project was entrusted to him. Whether it is coordination with the Department of Electronics or Semi-Conductor Corporation at Delhi during the tough Licence Raj days, or visits to overseas organisations like Citizen and Hitachi, the team was never complete without Yajna being in the team. His meticulous planning and execution skills are what have made him what he is today.

He knew the art of picking the right people and I am glad that he considered me as one right fit in the QAW project. He even went to the extent of asking Amitha to speak to Namadeva Rao, GM of HMT WF at that time, in a forceful tone to ensure that I was released from the Watch Factory overnight to join the new QAW project. This paved a different story for my career in the watch Industry.

In 1985 I joined Titan and within two years of joining Titan, I got an offer from our supplier cum great friend Majithia of Sonic Straps to join him or recommend someone else to establish strap making facilities in and around Bangalore. Knowing the entrepreneurial qualities of Yajna, the first name that came to my

mind was obviously that of Yajna. A small introductory meeting of less than an hour with Majithia at Hotel Rama in Lavelle Road paved the way for what was to follow. The confidence level of Majithia was so high that he did not even discuss anything about investment or fees! On the contrary, within two days of getting back to Baruch, Majithia dispatched the complete line of gold plating equipment required for Gold Plating on stainless steel straps. Yajna was in for a surprise and the poor guy had to run around a lot to get the same cleared at Bangalore - Tumkur Road Toll gate in the early hours of a cold morning. Thus, the First Baby steps of Yajna as an "INDUSTRIALIST" were taken in 1987 by way of setting up the Gold Plating unit at NS Palya - Bannerghatta Road, aptly called "SONA PLATING".

The technical assistance from Majithia was an exceedingly small step that lasted only a very few years. It is Yajna's vision, strategy, planning, commitment, the art of picking the right people and the desire to help the needy, what I specifically call as "KY TRAITS" that are the ones that stand out as critical success factors for the formation of the "SONA Group". The only and the big mistake Yajna has done is that of not offering equity shares of the Sona Group to his close friends and associates! A great loss.

JRD Tata had said many decades back – "Making money for oneself is different from creating wealth for the Nation." How true this is, and our Yajna has followed this to the core in addition to JRD's values and ethics. His diversified wealth creation of industries that takes care of job needs of hundreds of poor people and the charity work that he does stand tall. His involvement in the restoration of Guru Narasimha Temple at Saligrama in South Canara is one such example of the many. He has always cared for his friends and has helped them on many occasions. Recently our common friend since 1970's, BN Yalamalli wrote a book on Watches that was made available in e-form only, on Amazon. Yajna, without anyone asking for it, came forward to print 1000 copies of the book and distributed the same among the watch fraternity, business associates and friends as a New Year Gift. What a great gesture it is.

I envy the support Yajna has always received from his family, especially his wife Vasanthi - I think the culture of entrepreneurship is in their blood!

Hope it is not out of place if I say that Vasanthi brought good luck, she was the good



luck charm, alias the Lakshmi Devi to Yajna's Saraswathi blessed family. She took ten long years, 1977 – 1987, to convert him from a monthly salaried man to an entrepreneur! Wish she had married him much earlier.

An office mate of 1974 becomes a great friend (I took his wedding photos too in 1977), a boss in 1981 and then a key vendor to Titan in 1988, where I was working. What a journey and what a transformation indeed.

Often, we say that a good leader should “WALK the TALK”. Here is a simple and humble person called Yajna Narayana Kammaje whose “WALK” is so good that others “TALK” about his “WALK” – “TALK THE WALK”.

Finally, Dear Yajna, I appreciate your outstanding leadership and great contribution to Society. I wish Yajna, his family, and THE SONA Group the absolute best and greater success than what they have already achieved.

God Bless.

BG. Dwarakanath

2) Contribution from Harish Bhat

Profilic Author, Brand Custodian, Tata Group

Successful entrepreneur, invaluable partner, wonderful person



Yajnanarayana Kammaje is one of the finest people I have engaged and interacted with. I first met him when I was Chief Operating Officer of the Watches business in Titan Company. I watched him speak, and admired him for his views, which were always positive, enthusiastic and well considered. I watched him partner our business, which he did with great dedication and commitment. I watched him conduct himself with great professional and personal dignity, and with a rare humility, which I found particularly impressive, for an entrepreneur who has done so much, and achieved great success.

Yajnanarayana's SONA Group of companies, which began its journey with gold plating of watch straps, but later became a manufacturer of watches, stainless steel and leather straps as well, is an example of an organisation which has achieved a unique and respected position amongst vendor partners of Titan. He has enabled this through a sharp focus on quality of very high standards, on modern cost-effective operations, and, most importantly, through his growth mindset. An integral part of this mindset is his great hunger to learn, and be in step with the latest technology, to deliver the best products which could match and exceed the quality of imports. His visits to global watch technology fairs are a good illustration of his constant appetite for new knowledge.

I recall an episode from the Annual Vendor Meet of Titan, several years ago. I had just completed a presentation to all our vendor partners, about the growth voyage ahead of us, setting out a target of achieving sales of more than 15 million watches within the next five years. This was a significant growth target, more than doubling our sales base in a highly competitive industry. Yajnanarayana met me immediately after this session, to say how enthused he was with this ambition, and how he would ensure that his own company met every single requirement to support Titan in this growth. A few months later, he also briefly discussed with me the specific steps he had taken to prepare for such growth. And I do know that he made this a reality, over the next few years.

I have also seen and followed Yajnanarayana's activities and progress through two other lenses. He is a good friend of my uncle, M.N. Kamath, and through him I have understood the social side of Yajnanarayana, including his contributions to various important spheres and causes. He is also a senior alumnus of KREC (now NIT), Surathkal, the same institution where my wife, Dr. Veena Bhat, graduated from, several years after him. Hence, I have had the opportunity to see the active role that he has played in the alumni affairs of his College, despite all the other work pressures on his time. His indefatigable energy and enthusiasm, which enables him to undertake so many initiatives so fluently, are indeed impressive.

I also know Yajnanarayana as a deeply spiritual person, who is committed to following principled values in his life and in the businesses that he has founded. For this reason alone, he can serve as an inspiration to many young entrepreneurs who wish to build good and sustainable businesses in the years ahead.

May I take this opportunity to thank Yajnanarayana for all his contributions to Titan, and to society at large, and wish him and his family members all the very best for good health, happiness and fulfilment in the years ahead.

Harish Bhat

Editor's note: Harish Bhat is a prolific writer. Some of the books authored by him are #*Tata Stories: 40 Timeless Tales to Inspire You*, *TATA LOG: Eight Modern Stories from a Timeless Institution*, *The TATA saga*, *The Curious Marketer: Expeditions in Branding and Consumer Behaviour*, *Tata Indica*, *Tata Steel Wins the Deming Prize*, *An Extreme Love of Coffee: A Novel*, *Tanishq Sets the Gold Standard*, *Building the Greatest Company in the World (Co-authored with RM Lala)*. We strongly recommend these books for those interested in corporate history. In *TATA Log*, as aptly mentioned in the book, as per the English meaning of the word LOG, it records some of the major initiatives of the Tata group that throws light on the “Tata Way”. And as per the Hindi interpretation of Log, “the people”, it talks about the wonderful characters associated with these projects. It chronicles ten major stories to show the PIONEERING, PURPOSIVE, PRINCIPLED, striving for PERFECTION. One of the chapters has the story of Titan, their forays into the watch and later jewellery business and the creation of the iconic brand. The concept of Karatmeter to show the purity of the gold used can be considered a breakthrough idea and important milestone that changed the trajectory of the company. We are tempted to call it the “Titan moment”.

Seeing a parallel, the Editors feel that the investment into the IP gold plating machinery at the right time, at the right cost and as a calculated business risk can be considered as the “Sona Group moment” in the history of the company.

3) Contribution from BN Yalamalli

Author, Expert in design & quality in Horology

All at Ease with Yajnanarayana Kammaje



The only colleague among thousands in my 40 year-long career in the East and West, with whom I was all at ease, without an iota of professional jealousy, was Mr Yajnanarayana. The credit goes to him for sure, because I just act as a mirror of any relationship. He came into my career in 1973 when I was surrounded by dry and formal colleagues in a public sector, with very few exceptions. This smart, fair and smiling young man from South Kanara, a post-graduate from my dream institution, Surathkal Regional Engineering College, now NIT, entered. I am a neutral person regarding religion, caste, language and region but I have no hesitation in mentioning that South Kanara is really secular. That must have been the first cleared inhibition. And he was a down to earth professional and there was no sound but authentic music from him. He was unhesitating in asking what formalities were there in the public sector that he was unaware of. We soon became friends outside the office also.

We both were bachelors then. He had a family with a respected father, a brother and a sister, all with a freely mixing nature just like his. Soon he got married to a girl from a well to do family, a post-graduate too, but much simpler than him. In fact he got married somewhere in South Kanara and I was an important organiser for the marriage reception in Bangalore. I was quite close to his father, an old retired pious person practising astrology as a hobby. He used to even comment on our futures, unsolicited.

Yajnanarayana was bound to have success in whatever he touched. Destiny is only a logic which cannot deny ground conditions. Yajna was a very open, free person without mixing any politics whatsoever, in any of his actions. His acts were purely objective without any subjective or vicious designs. Negativity had no place in his bright outlook. He had no inhibition to enter any issue, any meeting. And he was adept at swallowing unfavourable reactions and disappointments without openly expressing displeasure. That is why he could survive and excel too in the public

sector, and with a public sector-like private sector too. He had no godfather in his family nor in the company he was working in. He took up the task of starting Electronic Watches at HMT, for the first time in the country too, when Electronics was just a mandatory subject for us in our final year Engineering. He was a very junior officer entrusted to handle the great venture in collaboration with Citizen Watch Company of Japan. All executives in HMT were like the Administration Managers accompanying the Indian sportsmen to the Olympic Games during earlier regimes. A public sector organisation will have its own protocols. One person superior to him had to be appointed, and Yajna did the complete process of hiring, including interviewing his own boss, a Doctorate in Electronics Engineering.

Throughout my career of 40 years in India and abroad, I have been accused of not having developed an effective second line. I had the bad habit of drawing more work on my shoulders. My explanation was that my work demanded versatility and a variety of skills. I had somehow managed to acquire them, but it was hard to find that in my subordinates who were picking up the stuff and skills slowly. I had noticed Yajna as a totally different and unique person in a public sector. He recruited 12 or 14 Engineer Trainees under him. Of course, his project was big. But that openness and HR activity was very rare to see in PSU executives at that time. He trained them and utilised their services well. They all have become very important Management Executives in the Indian Watch Industry. I noticed the semblance of our mentor Mr. IK Amitha in him with regard to his concern about people. He led the HMT Quartz Analog Watch project as a person at the helm in spite of other seniors around him with higher designations, and achieved success in its implementation. The implementation of the project was smoother and quicker compared to earlier projects at HMT, thanks to the cool and professional handling by Yajna. He established and made the organisation roll smoothly, established the second line and resigned after 16 years.

His personal endeavour was calling him. While he was still at HMT, an NRI friend had offered him to take over a running manufacturing process unit and he had readily accepted the challenge and his wife ran the unit until he resigned from HMT. Joining it in full throttle, he developed that single unit into a five-unit group of industries with 800 workers and nearing Rs. 200 crores turnover in 30 years until Covid -19 struck and hindered the gallop. He, being an Electronics PG was

managing a mechanical manufacturing industry successfully through utilisation of technical knowledge and skills of subordinate experts, by efficient handling and reaching the buyers' market, commencing from entry supplies and losses, and rising to numero uno supplier through his patience and perseverance. His main aim was to provide employment to poor people. And once he earned a lot of money it turned into charity to various needy sections of society.

We did not stay colleagues even for a decade, but our friendship will reach a half century mark soon. We took different directions in pursuing our careers and came back into contact after my return to India. And just recently I learnt that the reason behind that tolerant temperament and society oriented excessive charity was his hard times as a student. He never let me get the smell of it when we were together in those early years. He is not at all a person cursing his destiny or others, and takes life facing it with its horns and manages to stay unhurt. I consider it my privilege to have such close friendship with a kind and resourceful person like Yajnanarayana Kammaje. May his tribe increase!

B. N. YALAMALLI

4) Handwritten letter from Dr. Puthuraya Author, Professor Emeritus in medical education

Words of Appreciation and Admiration



Bangalore

Date: 14-11-2020

There are three types of people in this world - who never dreams, who only dreams and who converts their dreams into a reality. Sri Yajnanarayana Kamraje belongs to the third group. Hailing from a very modest family, he dreamt of achieving something in life, which should be useful to his society as well. Thus, he started 'SONA' group of Industries and emerged as a successful entrepreneur giving employment to more than 800 people. As a President and CEO of this Industry, he helped hundreds of people by providing them jobs, training as well as education to their children. He gave new life to hundreds of poor, illiterate women as well. To achieve this, he worked hard and came up step by step in life and not by lift. Poverty is not unknown to him. Hence he can always understand the feelings and problems of poor people without a delay. By nature, he is a cool, composed, simple, humble and soft spoken person. He is known for his generosity and kindness and offered financial assistance to several temples, religious institutions, hospitals and his organizations involved in social service. As a philanthropist, he distributed scholarships to the merited poor students and donated liberally to the needy. As a person, he is undoubtedly a very good human being with a passion to uplift the poor and serve his society and nation. In recognition of his meritorious services, several state, national awards and citations have been conferred on him. To name a few - Central Govt award India SME 100, Technocrat of the year, mover of time, category winner award Golden Indian Entrepreneur, Anja Bhat award Distinguished Service award etc. In one word, he is not only an individual, but an institution with a vision and mission. In spite of all his achievements and accomplishments, he is not after any publicity or propaganda. As we know, there are three types of people in his society - one who performs and informs, one who only informs, but never performs and the third who never informs, but keeps on performing. YNAK belongs to the third group. For he knows, it is not important, how long you live, what is important is how you live! He is living a purposeful, productive, life which is helpful and exemplary to many. It is an honour and pleasure to be his friend over decades. My Almighty bless him with Longevity, health and happiness.

With Best wishes

R.P. Puthuraya
DR. K.P. PUTHURAYA

5) Contribution from Prof. PN Singh

Former Principal & Director of KREC/NIT-K

My Acquaintance with Yajnanarayana

When Yajnanarayana completed his B. Tech and M. Tech degrees from KREC, I was a faculty member in the department of Chemical Engineering and was on deputation for higher studies. I had no avenue to meet YNK. During the year 1986-87, I was looking after the works of Convener of the Silver Jubilee Celebration Committee. The Alumni of the Institute had decided to build a SILVER JUBILEE AUDITORIUM for their Alma Mater, the foundation stone for which was laid in 1985. Funds were not coming. I requested some of my senior colleagues to visit Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore to raise funds for the auditorium from our alumni. My colleagues informed me that Yajnanarayana helped them at Bangalore.



I became the Principal of KREC, and later Director of NITK in 1997 and 2002 respectively. During 1998, I was informed by the Security personnel of the college that some of our students were sleeping on the terrace of our academic building. I called the students and asked them the reasons for sleeping on the terrace of the college at night. They informed me that they were very poor. They did not get any scholarship, and their parents were not able to meet the hostel fees. I tried to get a bank loan for them, but I failed. That was when I came in touch with our senior alumni, and one of them was Yajnanarayana. I narrated the entire story to YNK and persuaded him to do something. Soon he called a meeting of the local alumni and he requested them to create a corpus fund and raise money to help poor and needy students. In that meeting, YNK felt that the alumni association was in dormancy and needed to be awakened and reorganized, which he did commendably. He contributed substantially from his own money to the corpus fund to help the needy students and solicited his seniors and juniors to jointly build the fund. He was the President of the Global Alumni Association of KREC / NITK for many years. During his tenure as President of the Association, it was decided that the Global

Alumni Association should meet at least once in two years at the campus of the Institute. In the process, he energized and synergized Alumni Association activities.

Role of Alumni and YNK in Transforming KREC to NITK

KREC was affiliated to various universities in the region, from time to time. The constraints faced by KREC in its affiliating mode was well known, in view of the rigidity of the system to change with time. This was observed by several High Power Committees constituted by the MHRD of the GoI. In engineering and technical education, the pace of obsolescence is much faster, requiring continuous curriculum renewal and academic innovation. The Board of Governors of KREC was in favour of converting KREC to a Deemed to be University, as suggested by the High Power Committees.

During 2001-2002, YNK was appointed a member of the Governing Council. Since then, he had been regularly involved in the activities of the Institute. KREC was facing several administrative hurdles to get transformed to a Deemed to be University status, since it was not meeting all the requirements as stipulated by the MHRD and UGC. It was at that time that Yajnanarayana along with Umar Teekay took the lead to help the Institute to cross all hurdles by getting the VTU law amended and getting the No Objection Certificate from the Govt. of Karnataka, so that KREC could be awarded a Deemed to be University status, which happened on June 26, 2002. But for the involvement of the alumni, it would have delayed getting the Deemed to be University status to KREC.

Prof. P N Singh

6) Contribution from Dr. K. Ullas Karanth

Reputed Environmentalist & Tiger Researcher, NIT-K alumnus

Yajnanarayana Kammaje: Engineering For Humanity



Although I have known Yajna from 1971, I can claim to have been his good friend only in the last one decade. At KREC at Surathkal, each of us moved around in very different 'social networks.' Yajna was a hard-working, bright student who attained academic excellence in whatever he touched. Soon after joining KREC (now NITK), I had, however, lost all interest in engineering and started regretting that I had chosen this path. While my childhood passion for wildlife and nature often made me dodge classes to hike and wander in the forests of Nagarahole or Kudremukh, Yajna pursued his chosen field of technology with rare passion, attaining high academic ranks and scoring big wins. I was academically in the bottom 10% of my engineering class cohort. Yajna and other studious NITK scholars like him toiled hard with primitive tools like slide-rules, drawing boards and T-squares, while my own smaller network of hedonists concentrated on having as much fun as possible.

After Yajna and I graduated, our career paths diverged and we never met for the next four decades!

It was thanks to the intricate web of the NITK Alumni Association, woven together with much diligence by the likes of the irrepressible Sathyanand Karanth, that we were able to reconnect.

I was blown away by this new self-confident, dashing and savvy Yajna I now encountered. He had accomplished so much over the years in his career: to reach senior management in a giant public sector company, only to give up that secure career to jump into a risky venture to become an entrepreneur. Yajna was essentially driven by a deep passion: to do good for the society by creating new jobs for the youth.

Yajna, the dedicated Horologist with the necessary micro-vision, had also developed a farsighted, global view of the society at large. He had a clear idea of the role of engineers in nation building as well as a deep empathy for fellow human beings. He has strived hard to make the world a better place for all of us.

While I cannot possibly recount here details of the many challenges Yajna overcame to attain this level of eminence, his ability to recognize merit and accomplishments in other arenas also demonstrates the vision he gained from his own struggles and successes.

As President of the Alumni association, during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of NITK in 2010, Yajna and his team selected and honoured many 'old students' (a label we used in college) who had made significant contributions to the field. Two from my cohort were oddballs among those recognized: late Prakash Kamath whose career choice had taken him away from electrical engineering to tribal welfare in remote central India, and I, who had chosen to escape from mechanical engineering into wildlife biology and conservation!

Another example of Yajna's generosity of spirit revealed itself when I opened my Kannada newspaper a few months ago. There was a picture of Yajna and his lovely wife Vasanthi, standing in front of a decorated luxury bus. While most other employers had abandoned their workers to their fate when Covid-19 lockdown struck, Yajna had cared deeply enough to take care of them. He had even hired luxury buses to ferry them to their homes in the far corners of India safely.

Fortunately, after Yajna and I reconnected in 2010, we have become close friends, meeting quite often and even sharing some new family connections. While Yajna remains a deeply religious man, I notice one positive change in my old friend: his spirituality now includes some of the spirits I too love, making our meetings all the more enjoyable.

I wish Yajna and his entire family all the very best in the years to come!

Dr. K. Ullas Karanth

7) Contribution from Gopala Bhupal

Gopala Bhupal is chairman, Karthik group of Companies (www.karthikgroup.com) and served on the Board of Governors of NITK and is ex- Global President of NITKSAA, SURATHKAL



My Memories with Shri Yajnanarayana Kammaje

It is my pleasure to say a few words about a person who is always tall in his thinking and who had supported the Alumni Movement (NITKSAA) from scratch to this level.

My association with him started in 1996 in the formative days of NITKSAA and involved in the movement of NITKSAA through social networking for a period of 15 years from 1995 to 2010. His motivation has made me get involved in the affairs of the Alumni Association and he motivated me to take more responsibility. He encouraged me to become the Board Member of NITK from 2005 to 2010 on the Industry quota. If I was not thus motivated to get involved with the alma mater I would not have taken up such a leadership role. He was like a godfather to many of us. By his encouragement, I took over as President of NITKSAA and he stood with me for the transformation of the Alumni setup and its activities. During his tenure as Board member I have seen many transformational decisions being taken for the alma mater and for the welfare of its supporting staff. Even today many of the employees who have retired remember him for his support in the Board of NITK in getting them their pensions.

I have seen many facets of Yajnanarayana, his involvement in many social activities, and his helping the growth and support to startups. After his career at HMT, he started watch strap and quartz watch manufacturing setups, employing the poorest of poor women, and made it a successful entrepreneurship.

His thoughts, vision and philosophy are a guideline for many youngsters. He built a scholarship fund by collecting from the alumni, and today it helps many NITK students.

I have associated with him during the Global conventions 1st to 4th where I have seen his meticulous planning and implementing. Many guest lectures were arranged by him. In all these Global conventions he has honoured many a successful alumni in the field of Industry, Profession and Defense. His heart beats for the Alma Mater and its alumni members. He cherishes the memories of his stay at College to the present institutional level growth of the Institute.

He has been instrumental in getting many reforms introduced at the Institute, during his tenure as Board member of NITK and as President of NITKSAA.

With warm regards

GOPALA BHUPAL

8) Contribution from Ranjan Moodithaya

Former Scientist at NAL, NIT-K Alumnus

Why Fear to Fly ?

“An empty pocket teaches you a million things in life, but a full pocket spoils you in a million ways“ -- a popular saying which is true in most cases, but not in the case of Yajna. Kammaje Yajnanarayana Herle, Yajna for us, is an extraordinarily compassionate, but simple human being, difficult to put inside a boundary of words. His rags to riches story is a model for youngsters, but one thing is for sure – he has not changed to his friends and family in spite of his riches.



I met Yajna in the early 70's, when he was a student and I found him an extremely intelligent, witty, straightforward and committed young man. Coming from similar backgrounds, we became good friends immediately.

One distinctive character which youngsters should emulate from Yajna is his risk taking ability. He would take calculated risks instead of operating from the comfort zone, which most of us do. His favourite quote used to be, “One can't fall below the ground, so why the fear of trying to go higher?”

That doesn't mean that he would take risks unnecessarily. As a young man, he would try for a better tomorrow, but would not compromise with his principles and integrity. He joined ECIL, Hyderabad, left it within two weeks since he didn't like the work environment. He then joined the department of Industries and Commerce of the State Govt, and resigned since he felt that it would be difficult to maintain integrity. (I remember that everyday he would come in the evening and speak about the files in which he could clearly see misappropriations, and say. “This is not for me, I can't be at peace in such a job!”) Later he joined HMT and the rest is well known.

Commitment was Yajna's strong characteristic even those days. Once committed, he would plan and strive to honour it the best possible way. He would compromise time, sleep and such trivials for fulfilling the commitment.

Compassion was another hallmark of Yajna. Compassionate towards family, co-

workers, staff, friends and to the society in general. Even during the early days, his concern for fellow beings was evident. His lectures and teaching to a student who was staying with us in 1974 definitely had good effect. The boy has achieved an honourable place in the society today. I have seen many such instances of his compassion. I happened to be in his office on a festival day. He returned from his factories and made a statement showing his hands: "I am very happy with these hands today." Then he explained: "Today these hands distributed lakhs to my staff as bonus. It was worth it, to see happiness on their faces." I could see the happiness and satisfaction on his face too.

A habit which should be adopted by all youngsters is Yajna's proper time utilization. I have never seen him wasting even a second when he is awake, always utilizing time in a useful and constructive way. I have never seen him gossiping or daydreaming even those days. He rarely had time for parties, movies and other entertainment even in the younger days, always on the path to pursue his dreams. This trait along with his focused and planned approach to the problem at hand, have been the foundation of his successful endeavours. Another wonderful quality is his faith in his co-workers, and delegation of activities. One of our friends used to work more than 12 hours a day, six days of the week. Yajna used to tell him, "You don't know to delegate work or you don't trust your staff. That's why you overwork!"

His capability to bring together persons with similar interest for mutual benefit is phenomenal. Whether it was the KREC Alumni Association, or the Watch industry meets, many entrepreneurs would have benefitted by his skills and association.

It will be incomplete if we don't mention Yajna's partner, viz, his life partner. But for the support of Smt. Vasanthi, Yajna could not have become what he is today. Like any common housewife if she had objected to his risky ambitions, I just can't imagine where Yajna would have been today. She has managed the family, kids, guests, and everything on the home front so that Yajna could be free to focus on his goals and ambitions. The analogy can be that of Smt. Sudha Murthy & Narayana Murthy. She has supported all his endeavours.

It is rare to find a gem like Yajna. We all consider ourselves lucky that we are his friends. We pray to the Almighty for his good health and life so that he can continue to serve the society for many more years.

Ranjan Moodithaya

9) Contribution from Prof. (Dr.) Sandeep Sancheti

*VC of Marwadi University, Rajkot,
Former Director of NIT-K*



Prof. SANDEEP SANCHETI

Ph.D (U.K). FIETE, FIE(I) MIEEEE Vice Chancellor

&

Ex-President – Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi



December 01, 2020

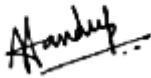
A Champion of Alumni

A proud and privileged alumnus of NITK, Surathkal, he launched the First Electronic Quartz watch in India and established various companies under the Sona Group umbrella. Later, he set up the first Only Women Entrepreneur SSI unit. He is well known for being an active entrepreneur, academician, administrator and philanthropist who always led by example. As a human with compassion, in his personal capacity he supports higher education of deprived students through many scholarships and is also a job provider, particularly for those at the bottom of the pyramid in the society. He belongs to the 1971 Electrical batch and has been the dynamic Past President of KREC / NITK Alumni Association. Yes, the proud man of such distinguished achievements is our KRECian, Shri Yajna Kammaje.

He has also been responsible for providing the necessary impetus for the growth of the NITK alumni movements over the years. After my appointment as the Director NITK, it was he and his team who contacted me even before my joining the institute in 2006 to start discussing various plans they had in the pipeline and also arranged an alumni interaction programme, within one week of my joining at Cubbon Park in Bangalore which also gave me the first opportunity to meet the Chairman of our BoG. I have lots of fond memories of discussions with Shri Yajna Kammaje on wide ranging issues both inside the formal bodies like BoG or otherwise with the Alumni Association on other important institutional issues. Through his unrelenting efforts, he has been instrumental in setting up beach side facilities, tree plantations, new chapters of Alumni, regular annual and global Alumni meets, Alumni awards, and establishing a proper functional structure of the Alumni body.

His works and contributions in the form of fund raising, inviting dignitaries, ensuring alumni participation etc., during the Golden Jubilee celebrations of NITK, Surathkal in 2009-10 were noteworthy. The grand success achieved in the Golden Jubilee was fully supported by the Alumni networks under his able leadership. He has also been a driven individual in contributing so much to his alma mater, and the society at large and has created an indelible memory amongst his peers. Being friendly, honest, responsible, forthcoming and adaptable are great traits that Mr. Kammaje will be well remembered for!

I wish Shri Yajna Kammaje continued and greater successes in all his endeavors and activities in life.



Dr. Sandeep Sancheti

10) Contribution from Prof.(Dr.) Gopal Mugeraya

*Director, NIT Goa. Former Director,
NIT-Agartala*



Salute to your vision

Namaskar!

It is my proud privilege to pen a few words about Shri. Yajnanarayana Kammaje lovingly called 'YAJNA'

I have been associated with Shri. Yajnanarayana for more than 25 years in different capacities. In fact Yajna, Karanth and Gopala Bhupala are three proud alumni ever responsible for the first three Global Alumni Conventions of KREC/NITK Surathkal where I had the privilege of serving as the Organizing Secretary.

Yajna is a competent Engineer, Expert Manager, perfect entrepreneur, above all a good human being. He is an Institution by himself. The type of unconditional love, affinity and affection he has shown to his Alma Mater is appreciated by all alumni.

He has spent his Money, Time, Energy and all his contacts to bring a corporate look to our NITK Surathkal campus.

I still remember when I was serving as the Director, he visited NIT Agartala and shared his experiences and thoughts among students.

Sir, we owe you a lot. Personally I am very close to Yajna for his pleasing personality. I learnt a lot from his Intellectual Interactions. I still remember the day, 26th December 1998 when he told me personally "Gopal, Attitude will determine your Altitude.....and one day I will see you as a Director in the NIT System." It happened so. He also added that an Idea which is conceived can be achieved if it is pursued. You are a visionary, I personally salute your vision.

Sir, we meet many people in our journey of life, each one has a role to play in our life... someone will test you, someone will teach you, someone will use you, someone will love you, someone will use you, someone will misuse you, someone will hate you but there are very few who will get the Best out of you.

It is said that, we have two LIVES in this beautiful world but the second begins when you realize you only have one.

In my life, Yajna is one among the people who brought the best out of me.

Sir, with these few words, I once again thank you and your lovely family, and the wonderful interactions we had in our journey of life. God bless you.

Namaskar

Jai Hind

Vande Mataram

11) Contribution from Dr. K. Balaveera Reddy

*Chairman Governing Council of NIT-K,
Former Vice Chancellor, VTU*



Yajnanarayana Kammaje: An Illustrious Alumnus

Kammaje hailing from Siddakatte at Bantwal Taluk comes from a rural and modest family background. He was an intelligent and studious student in school and college and got admitted to Karnataka Regional Engineering College (now called NITK, a Deemed to be University), Surathkal. He obtained Electrical Engineering degree in 1971 and later completed his Master's degree in Industrial Electronics in 1973, also from KREC/ NITK. He joined HMT Watch Factory in Bangalore as Electronics Engineer in 1974 and by his dedication and innovative approach to his job, got promoted as Deputy General Manager in 1990. He voluntarily resigned from the post of Deputy General Manager and ventured out to become an entrepreneur, achieving success through his acumen for quality and hard work.

He found his own company by name SONA, in the area of clocks and watches which established itself as a leader in the watch industry of India within a short time. He started with a plant for gold plating of watch straps at first, and then he became manufacturer of electronics quartz watches along with stainless steel and leather watch straps. He has also funded many ancillary units to set up and manufacture watch parts and components.

His acumen for business envisioned opportunities in the growing software field and pushed him into the software business in 1997 by starting Unisoft India Pvt. Ltd., at Bangalore. He has trained over 1000 fresh engineers, many of whom now have their own ventures. He has created opportunities for over a thousand downtrodden women by providing them a means of livelihood. This he could achieve by giving them proper training and also jobs at his own establishments.

The success of Yajnanarayana, one of our illustrious alumni, an entrepreneur who

opened up his heart to serve the society and the alma mater, was demonstrated over the last two decades through many of his actions: His involvement in pooling local alumni to create a corpus fund to help poor and needy students of NITK, serving as the President of the Global Alumni Association of KREC / NITK for many years; serving effectively as a member of the KREC Governing Council; taking a lead in setting up beach side facilities, tree plantation, starting new chapters of the Alumni at different places, conducting regular annual and global Alumni meets, initiating Alumni awards, and establishing a proper functional structure of the Alumni body for effective working.

I was pleased to know that he is bestowed with many distinguished awards for his outstanding achievements, like **“Global Man Award”** by **Bahrain Kannada Sangha**; the ***Trade Post*’ Technocrat of the Year** for the year 2006 and **'Mover of Time'** award in 2010; **“Outstanding Performer Award”** for the year 2008 by TITAN at Kuala Lumpur amongst 100+ major vendors; the most distinguished **“Aryabhata International Award 2010”** for the year 2009 in the field of Social Services; **“Distinguished Service Award 2010”** by NITK for significant contribution towards planting thousands of trees in the Campus; **“Category Winner Award”** in the watch field consecutively for three years from 2009 to 2012, to name a few.

A very humble, simple and soft-spoken person, Yajnanarayana has distinguished himself in the corporate field achieving many laurels in his life and also extending a helping hand to the needy in the society. I personally wish him the very best in all his ventures and also for his health.

Dr. K. Balaveera Reddy

12) Contribution from SP Kudva

Industrialist, NIT-K Alumnus

A perspective from a batch mate in engineering



“My life is a message” -Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Father of the Nation

As I look at Yajnanarayana-- fondly called “Yajna” -- among my batch mates and close friends' circle, I often get reminded of the above message, since he always believes in giving back to the society from where we have earned everything. Nevertheless, it is always easier said than done!

During college days nobody would have imagined that Yajna would scale such great heights in life, but the attitude and passion to earn a name and fame and share it with the society may have triggered such a scale. Frankly, I know him from close quarters, since I continued my contact and friendship with Yajna even post college days. Life was indeed a struggle during school days and that too securing an admission in a prestigious institution like Karnataka Regional Engineering College (KREC) in those days, without the so called “tuition” and that too in Electrical Engineering, was by itself a major achievement, as Electrical Engineering was the preferred option of toppers.

After completing his Master's at KREC, he joined Hindustan Machines Tools (HMT) as a trainee but the burning desire of converting a career option to entrepreneurship was lingering on in his mind. Of course, he had a comfortable position and cosy job at HMT which he gave up to start his own enterprise, and the rest is history! It is quite heartwarming to see that he grew up in his enterprise, earned a reputation as a global supplier for the horology industry, but with feet firmly on the ground and no airs about it. Perhaps this is the difference between an industrialist and a business man!

Contribution to the alma mater from where we passed out doing our engineering and where we learnt about values and character, is paramount to Yajna. He was never found wanting whenever the alma mater was seeking his guidance and help. Let me recall a small incident like the re-union of 1971 batch (our batch) in the college

campus in December 2019 when we could save an amount of Rs. 1.35 Lakhs. Being one of the members of the organizing committee, I was pondering on various options as to what to do with this left-over amount. Although Yajna was the main donor which in fact resulted in a major portion of this left-over money, he did not intervene. But then when we did not come to any conclusion, I naturally referred it to him and the spontaneous response was that we could donate it to the elementary school in the college campus itself. What a noble idea and gesture!

Of course, knowledge is power, but knowledge needs to be shared for the benefit of society and posterity! Whenever I interact with Yajna I get reminded of the couplet in the *Dasa Sahitya*: “*Kereya neeranu kerege chelliro*”, meaning to say that water drawn from the pond needs to be thrown back into the pond, which in other words has a hidden message that whatever we have drawn from society needs to be given back to society. Though I am so close to Yajna, frankly I have lost count of the awards that he has won for social service, philanthropy, upliftment of society and contribution to education and culture.

“The gift of the hand can be silver and gold, but the heart can give which neither silver nor gold can buy” – I have seen this attribute in Yajna, especially during the recent pandemic when he came in support of migrant labourers in his factory. Not only did he arrange for the safe passage of migrants to their destinations but also provided food and shelter for those who decided to stay back. For their return journey he had flights arranged for most of the labourers and for many it was perhaps a lifetime experience of flying!

Yajna is always available when any institution, may be a place of worship, a place of education, a place of culture, and society approaches him for guidance and direction. He was alumni president of KREC/NITK for well over ten years and contributed immensely in fund raising to take care of scholarships, assistance to deserving students of the lower strata of society, greenery of the college campus and not to speak of the trusteeship of the Shri Guru Narasimha Temple in Saligram near Udupi and continued with the trusteeship till the temple could sustain itself.

I am proud to be Yajna's batch mate and that reminds me again of one more quote:

“The woods are lovely dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.”

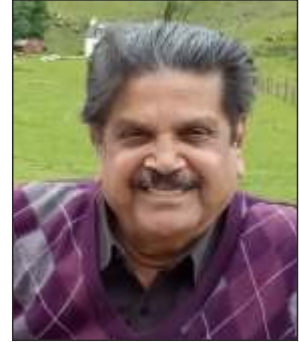
S. P. Kudva,
1971 Mechanical Branch
Karnataka Regional Engineering College.

13) Contribution from Hemanth D Pai

Banking Professional, NIT-K Alumnus

Heart of Gold

Sri Yajnanarayana Kammaje, more popularly known as Yajna, was born in a small village and had his basic education in a nearby Kannada medium school and did well in SSLC.



For the first time he had to study in English medium for his PUC, which was a big handicap, as he had to compete with other students, many of whom had their basic education in English medium. Notwithstanding this setback, he did well, getting 87% and secured admission at the prestigious engineering institution KREC (Karnataka Regional Engineering College) Surathkal, purely on merit. Being academically brilliant he secured the National Merit Scholarship for all the five years and got his BE degree, and in the same college pursued the M.Tech. course and completed the course with distinction.

While he was a brilliant student, he was also active in the sports field. On the college sports day he participated in the 10,000 mts race and finished 3rd with me finishing 2nd. Later it transpired that the person who got first place had actually run one round short, which meant he was behind us, but the mistakes of judges resulted in our getting one place lower than our rightful places.

He joined HMT and through hard work and commitment rose to the level of Dy. Gen. Manager. However, his burning ambition to achieve more and his enterprising spirit made him leave the job and set up his own unit, Sona Industries. He was an outstanding success and today has five units manufacturing various types of watches and straps, employing more than a 700 strong workforce with most of them being migrant labourers from Orissa, etc., besides providing indirect employment to many more.

He, like his brand name Sona, has a heart of gold, and during the lockdown he provided his workforce shelter and food at his own cost and also made arrangements, again at his own cost, for transportation to those migrant labourers to

their native place. Now after the reopening of his manufacturing units almost all these migrant workers have come back and have resumed work in his units.

Yajna is also a great philanthropist making substantial donations to many noble causes.

He has also taken the lead role in renovating many temples and is on the management board of several temples, actively participating in their affairs despite his busy schedule.

He has played a very active and stellar role in developing KREC Alumni Association, being its president for a number of years which has helped us alumni to continue our bond with our beloved alma mater. Apart from making substantial donations towards building/ upgrading infrastructure for the institution this has also helped in improving the environment by planting large number of fruit bearing trees in the college campus.

It is my privilege that such a great versatile personality was my classmate.

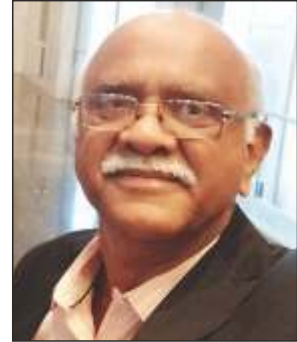
Hemanth D Pai

KREC(now NITK) - 1971 Electrical

14) Contribution from A.S. Karanth

Wind Energy Expert, Technocrat, NIT-K Alumnus

My association with Yajna



The first time I might have got associated with him was at an Alumni function in a resort outside Bangalore. Before that during college I have no memory of having met him, despite my being just a year ahead of him. I graduated in 1970, Yajna in 1971, both in Electrical Engineering. That Alumni programme headed by Yajnanarayana has stuck in my mind. He, after expressing the view that as Alumni, we need to give back something to the alma mater, led the path for all of us by announcing a scholarship fund for deserving economically weak students in the college. Interestingly, before the end of the programme, he asked Vasanthi, his wife, for the cheque book and wrote a cheque for Rs. one lakh and submitted it to the Alumni. It was a spontaneous act, providing the lead for others to follow. This collection drive helped accrue a corpus fund, and disbursement through a proper selection continued for many years.

In those days there were situations where students found it difficult to pay the monthly hostel fees which could deprive them of the meal coupons issued along with it. But with no paperwork, he got this permitted through the Alumni Treasurer at the College premises, to help such students as a temporary relief.

The Alumni Association was run with deep involvement and commitment under his leadership, which facilitated the team to work with equal sincerity and commitment. His leadership and method of involvement made the team members also be more dedicated on all fronts -- collection of funds, arranging programmes -- with comradeship from the Faculty and College administration.

Apart from the many functions held at the college under the initiation of Yajna, travelling each time to Surathkal, there used to be a Global Convention (GC) once in three years, marked by a grand two-day festival. One interesting fact that I have seen -- having attended all the GCs in the college so far-- was the delegation and support his leadership engendered, with the organizing college team. Hectic preparation happened involuntarily, by the Faculty (of whom a few were alumni

themselves) and students. I have seen students spending valuable time staying back at College even though generally the GC would be held in the last week of December, when the college would have had holidays.

Yajnanarayana used to come with his full personal team, mainly his friends/associates from Bangalore businesses, including their staff, to make things happen. They too would work throughout the night, with the same zeal as Yajna, until the function was declared ended, a grand success. It was always amazing that while Yajna used to give overall directions, but with such delegation, support and independence, that his team members would put their sweat and money on their own, without checking with him at every move. The trust he showered on his team and function organizers was always like a 'blank cheque', where everyone was totally assured of managing the needs and not getting crippled for lack of funds. The atmosphere was such that they knew they had his backing if there was any shortfall.

I had a similar personal experience, where he virtually wiped my tears, and which I cannot forget for life. I was working as Coordinator, managing Alumni activities in Pune, the chapter next to Bombay chapter, a new, vibrant and active chapter, functioning with all the support from headquarters in Bangalore, under Yajna's leadership. During my eight years of building this chapter, I had the privilege of conducting a family get-together once a year. The expenses were generally managed through contributions, none from any corpus fund or from the main Alumni kitty. We used to invite Yajna, and the College Principal/ Director, which would help to give a boost to the Alumni fraternity. This event attracted participation even from Belgaum and Bombay.

Yajna, I remember during one such programme, obliged me by accompanying me to meet some stalwart Alumni businessman to get encouragement for the Pune chapter activities. In another year, it so happened that the arrangements went somewhat haywire, attendance fell short of expectations, but commitments had been made for expenses. Yajna, even though he was not present, was following up with me personally as to how it was going, in terms of cash flow management, etc. He always used to tell me, "Karanth- please go ahead with full steam, even if you fall short of funds, don't worry, I will fill in." Such a situation happened that year, when the shortfall was huge, and I was in tears, more so on account of my failure in organizing it well enough, and I did not know how I would make up the difference

and settle the dues. During a follow up call, Yajna understood the situation, he simply pacified me and assured me he would transfer the deficit the following day, which instantly relieved me of my pain. Interestingly, he was not filling up the loss from the Alumni corpus, but extending from his own personal funds. When some of our friends in Pune around me learnt that Yajna was coming to the rescue, they simply pitched in immediately that night to settle the dues. That is the impact of his attitude and leadership, even though he was far away, at his HQ in Bangalore.

At the college functions during his role as President, he used to mobilize particularly good collections without any shortfall. He had his own special charm, getting in touch with benevolent donors both from among the Alumni and general public or from industries (for sponsorship) as he sought funds for the event. It was the same when he tried to get very notable and famous personalities from the industry, social work, politics etc., to attend or grace the function, with ease. Here too his approach, use of network and attitude made everything so smooth, apart from the visitors who used to commit further support for the Alumni and College, announcing them during the programme. So much so that all these events were made enjoyable and memorable. Many miscellaneous expenses and needs were well taken care of, with full delegation to his company personnel, and one never saw any hitch. To mention a few who graced our events included K V Kamath, Chairman of ICICI Bank, M.D Mallya, Chairman, Bank of Baroda, P M Pai, President of Moser Baer Delhi, Mr Kamath, Social NGO Chief, Kheny, CEO of NICE, and many state and central ministers, both from South Kanara region and other parts of India -- all of which could happen only due to the aura of Yajna!

One of the major projects he took up was with the support of his Secretary K N Bhat, another doyen of Association-building, who both, with personal commitment and hard work, their repeated travel to the college campus and ability to get the full support of the college administration and campus upkeep and management staff, succeeded in greening the campus. The college land was barren, with Laterite rock surface, and hardly any greenery, even for some shelter. What a turn-around happened, with hardly any money used from the Alumni budget, through obtaining free plants from Institutions, to transportation, planting, watering, and taking care of its growth.

Another interesting occurrence those days: During Yajna's regular campus visits for

Board meetings, he had built up a wonderful relationship with the Administration, Faculty, Principals/ Directors. This aspect was so well known to all the staff at all levels -- including temporary staff —that many a times, it helped resolve many ignored issues needing a special intervention of the top management. With his conviction in supporting the welfare of the lower class staff at all times, he could help solve many issues favourably and speedily.

The Alumni budget was always managed within the funds either collected as donation or from the interest accrued and yearly gains. One can say his leadership era was the golden era for Alumni growth, and comradeship among students, faculty, and campus staff was at the highest during this time.

At the same time, Yajna's intervention, be it to get cooperation from government officials both at the state or centre were well used by all who needed it. All such efforts, including travel and time were freely offered by Yajna.

One more attitude which is special to him was to become hands-off in the Alumni affairs once he left the chair. Neither did he interfere, nor throw any weight, or get restless despite having administered the same for such a long time. At the same time, he was available for the right suggestion or guidance on many ticklish issues faced now and then, but always on request. But he never refrained from supporting financially when needed. His contribution was always significant, coming open-heartedly and without bargaining. This has happened in many instances all through the years since he left as President, apart from his support to new students seeking start-up guidance or a portion of the stake to kick-start their ventures.

I am told that this quality of his was seen even in another instance, where he led the temple management affairs for a few years, where he refrained from any involvement or interference, not even seeking representation for his past work association, after he left the management. This is according to me, a special characteristic, not generally seen in common human tendency or behaviour. This should be really admired and learnt, for leadership role and practice.

My concluding remarks: I am privileged to associate myself with this project of gathering material about Yajna and his deeds to launch a book that can be a reference for motivation, more learning, to try and follow some of the attributes of

his multi-dimensional involvement, as shared by others. During this process, I have had wonderful opportunities to meet, talk, listen to and learn about his friends and family circle, industry associates, his governing methods, his special characteristic of remaining cool all the time, his sharing each and everything with his wife Vasanthi -- another great personality, she is being more than just a wife -- and acting after many discussions and deliberations.

Another characteristic I have observed is about his decision making: a few were impulsive, but with a third sense prevailing, and added with a quick risk-taking assessment. I have understood that he has been successful most of the times.

Yajna always treated me specially. One such move was to recommend my name for the KREC/NITK Board Council membership in his place, representing the Alumni after his term of five years got completed. This gave me a new dimension to my life during those years. My time with him had given me a special boost of awareness around him. I used to get calls to accompany him on his travel, meetings, visit his office and factories, apart from attending both industry related, religious, and social functions, even to some that were not connected with my circle of activities. This has given me much time not only to enjoy his proximity but also to learn new facets of Yajna, many of which were new to me and I could not have imagined that he possessed them. So, I have enjoyed every bit of his association, apart from talking over the phone with him now and then, on many subjects. In conclusion, I am not only lucky but also blessed by Shri Guru Narasimha that this has happened.

I end by praying always for his and his family's success in all endeavours, to continue to remain a special icon for all of us to continue to learn, even if we may not be able to follow him in everything.

A.S. Karanth

15) Contribution from Panduranga C

NIT-K Alumni Association, Pune Chapter

My take from Sri Yajna Narayana's association

When Karanth called me as usual by surprise, and requested me to be available at Hotel Blue Diamond in Pune for a friendly get together on a Saturday evening, I had no idea what was waiting ahead. But at that time, I had retired from my company and was looking for an occasion to keep myself engaged. This is how I went to the Hotel Blue Diamond in Pune (this hotel has changed name now!), which was just 5 Km from my house. To my luck I met Sri Yajna Narayana, an energetic and live- current man from Bangalore. He is a staunch Kannadiga from South Kanara, which was an additional qualification for my interest. This was of course, apart from the KREC connection.



It is essential to tell now, since a book is being attempted to bring out all about this great Leader and an Alumnus of my beloved College, what are my 'intakes' from his association.

At the Blue Diamond meeting over dinner, I saw a true leader. He was full of new ideas and ways to drive our Alumni activities with all sincerity. His venture in manufacturing wrist watches and this success story, when even a public sector company like HMT failed to survive, was an eyeopener to me. He had empowered his employees to contribute the maximum by self-motivation, and this I saw as a most valuable quality in building a sustainable organization, during his tenure as President of KREC Alumni Association.

Another observation, as experienced by me, was his humane approach to solve problems. He walked the talk and he knew the difference between “a human being and being human”. This was seen in his support to our Pune Chapter in those initial days where we used to meet under the banyan tree, or on hotel benches to participate in our group activities!

To put it in a nutshell, I can place him as a “North Star” (Dhruva Nakshatra) for all the developmental activities and progress made by our Association. May God bless him and his family.

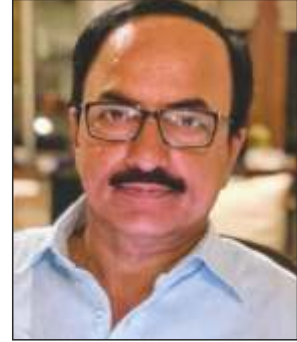
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16) Contribution from Ramakrishna Upadhyaya

Journalist & Former Chief Editor of Deccan Herald

An entrepreneur with a social mission

Yajnanarayana Kammaje's childhood memories – largely focused on his single-minded obsession to excel in education, overcoming many obstacles – reads like an inspirational fairytale.



Yajna's father, Venkappayya, was a village Shanbogh at Siddakatte in Bantwal taluk of Dakshina Kannada district.

His meagre income was hardly sufficient to sustain a family of five, including wife and three children.

Remember, we are talking about the 1940s (Yajna was born in 1949) when India was largely an agrarian, poor and illiterate country, milked dry by the British Empire for nearly two centuries. Dakshina Kannada was no exception.

Yajna somehow completed his high school at nearby Venur, staying at his teacher Anantha Krishna's house. He had heard of the free education and hostel facility for the poor offered at Dharmasthala. He was barely 13 years old when he boarded a bus all alone to meet the then Dharmadhikari, Shri Ratnavarma Hegde. He had to wait for a long time to get an audience with the Dharmadhikari. Finally, when he got a chance to speak to Shri Hegde, he was told that they could not accommodate him. Deeply disappointed, hungry, angry and shocked as he was, the young boy walked all the way from Dharmasthala to Ujire, a distance of about 10 km.

Determined to continue his studies, Yajna went to Moodabidri with a greater resolve to succeed. He completed his pre-university at Mahaveera College, staying with a Jain family. “I had nobody to guide me, but all that I wanted to do was study well. My hard work paid off and I managed to secure 87 per cent marks, further fueling my ambition,” he recalls.

Yajna had heard of the prestigious Karnataka Regional Engineering College (later renamed as National Institute of Technology, Karnataka) at Surathkal. He contacted a distant uncle who stayed at Surathkal. He was told to send his application by post. Thanks to his merit, he was not only selected, but obtained a scholarship of Rs 1,500 per annum for five years! He was virtually over the moon. “From the scholarship money, I used to pay Rs. 250 towards tuition fee. With the Rs. 75 monthly allowance, I used to spend Rs. 62 towards hostel fee and send the remaining 13 rupees by money order to my father living in Siddakatte,” says Yajna. Being the eldest in the family, he was conscious of the fact that he had a younger brother (Narasimha) and sister (Bhagya) to support, and that the little contribution he made did help his father.

From a very young age, a sense of responsibility, empathy and discipline in life were embedded in his mind.

When he finished his course in Electrical Engineering in 1971, though he had obtained top marks, it was not easy to find a job. He was offered a choice of joining as a temporary lecturer for a salary of Rs. 450 or take up M.Tech. He chose the latter. Thanks to his academic excellence, he was able to get a stipend of Rs. 250, of which he was able to save Rs. 100 every month.

As a student, all that Yajna wanted to do was to concentrate on his studies and be a topper – nothing else crossed his mind. After completing his course, he saw an advertisement for the post of Assistant Director in the Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Karnataka, and sent in his application. Merit did count those days and without spending even a penny, he landed the job.

“It was the most boring job I have ever done,” recalls Yajna. “All that I had to do was to go through the applications and make allotment of cement and steel to various parties. I had no other work. I was so frustrated and disillusioned, that I resigned within six months.” Zafer Saifulla, who was the Director of Industries and Commerce and later went on to become the Union Cabinet Secretary, urged Yajna to stay on as he had a bright future, but he had made up his mind.

Many people would consider a government job – that too in the Industries and

Commerce department – very “lucrative” as there would be lots of scope for making money. But Yajna was made of a different mettle; he resigned without thinking too much about the consequences. He started spending time alone, sitting in Cubbon Park and enjoying nature.

One day, he saw an advertisement for the post of a Junior Engineer at HMT's Watch Division. He took up the job – though some of his friends were surprised that he had “demoted” himself from being an Assistant Director to a Junior Engineer – and he began working in 1974 at a princely salary of Rs. 686 per month. HMT was a dynamic public sector institution those days under the stewardship of chairmen like Shri S M Patil and Shri Mansukhani, who had many innovative ideas.

In the late 1970s, watch companies worldwide had started introducing Quartz technology and the Citizen Company of Japan was the leader. Since Yajna had displayed a sharp brain for electronics at HMT, he was asked to go to Japan and meet the officials of Citizen Company.

Being an enthusiastic young man and effective communicator, Yajna was able to convince the Japanese to transfer the Quartz technology to HMT. In 1979-80, Citizen and HMT signed an MoU and HMT put Yajna in charge of implementation of the Quartz technology project.

As the demand for HMT watches began to soar, Yajna was given a free hand to recruit young, talented engineers. He and his team went talent-scouting to prestigious institutions like KREC, UVCE and BMS and they were able to attract many bright students.

“I was the blue-eyed boy of the then Chairman, S M Patil, who had complete trust in my capabilities. I was promoted as Deputy General Manager and at one point of time, I was multi-tasking and handling seven projects across the country apart from Bangalore, simultaneously, and all other DGMS were reporting to me,” Yajna recalls proudly.

Despite his success in taking HMT to great heights, Yajna wasn't very happy on two

counts: The salary that he was earning was barely sufficient for middle-class living. As his two sons were growing, he had to think of giving them good education and settling them in life. Secondly, he also wanted to do something for society, help uplift the less privileged, but those were dreams he could not fulfill being a public sector employee.

That was when he began to consider venturing out on his own and become an entrepreneur. Yajna knew Mukund Majithia from Bharuch in Gujarat for a long time as he was a vendor for HMT. One day, Majithia told Yajna that he had some watch strap making machinery lying idle back home and he would send them to Bangalore so that together they could run the factory.

Yajna thought it was one of those casual conversations. But, within no time the machines landed in Bangalore. As he was still employed at HMT, it was his enterprising and dedicated wife, Vasanthi, who came forward to run the show along with a core group of his friends. She used to ride her Luna from her Malleshwaram house all the way to Bannerghatta Road to attend to factory work, besides looking after two children and household work. The factory started doing well supplying watch straps to HMT at a competitive price.

Being a top functionary at HMT, which was growing by leaps and bounds, Yajna saw the demand for watch straps made of gold-plating, stainless steel and leather going up manifold. In 1987, he set up the Sona Group with its factories at NS Palya and Attibele for manufacturing these items, which became a roaring success.

“Those days, I would get up at 5 am, finish bath and pooja at home, drive to Attibele to supervise the construction of my factory and then go and report to my office at Lavelle Road by 9 am. Once I was in HMT, my full devotion was there. But soon I realised that I could not carry on like this and in 1990, I decided to resign from HMT,” he recalls. His superiors were not ready to let go of him, but after seeing the progress he was making as an independent entrepreneur, they accepted his resignation.

A little known facet of Yajna's life journey is that around 1987, he had almost decided to migrate to Australia to pursue better prospects in his career. “Around that

time, I was feeling a little low about not earning enough. I had applied for an Australian visa, thinking that I should go abroad and make more money. To my surprise, with no effort on my part – may be thanks to my KREC background, which is very much respected around the world – I got a communication from Australia offering me permanent residency. I discussed it with my Appa. He was not very happy. As he was also an astrologer, he looked at my horoscope and told me that I would go and see Australia but would not settle down there. Eventually, that's what happened!” says Yajna.

Working tirelessly over the last 45 years, Yajna has made an invaluable contribution to the field of horological science. The Sona Group has established itself in the field, earning high reputation for the quality of its products, which are supplied to leading manufacturers of watches like Titan, Citizen, Timex, Maxima etc.

The watch strap-making factory he set up in the backwaters of Tumkur is unique in the sense that over 95 per cent of its employees are average-educated women from very poor economic strata who were trained by the company. Over the years, many of them have been helped by the Sona Group to such an extent that they have been financially supported to build their houses and to educate their children. No wonder, they consider Yajna as their father figure.

“Because of his own humble background, Yajna's focus as an entrepreneur has been not just to make money, but to help the down-trodden in society so that they and their children may have a better life. He has magnanimously helped so many poor and deserving students, several charitable institutions and in the renovation of temples and so on that he has made a huge difference to the lives of hundreds of people who remain eternally grateful to him,” says AS Karanth, a long-time associate of Yajna.

Yajna always believed that there was enormous potential and talent in India which needed the right support and encouragement. When he started a software company called Unisoft India Private Ltd, he recruited mostly unemployed graduates who had failed to get selected during campus interviews. “I had a soft corner for non-

BEs more than BEs because I knew that they were no less talented than those who obtained higher marks. All that they needed was encouragement, and opportunities. With that kind of support, I earned their loyalty for our companies,” says Yajna.

Even then, there were occasions when Yajna would be annoyed with some of his employees, who would join reputed software companies like Infosys or Wipro, after getting good training and experience at Unisoft. When such issues came up during conversations at the dining table, his practical-minded wife Vasanthi would console him, saying, “You should be happy that our company has become a good training centre for so many youngsters who are moving up in life!”

A philosophical Yajna concludes: “Looking back, yes, I really didn't mind those boys and girls leaving my company in search of better prospects. After all, I too came to Bangalore from a small village in Dakshina Kannada with zero money in my pocket. I'm very happy to see them grow.”

That philosophy, coupled with selfless generosity and compassion for fellow human beings, really sums up Shri K Yajnanarayana Herle's mission in life.

Ramakrishna Upadhya

17) Contribution from P. Venkat Rao

Entrepreneur, Ex-President Koota Maha Jagathu Kendra Samsthe

Dynamic man with Down to Earth nature Our Yajnanna



Honesty, hard work and integrity in addition to commitment and an insatiable zeal in every endeavour is key to achieving the pinnacle of success. Challenges like poverty, lack of opportunity or support and encouragement will not stand in the way of anybody who is committed to succeed and achieve. These words aptly suit my friend, philosopher and guide Sri Yajnanarayana Kammaje, the great entrepreneur, philanthropist of our Koota community.

Well known as Yajnanna among his friends and followers, Yajnanarayana Kammaje is the founder and proprietor of Sona Group of Companies. Having been born in a small village Kammaje of Siddakatte in Bantwal Taluk to the couple Shri. K Venkappayya and Smt. Padmavathi, his achievements serve as a motivation to youth with challenges and hardships. His feats of joining KREC (now NITK) of Surathkal, becoming DGM of HMT and starting his own enterprise, SONA Group of companies which has now risen to a multi-dimension enterprise working in multiple fields of manufacturing, software and real estate – are all a testimony to his talent, commitment and consistent appetite for learning..

What is impressive and humbling, is to see Yajnanna structure the lives of many young talented people who had similar hardships to those he had faced during his young age, which goes to show that one should never forget one's roots and the journey one took in life. Yajnanna has a desire to give back to the society which assisted him during his tough times. He never had a thought of 'my home', 'my family', 'my company', etc. He believes that the shadow of poverty shouldn't be the reason for failure or for the lack of opportunities. Keeping this in mind, he started giving employment to many young talented graduates from poor and backward communities and helped them to shape their future.

Our friendship is decades old, right from the 1980s. I am impressed by his frankness and his kind nature, consistently having witnessed his charitable work towards the challenged and the needy.

When I was the President of the Uttarahalli branch of Koota Maha Jagathu and the President of the Central body of KMJ, Yajnanna stood as my backbone to assist me. He was a spirit of encouragement for me. To list some of the support that he has given during that period:

1. When we started Narasimha Prathisthana through our Angasamsthe, he started giving scholarship to more than 200 students per year spending money from his company.
2. He supported our Sri Guru Yogananda Trust through many ways.
3. When we started to build Sri Yoganarasimha Prarthana Mandir Building for our Uttarahalli Angasamsthe at Govindarajanagara, Bangalore he donated a huge sum and only because of his support could we finish the project in time.
4. When we thought of hosting the second Vishwa Koota Sammelana at Bangalore, it was he who stood with us and encouraged us to go ahead with our plans and ideas. When the estimation of the programme rose to Rs. 70-80 lakhs, he said, "You just go ahead and plan the programme. Think how best we can organise it. My friends' circle is large and I can bring the funds. If I fail I will give my own. I am there with you. Don't worry." These encouraging words from him brought great success to the programme. Being the Chief Secretary of the programme he used his contacts and experience and we could invite some great personalities as chief guests, and in total could make the programme a grand success. On the many occasions when we found some glitches in organising the programme, we used to turn to his industrial and organizational acumen and would get the direction and guidance to solve the tricky situations.
5. We saw his commitment to Lord Narasimha and to the community again when he became the Trustee of the managing committee of Sri Saligrama

Gurunarasimha Temple. He helped bring in the new look to the temple and made everything very systematic. He tried his best to make the temple a 'Shree Kshetra' so that large numbers of devotees would visit the temple. Having witnessed the development of the temple, many are motivated to contribute and be a part of the ongoing and future developmental works of the temple.

He has never sent us back whenever we went to him for suggestions, instead he encouraged us to get back to him whenever needed. Many a times when we were not on the same page on a few things, he patiently listened to our explanation and had a wholehearted nature of accepting the proposals. Our bonding is so good that he doesn't hesitate to point out if I do any mistake in my work and at the same time has the humility to accept and acknowledge open suggestions and advice in the right spirit to achieve the greater good!

His wife, Smt. Vasanthi is also very active, just like him. They are a rare couple together. They work things out together in every field. They have been members, donors, advisors in many organisations. It's also inspiring to see that their children, Ravi and Gautham have imbibed most of the good nature and qualities that have served Yajnanna well, for all these years. The next generation are also committed and are an active part of the societal developmental work that Yajnanna is so passionate about.

I wish Yajnanna a happy and prosperous life ahead and pray to Lord Narasimha to bestow him and his family the best of health and happiness.

P. Venkat Rao

*CEO GR Power and Chitra Power Systems,
Ex-President Koota Maha Jagathu Kendra Samsthe*

Editor's note: Anna means elder brother in many Indian languages. It is very common to suffix that to a person's name in addressing those who are elder than you. Hence 'Yajnanna' appears in his writing.

18) Contribution from T. Vidyadhar

Former DGM, HMT. Social Volunteer

My Association with K.Yajnanarayana was special for me

Though we were in HMT, he was in the Watch Division, whereas I was in the Machine Tools Division. Before I moved to HMT International USA in 1986, we were in the same building on Lavelle Road. He was in charge of Electronic watches and I was in the Electronic Instrumentation Division of Machine Tools. Being both from South Kanara we must have bumped into each other a couple of times. People from South Kanara have always some magnetic attraction for each other, but being serious about our duty first, there was no time for chat, I guess.



It was only when we came out of HMT that we met at Attibele sometimes, during early 1993 where he started manufacturing watch straps, whereas I worked for Miki Steel Works. Though I never started a business, I could empathise with him during those struggling days of starting in the manufacturing industry as I used to visit several small industries during my HMT days to sell/service machine tools.

One day I was so upset when he told me that a government officer had demanded a heavy bribe by falsely alleging tax/duty evasion when KY was struggling to establish his business. Soon after I left his factory, I telephoned the concerned officer, warning him of dire consequences if he continued to harass small struggling industrialists.

This was the beginning of our long relationship, first as a friend and later he was a friend-cum-boss. Soon I found out that he started the business not only to earn money, but also to serve and feed the poor by providing employment to them. Slowly I could smell the in-built value systems in KY that took me closer to him.

KY told me once that his father taught him one of the greatest lessons in life – i.e., never hold the palm facing upwards, but it should face the ground (to give, not to ask). I noticed this many a times when I was with him.

I wish to narrate some of my experiences with KY that exhibit his good nature, ethics and values.

Once KY had to travel with me in my Zen car to some government office. When I was reversing the car in a parking lot he saw me straining myself. He said that I needed to change the car to one with power steering, as I was growing old. Though I did not worry much, he appeared concerned. After a couple of days, when he was planning to leave to go abroad with his wife, he called me and said that I should take his Santro car that was used by his wife. I said that I had to sell my Zen before I took his car to pay for it. He told me that selling my car and paying him, etc., could be done later, but I should drive the Santro which had power steering. It was not the money but the concern for an older person who worked for him. I was working for him as Consultant /VP at Unisoft at that time.

KY loves to do many things that are constructive, and that involves GIVING to charity, and the poor. Knowing his habits, I too used to commit on his behalf to many poor students.

For example -- a cook whose daughter was studying Engineering needed some help. I gave him some money and agreed to give some more in the evening, knowing fully well that KY would donate for such causes. When I met KY later in the office I told him that I committed to a poor student some money on his behalf. He said, "Whatever you commit on my behalf for such purposes, I will honour." That was the equation we had.

KY used to pay to many charitable institutions through advertisements that served the society. Once I invited KY to a Thoreau Foundation function to raise funds for the Hebbal lake rejuvenation. Though the lake is in the north of Bangalore, he attended it and when I requested that he announce a contribution, he immediately agreed. Later, a wooden bridge across the drain inflow area was built and named after Unisoft. Further, as part of extracurricular activities for the Engineers of Unisoft, I proposed the cleaning of weeds in Hebbal lake. He not only agreed to the proposal, but the day was converted into a picnic cum social work day. After the cleaning work, the Engineers were taken to Nandi Hills as an incentive. They were also provided with T-shirts with the Unisoft logo and an environment slogan.

Once he deputed me to Bangkok for an exhibition to study some new technology. Since I always tried to groom youngsters, I suggested that one youngster, Manohar Kamath, M. Tech working in CAD/CAE may join me to visit Bangkok and KY immediately agreed. On the following Saturday we were to return to Bangalore, but

we did not get the flight confirmation and were compelled to stay on until Monday. Though I was depressed, KY said, “Enjoy the weekend in Bangkok, particularly when your birthday falls on Sunday.” How many owners of companies have such a liberal attitude towards the people who work for them?

In another instance, I had coordinated Technical Training Programmes in Saudi Arabia on behalf of Unisoft. Several programmes were conducted by Indian experts for different industries of Saudi through a Training Institution. In 2005 I had to go to Dammam after my personal visit to USA. However, it became a herculean task, as my passport was expiring within the next couple of months, and hence my visa application was rejected by the Saudi Consulate in Mumbai. Their rules said that the passport should be valid for at least six months during the issue of visa for a country. I had to make a few visits to the Indian Consulate in New York, USA to renew my passport, emphasising the urgency with the Consulate. I got my new passport within two hours of meeting the Consulate. KY, sitting in Bangalore, was able to appreciate my efforts in USA that saved the credibility of Unisoft, and refused to accept the training remunerations that I earned during that particular trip to Saudi, soon after my return from USA. For KY, money was not important, but values were important.

In another instance Unisoft undertook a USA Project for the market survey of USA food products in India and I was given the task to steer it, along with Mr Chandrahasa. At the end of the market survey and research report, USA invited some imported food-clients like Nilgiri, chefs from star hotels like Windsor Manor and others to USA. KY felt concerned that I was not invited. That showed KY's concern for those who were committed to their tasks.

I must thank KY for inviting me and my family to all his personal cum official engagements/functions. Like me, he has many close non-Brahmin family friends, though he gives the impression that he is mainly concerned with justice to Brahmins.

Finally, I always wanted to give more than what I take. It was possible in HMT. But it was not possible with KY. He always ensured that he gave more than what I gave to Unisoft, as if to fulfil his late father's life philosophy.

T. Vidyadhar

19) Contribution from Dr. Souptik Mukherjee

Researcher, Alumnus of NIT-K.

Guiding Light

I had met Yajnanarayana Sir when I was still in college. I was organizing a technology event (Techsplash) at NITK and was travelling around India, selling the idea. It was a unique event allowing students to present their projects live along with prototypes. It had robotics competitions and many real time tech features, the first version of Atmanirbhar Bharat or Innovate in India. This was way back in 2003.



Unisoft India was one of the participants in the event and the early support from Yajnanarayana Sir for these innovations was very encouraging for us. I was also amazed to see our Alumni successfully build a global technology company from scratch, and without any godfather, so to speak. This was during my college days.

After college I went on to work at Essar Steel.

But the desire to do something more interesting, marketing ideas, was driving me. I then contacted Yajna Sir who took me under his wings as Business Development Manager in his company. I was privileged to work under Yajna Sir for the next 2.5 years. He taught me the ways to chase a vision. He allowed me freedom to experiment with different ideas on how to grow the company. For example, we had started a development course on Embedded Technologies for fresh graduates. Part of the time I also devoted to selling customized gift watches as well. It had customized logos inside it. I always felt extreme pride that I was representing a company started by our own Alumni.

But not only me, Yajna Sir also helped others -- budding entrepreneurs who were NITK (KREC) Alumni. Ravindra Gujaral Sir was another person. He helped them to set up a company within Unisoft itself, incubating them as they grew, just because he was an NITK Alumnus. He also took my friend Vipul Vinzuda (another NITK friend and my batchmate) and groomed him as a designer. He is now a professor at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

During my time at Unisoft, while I was looking at different technologies, I felt the desire to get into research to build technologies and then market it. Thereafter I moved to the US for my Masters and PhD. However the guidance which Yajna Sir provided in the early days of my career has always helped me and inspired me.

A few years back I had contacted Yajna Sir on an altogether different matter. I was involved in community development in the US and came across the plight of our Yezidi brothers and sisters in Iraq. They still hold on to beliefs like Reincarnation, hold Agni as sacred, typically Hindu. Yajna Sir was in Mysuru and had helped me connect them with Sar Sangchalak Mohan Bhagwat ji. This helped to save their civilization from ISIS.

The goal to be economically strong, be self reliant and give back to the community, these attributes that I learnt at the feet of Yajna Sir, are the greatest ideals I cherish in life. They are the guiding goals in our lifetime to fulfil.

Dr. Souptik Mukherjee

20) Contribution from Ramprakash Holla

Engineer, Entrepreneur, Exporter

Spark that Ignited the mind: Journey towards entrepreneurship

With my background of a conservative Brahmin teacher's family, entrepreneurship was not even heard of till my completing my engineering. It was neither a preferred path to be chosen, as per my parents. The aim was to get into a good job and lead life! Accordingly, life was going on with a job in an Indo German machine tool company with promotions, increments, exposures and so on. According to me life was good!



Entrepreneurs Sudheendra & Ramprakash Holla

I am known to Sri YK from my childhood. He is the first entrepreneur whom I have seen in my life. I always watched him with curiosity and wonder throughout the years of my early life and career. I often used to get in touch with him and update him the progress in my career, challenges in the job, etc. He used to listen to the updates with great enthusiasm. Each time I would come back filled with new thoughts, ideas and road maps. But I was not taking action on any new ideas and thoughts, obviously because of the hangover of the so called good job.

By then it had become customary for me to meet him once in a while and get a dose of dis-satisfaction for being conservative and doing nothing constructive. It was one such meet where he probed deeply into my personal aspects, specifically about salary, etc. He was literally upset with me for my lack of vision, and my complacency of being satisfied with the low salary. His reaction ignited my mind and I place it on record that it was the turning point in my life. He had left me provoked!

It was in 2004, my friend D. R. Sudheendra and I resigned our jobs and started a trading outfit with our PF money as the humble seed capital. We built several strategies in our own capacity to move from trading to manufacturing of precision

components. In March 2007 we made our first ever export consignment to USA. We had some early success in our journey of entrepreneurship, and it was quickly able to replace the salaries that we were getting from our job. But that was not the purpose.

We were doing an annual turnover of about Rs.3 crores during that time. We developed a high precision bearing product for Bosch Rexroth India, and it was an import substitution. It was a very exciting project and could have changed our lives. But it needed a lot of capex which was not possible for us in our economically anemic situation.

We went back to YK to discuss about the possibility of financial help. He glanced at the prospects of the project and did sense the possibility of sure success. We were so desperate to do the project that we offered to sell him stake in our company. If he wanted, he could have swiped his credit card and bought the entire company. But he did not do so. He chose to become the catalyst for the growth. He mentioned that unless you pass through the pain of creating an enterprise by yourself, you will not become another SONA. Since then we became a part of his mission of creating more entrepreneurs in the society.

He kept on mentoring us through various projects, opportunities, industry connects, networking, bank funds restructuring, capital infusion and so on. He broadened our vision and deepened our roots to set up a mature manufacturing facility. Today we have a fleet of 70 CNC machines, exporting more than 40% of products to USA, Canada, Germany and Italy, we have two manufacturing facilities, catering to reputed OEM customers, and notching an annual turnover of Rs.30 crores in the last five years.

We are fortunate to get guided by him on various aspects of building the enterprise, like accelerating on productivity, optimization of capital purchases, gaining negotiating powers, bringing the best out of people by connecting to their personal aspirations, grasp of various interdisciplinary topics, hard negotiation with light humour, effect of complacency in business, art of slowing down and speeding up, and so on. We are now part of the SONA Group and all set to continue our journey to create an enterprise of international repute. We are on our journey to go forward aggressively and fearlessly with the target of crossing Rs.100 crore per annum in the next four years with his insightful review and guidance.



Strategy meeting with Italian Customers Mr. Luca and Mr. Francesco



With Ramprakash Holla, Sudheendra: During Inauguration of Unit – 2
at Kammaje Industries, Hosur

For him, entrepreneurship is a journey and not a destination. He believes that entrepreneurship is the key to an “active economy” which is the biggest contributor to nation building. He bubbles with new ideas and new thoughts every single day, looking forward to ignite the minds of many new entrepreneurs like us!

Ramprakash Holla

Distinct Productivity Solutions, Bangalore – India

21) Contribution from Giri Karanth

Corporate Lawyer, Social Volunteer

Turning ordinary to extraordinary

To begin with, Sri KY has an extraordinary talent for converting ordinary employees into entrepreneurs. After thoroughly analyzing the strengths, attitudes and aptitudes of a person, Sri KY has the special ability to encourage and motivate ordinary people, resulting in ordinary people executing extraordinary tasks.



Sri KY, whenever getting into new ventures/expansions of business, never bothered about the competition. His concept was always, jump into the 'arena' and face, strive, solve the problems and come out successfully -- as he always says, 'You should take the bull by the horns.' That kind of courage resulted in Sri KY's success, along with his dedication and appetite for risk in any assignment even today!

Also, Sri KY always focused on skill and personality development of rural boys, though there were problems of attrition. He wanted to focus on such boys just so as to bring them into the social and economic mainstream.

Sri KY is a great entrepreneur with a social cause. He always mentioned, "My business should always go with some improvement /impact to the society, and also let me give back something to the society." This is the kind of person Sri KY is, even today. Sri KY always encouraged everyone to take the lead, encouraged everyone to become an entrepreneur like him, always empowered everyone, encouraged them to take the initiative, encouraged everyone to take the decision, even if it went wrong!!

From my own personal experience, I here recall, when I moved from Mangalore to Bangalore, I was very much delighted, as it was a dream come true to work under Sri KY. It was like moving from a small village to a big city, and because of Sri KY's blessings, I moved and settled in Bangalore. And I reiterate, many of my relatives, community people, and some references, moved from their villages and got employed, and became successful software engineers in Bangalore because of Sri KY's blessings.

As I was getting settled into the new life, one fine day, Sr. KY asked me if I had a passport. I was thrilled and shocked, wondering why Sri KY was asking this. Immediately he made me apply for a visa and subsequently I was lucky to travel several times to Singapore on business, by the grace of Sri KY, which would not have otherwise happened to me at that age and time. This great experience happened to umpteen employees of Unisoft (software company promoted by Sri KY) who had hailed from small towns. There are so many such great experiences for me and other employees as well!

Sri KY always believed that Knowledge is Power and gave utmost importance to knowledge and the sharing of it. He also believes in giving global exposure to all employees, as he keeps repeating, 'You should Always Swim in the Ocean.' Almost once in three months he used to invite experts from different fields of excellence like production, process, SAP, quality, software, management activities, etc. This is how he has been developing managerial qualities among the employees, to take them to the next level from being ordinary employees. Whatever TCS is following now, i.e., 'Get Extraordinary from Ordinary People', Sri KY has been following for the last 40 years!!

Sri KY appointed me as one of the key members of team Unisoft. As Unisoft grew rapidly, during one of our trips to Singapore, Guru Prakash, a close friend of Sri KY introduced Sri KY to the Head of ASTI Group and played a crucial role in getting a collaboration between Unisoft with ASTI, because of which Unisoft became the offshore development centre for ASTI in Bangalore, and eventually Sri KY assisted STI to establish the STI's wholly owned subsidiary in India, Bangalore, with Sri KY on the board of STI.

Under the able leadership of Sri KY, Unisoft became a 200 employee company and STI, a 50 employee company. During its tenure, Sri KY provided employment to atleast 500 employees, most of whom hailed from poor or middle class families from villages in South Canara district. Sri KY also provided employment opportunity to many of his relatives, including me. Sri KY also moulded all of us and provided exposure to the working of MNCs in foreign countries. I still have contacts with most of the ex-employees of Unisoft and STI who have risen to very high positions either as entrepreneurs or employees at leadership level, with top managerial portfolios at MNCs, who were given great opportunity by Sri KY in the

initial days and groomed and promoted subsequently by Sri KY at Unisoft and STI. Apart from being a hardcore business man and entrepreneur, Sri KY is spiritual and has been devoting himself considerably with religious activities also. After becoming the Dharmadhikari at our deity Sri Guru Narasimha Temple, at Saligrama, he was involved in the renovation of the temple and with lots of development activities of the temple.

What amazes all of us is the kind of energy and freshness we see in Sri KY's face, all the time!! We are so proud that Sri KY, even at this age, is so active, that we, young blood, are ashamed that we do not even use 10% of the energy level he uses, for different activities for the betterment of society, employees and relatives.

Finally, I am ever grateful to my Boss, and on behalf of all 500 employees who worked at Unisoft and STI, thank my Boss once again for all the motivation, support, encouragement, opportunity and exposure given to me and all my ex colleagues of Unisoft and STI!!

Giri Karanth

22) Contribution from Prof. (Dr.) K B Linge Gowda

Former Director, Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology

An Inspiration to All



Yajnanarayana Kammaje, I see as a down to earth person, an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and a good human being. He always had the passion to serve the society through all means, for the up-liftment of the poor. He had extended several contributions to the needy patients of Kidwai Cancer Hospital when I was serving as Director of the Institute. His contributions to Kidwai started with donating an idli making machine to the Dharmashala and continued from there on, till date. Hence, I still identify his friend as Idli Ganesh Rao. Later I learnt that he had been continuously supporting the activities through the Samiksha Foundation, wherein all educational activities of cancer affected children are taken care of, along with regular festival activities and birthdays of all the cancer affected children. On 1st January 2018, when I requested Shri. Kammaje to donate a big television set for the patients in the waiting lounge and also some furniture to the Paediatric department, he graciously agreed for the same instantly. I happened to visit his factory for a function to distribute financial assistance to the employees and to their children who are studying various courses. This is really a great gesture, supporting all the downtrodden families in that region. Also, I came to know that he is continuously supporting many such families in some South Canara villages, which shows his commitment to the place where he was born and brought up.

Since I too come from a village and have a village background, where there was no facility to attend school, and having reached this stage as Director of this prestigious 2nd largest cancer hospital in the country, and having served as Registrar (Evaluation) of the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, I know how important it is to help needy people in rural areas. I am sure Shri. Kammaje will continue to serve the society in the future in a big way, which he is known for. I liked his simplicity, generosity and kind heartedness in the last five years of my association with him. I am privileged to be associated with him and pray the almighty for a very happy and healthy life and prolonged community services in the days to come. He is an inspiration to all and his services will motivate all of us in uplifting our society.

Prof. (Dr.) K B Linge Gowda

23) Contribution from P. Jayarama Bhat

Chairman of Karnataka Bank Ltd.

Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje

A Self-Made Man

Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje is a man of vision and creativity. This book throws light on his thoughts and achievements through his life journey depicting the core values practiced by him, through which the readers can understand his personality.



I know Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje since long. Shri Kammaje was born in a remote village and had lots of challenges during his childhood days including poverty, but his firm determination never allowed him to be trapped in the cycle of deprivation. He managed to sail through this phase and become economically and socially successful. He was able to transcend the steep obstacles in his path even being in the midst of fewer privileges. Since his school days, he has been a firm believer that one should not become a burden on the society, thanks to the good seed of character, values and morality instilled into him by his parents and elders.

He is a self-made man, adept at setting aside all obstacles. As the reader turns the pages, the inspiring story of his life gives clues and practical tips on how to lead one's life to come out successful. He is a living example to show that you have to develop an inner urge, to succeed through your own effort, and then His help crystallises within us to make everything possible. He was a merit student throughout his academic career and holds postgraduate degree in Electrical Engineering from the prestigious NITK Suarhkal, Karnataka. (KREC).

Though he was employed in a prestigious company and earning a handsome salary, being true to his nature, he quit his job and took the decision to become a job giver instead of a job seeker. He started his own company 'Sona Group' with very limited resources and with few like-minded employees. With his dedication and hard work, he built the company brick by brick which has gained reputation at the international level today.

With his unique nature of adaptability, he was able to diversify his business

activities into different fields, generating jobs to many poor needy persons, even illiterate rural women, and empowered them both on the economic and social fronts. Many prestigious awards received by Shri Kammaje speak about his splendid achievements in all fields.

Though Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje climbed the high profile ladder, he practised simplicity, and involved himself in various philanthropic activities with the aim of helping many needy without any publicity motto. He is living up to the principle, 'no matter what we achieve, it is important to remember that we owe this success to many factors and people around us.' His life is the reflection of the principle of the *Baghavat Gita* “ಕರ್ಮಣ್ಯೇವಾಧಿಕಾರಸ್ತೇ ಮಾ ಫಲೇಷು ಕದಾಚನ”.

It is a rare opportunity one gets to write about a mighty person like him who has achieved many milestones without aiming for popularity. I am sure that this book will be of immense help and serve as a guide to aspiring young entrepreneurs, and also to the student community, apart from the common man, to build their confidence and succeed both on the personal as well professional front. He has been involved in a lot of charity works and has also been closely associated with the *jeernoddhara* work of Sri Gurunarashimha Temple, Saligrama, which will be remembered for ever.

I wish Shri Yajna Narayana Kammaje all the best in his endeavours. May God give him more strength and success to continue his service to mankind, including philanthropic activities in the coming days too.

P. Jayarama Bhat

Editor's note: The quote in Kannada mentioned in the previous paragraph is one of the most famous stanzas of the revered *Bhagavad Gita*. The commentary on that is “Your role in this universe is to do the work & enjoy the journey. Don't be too obsessed with all the results that are expected to come at the end of that effort.”

The second stanza (Chapter 2, Stanza 47) espouses further advice on “never opt for inaction”. Do your duty and the rest will follow. We believe Jayarama Bhat's reference of this stanza is most appropriate in describing Yajna's approach to life.

24) Contribution from MG Chandrashekar

Former Scientific Secretary, Govt. of India

Generosity Personified



K Yajnanarayana popularly known as “Yajna” among friends came into my life in mid 1971 when I joined the newly introduced M Tech programme (Industrial Electronics) at KREC, Surathkal. Being a rank holder myself at my BE degree level, but from Bangalore University, I was curious to get to know Yajna as a classmate who had topped from Mysore University. I was keen on joining the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore but those days hostel facility was denied for local residents of Bangalore. Hence the opportunity to join KREC was a blessing. Further, having done all my education till then in a single room home, staying in a hostel with a room to myself was a real pleasure. More than anything else, studying in South Kanara, the Parashurama Khsetra, with its rich cultural and literary tradition was a great opportunity.

South Kanara (SK) was the epicentre of revival of India, the need of the hour being, the resurrection of India's rich traditions and its true greatness while adapting to modern world needs. Those days people like Shivarama Karanth-- whom I rate as highly intellectual as Albert Einstein -- came from South Kanara. SK was the growing hub of arts, education, hotel, banking and small scale industries, involving skilled craftsmanship. Prof UR Rao who hailed from Udupi, who built a very successful organization in ISRO and brought it international recognition, and with whom I worked all my professional life, is another great example. All the state level ranks mostly went to students from SK. Yajna truly represents SK as a single individual with all its virtues, values and greatness in their complete form.

I thus know Yajna for 50 years. When I was approached by Guru Prakash, for whom I have a lot of respect as an individual and professional, to write on Yajna, I was very hesitant, as according to me, no biography accurately represents the given individual. Invariably they bring out all the strengths of the concerned person, but never their weaknesses! I did think quite a lot on the strengths and weaknesses of Yajna, but I was convinced that Yajna has no weaknesses, not even very minor ones. It is thus a great honour for any one to write on Yajna.

My days with Yajna during our two years of hostel stay, everyday walks to the nearby Sadashiva temple and the beach were event-less. Among us, he was obviously the most loved and respected individual in the campus, with many admirers among faculty, administration and support staff. He always remained calm and treated everyone equally, and was never too worried about the future. Some of us were very nervous about the uncertainties, with very few employment opportunities for engineers those days, after graduation. There was nothing like campus recruitment, etc. I always remember the events during our final examination, when professors who were very fond of Yajna used to give good tips about the subject topics that were crucial to study. He was very eager to share the same with all of us, his class mates, and sometimes felt bad when he could not reach some of them who were staying outside the campus. I do not think I would have been that generous and helpful. These events alone truly represent Yajna's value system --he is always ready to share his fortunes with his friends and colleagues!

Siddalingaswamy, -- another class mate--Yajna and I did our project work at NAL (National Aeronautical Laboratories), Bangalore, when we became very close and started interacting with each other on a regular basis. Ranjan Moodithaya, an MSc, who also graduated from KREC and was at that time working at NAL also became part of our group and daily interactions.

As time went by, I joined ISRO Satellite Centre, Swamy started working at the Indian Institute of Science, and Yajna joined the Directorate of Small Scale Industries in the state government. I used to wonder as to why Yajna joined the state government where pay scales were never that great, and it was also full of bureaucrats. I know now that his deep understanding of government provisions and opportunities in promoting small scale industries has been fully implemented when he built his group of Industries. He deeply understands the system and opportunities and never lets goes his knowledge wasted.

He later joined Hindustan Machine Tools which was producing watches. He embarked on the introduction of electronic watches to replace traditional mechanical wind-up watches. This was one more opportunity that the Watch industry provided, as he used to say, it is a minimum Rs. 10,000 crore industry. Every individual would be needing at least one watch. In the process of working in Tokyo, in the Japanese watch industry, he imbibed the best of the Japanese work culture and implemented it in his own life and business: firm commitment to one's

goals with sharp focus, strict adherence to quality and extreme hard work. I had an opportunity to visit him at Tokyo on my way for some ISRO work in the US. His appreciation and understanding of the Japanese work culture and products were immense. He showed me refrigerators which worked for over 100 years without any failure at all. Yajna was keen on achieving similar quality and reliability in all his products. Even during my short stay at Tokyo, he did not forget to buy a pair of golden pearl earrings for my newly born daughter Shruti, which she is very fond of, even now. It represents one more of his virtues: he knew what his friends wanted and gifted them without them even asking for it.

With all of us working at Bangalore, we used to meet somewhat regularly in the evenings on our way back home, at his house at Rajajinagar. That was when I came in contact with his father (Shri Venkappayya) and the rest of his family. His father was at ease dealing with all of us as his equals, and was very friendly with all of us. His deep knowledge of life and its necessities were immensely impressive. He was jovial and gave many suggestions to improve our lives. He introduced me to Astrology in which he had deep knowledge and expertise. He was quite correct in reading horoscopes of persons who were even entirely unknown to him. Thus I was drawn into the concept as to how one's life is predetermined, and thus built my strong belief in God. Whereas he was ready to analyze all our horoscopes, about Yajna, he volunteered very little insight. On questioned, he used to say that he will do well, and that he was not worried. We were in the process of getting married, and used to show the horoscopes of prospective girls to him. He used to freely discuss with us all aspects of one's married life including physical compatibility with ease and no hesitation, as it is an important requirement! I still vividly remember how he personally took care of us during Yajna's elaborate marriage lunch and made us relish all of SK's delicious food. I strongly believe that Yajna's ability to deal with all levels of people with ease on any issue is a trait imbibed by him from his father. In addition, simple living and being happy, making others happy and smile in spite of many uncertainties and adversities was a character which was gifted to him by his father.

Yajna continued to help me during many difficult periods, such as when I was building my home, without hesitation. He never counted money when he gave cash as presents on occasions like marriages, birthdays or guruhapravesha, etc.

I did quite well at ISRO and became its Scientific Secretary and played a key role in managing many of its successful satellite missions. I was a Fellow at many national and international academies and won many awards, but my own community and friends were not very aware of my achievements at ISRO. But Yajna was there again honouring me with the Distinguished Alumni Award that was given to 20 of KREC alumni in 2009 during its Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Yajna played a key role in bringing together all of its alumni spread the world over, as President of the Alumni Association. More than me, he knew about most of the KREC alumni who excelled at ISRO. Also in the process, he was able to bring several cash and in-kind contributions to help its needy students, as he himself had experienced the struggle students go through, and the need for money for fees, stay and food.

When I faced serious difficulties in my professional career beyond ISRO at private satellite ventures, Yajna always comforted me. When I was deeply depressed, my wife Sheela who knows Yajna well, arranged a surprise dinner at my home with Yajna and Swamy. Yajna made me very comfortable and helped me strengthen my resolve to face the situation.

Incidentally, he always excelled at hosting dinners, and knew precisely each of his friends' preferences in drinks and food.

Single handedly he built up such a large business infrastructure encompassing many elements --real estate, IT, manufacturing, assembly, marketing and sales. I always wondered as to how he could do it. First and foremost, he is very analytical. He plans his goals precisely well and the steps and processes needed to achieve them. Besides, his man management is excellent. As I have watched him closely, though he is a very demanding boss, he has always remained cool and composed, very caring and friendly. He knows each of his hundreds of employees individually, and deals with them as equals, always keen on helping them and their families through all their needs in their lives. His no nonsense piece of advice to his subordinates makes them perform to his full satisfaction. Recently, during his 70th birthday celebrations, I saw how much affection and love he received from employees at all levels, including his family members, unmatched by any in the other current day business world. Very few businessmen can achieve this.

Yajna is very active and fully involved in anything he does. He is full of achievement amidst several challenges and struggles. Only his exceptional entrepreneurial skills and strong faith in himself, his family, kith and kin and God

have taken him thus far. More than anything else, he has not forgotten any of his struggles, but also most importantly, the help he has had from his family, friends and God.

Yajna has managed to fully master the essential skills of entrepreneurship and building a business and is a role model for any industrialist.

He has earned many honours and awards. Recently he was given an award bearing Sir MV's name who had said, "Industrialize or perish". He has contributed significantly to build a modern self sustaining Atma Nirbhar India. Yajna once remarked to me that if he was me, he would have walked into many business houses which were around my residential apartment in metropolitan Washington area, and got at least a few of them to buy something made in India, and in the process made some money for himself! He is unimaginably confident of what he can achieve!

We have all done our best to take care of our families. Among us, Yajna has done the maximum to take care of his family, friends and society at large.

What is left to be done in Yajna's further life is a question answered by himself -- and that is, to achieve Moksha. It only reaffirms that Yajna is an intellectual with a total understanding of life, respect for traditions, family life and human values in general.

Yajna is an excellent embodiment of the good traits of Krishna, Arjuna, Dharmaraya and Karna too. As I said in the beginning, he has only strengths, no weaknesses!

His family, friends and colleagues are all blessed to have Yajna around them. We all pray that he continues to live healthy and complete at least a full life cycle of 120 years.

Right now we are at a stage in life where we need more of introspection, especially among friends and common interest groups. A book on Yajna should open up some of those processes.

I am proud of Yajna. Over the years being involved in the gold plating industry, he has become a solid golden person himself! My prayers and best wishes for a "Golden Yajna" for his continued success and glory.

Chandrasekhar MG.

25) Contribution from N. Hanumantha Reddy

Industry Executive - General Manager, Sona Group

My Association With Sri Yajnanarayana



To say that Yajna Sir has shaped my life is an understatement. From giving me my first break in the Watch industry to something as simple as teaching me how to make *upma* in a foreign land, he has been my guru right through.

I first met Yajna Sir way back in 1981 when he interviewed me for a position at HMT. He joked that I was crazy to contemplate leaving my secure government job at the Karnataka Electricity Board to join HMT for a lesser salary. Fortunately for me, he took me under his wing as an Engineer Trainee and thus began my four-decade-long journey with him.

In 1983, I was part of Yajna Sir's team that underwent training at Citizen Watch Company in Japan. Following our return, he motivated me to take on the Stepper Motor project single-handedly and to implement our learnings from Japan at HMT, Tumkur. The great mentor that he is, he identified the potential in me and took a chance and handed this prestigious project to a young engineer like me with the noble intention of helping me grow. Under his guidance, the project was successfully established as the first project of Quartz Analog Watch Technology in India.

Through the years, Yajna Sir has continued to guide me, encouraging me to take on roles in other companies, such as Titan, to further my career. Since 2003, I have been with Yajna Sir's own Sona Group. Not one to micro-manage others, he gave me a free hand to establish the Ion-Plating project. Despite starting from scratch, we became Titan's biggest vendor in no time.

Yajna Sir's concern for people extends beyond the workplace. I have experienced his generosity of spirit first-hand and we are indebted to him. As a genuine well-wisher, he has supported me through difficult times and celebrated with me through the good ones.

His magnanimity has touched many lives. The various awards he has won for his philanthropic work are a true testament to his passion for helping others. Yajna Sir is deeply loyal to his alma-mater, the National Institute of Technology – Karnataka (NIT-K, Surathkal). As an active alumnus, he goes out of his way to connect with other NIT-K graduates scattered across the world, fostering a strong community that supports fellow-alumni. He is an environmentally-conscious person who has sponsored the planting of trees on the NIT-K campus, contributing to its beautification and eco-friendliness.

Yajna Sir's life is a master class in what it takes to stay relevant. His inquisitiveness, desire to learn, and connections with like-minded people around the world have always kept him ahead of the curve. This in turn has ensured his success as an entrepreneur, mentor and innovator. Undoubtedly, people connected with the horological industry look up to him as a visionary.

I am indeed honoured to have been associated with Yajnanarayana – a true teacher, guide and friend.

N. Hanumantha Reddy

26) Contribution from Vikram Bhat

Businessman, Sales Specialist, Associate of Sona Group

Trust & Encouragement



My name is Vikram Bhat and I was born in a small town of Kaup near the temple town of Udupi in a conservative middle class family. Before 1992, I was working at a hotel at Mangalore and always wanted to make it big in life. Through a common connection, I was referred to Sri. Yajnanarayana, whom we all still respectfully refer to as “BOSS”. In the year 1992, I still remember, one fine morning, I came to Bangalore and visited No 3, 13th Cross, Margosa Road, Malleshwaram where Boss was residing at that time and knocked on the door. Boss's wife, whom we still refer to as “Madam” opened the door and informed me that Boss was at the Attibele Sona Band factory. Immediately I travelled to Attibele, somehow located and visited Sona Band factory where Boss was busy churning numbers and guiding/motivating his key team. I calmly introduced myself and after brief discussions, Boss asked me one straight question, “What will you do for me?” to which I confidently replied, “Whatever you ask me to do,” and Boss who immediately recognized the fire in my belly, was so impressed with this answer that this became the turning point and beginning of a new journey of my life!!

Subsequently, I visited Sona Band factory again where Boss introduced me to his key management team as the new Sales & Marketing Executive. Though I didn't have any experience in the horological field, he motivated and assigned me the task of Sales & Marketing throughout India. I started learning about different types of watch straps and would carry those straps to every dealer and retailer in the country, collect money and give it back to Sona like an employee.

During this time, when everything was going good, one incident occurred which is worth mentioning here. I was travelling by bus from Coimbatore to Erode at night, and I had kept a briefcase full of straps worth around Rs. 60,000 on the luggage rack above my seat. When I reached Erode, I found the briefcase was missing. I was really shattered!!! For a moment, I thought my life in Sona had come to an end! Immediately I called Sona Leathers and explained the situation and deliberately

lied that Sales Tax authorities had confiscated the material, but nobody was ready to accept my story. I was almost in tears!! But Boss stood firmly by my side and even after this incident, Boss encouraged and motivated me by giving more material with the moratorium and understanding that I would return Rs. 60,000 in instalments. As the days rolled by, I started working hard, travelled extensively, expanded my business/market and collected money, only with the target of somehow returning Rs. 60,000 to Sona and save my face.

Fortunately, one day Sona received a call saying one briefcase with straps was found in the bus depot at Ooty and they were informed to go and collect it immediately. It so happened that someone found the Sona letterhead inside the briefcase and informed Sona accordingly. This incident became one more turning point of my life, and I was totally exonerated and Boss trusted my integrity and my commitment to the Sona family!!

After this incident, Boss always motivated and supported me extensively to become an independent distributor of Sona and instructed me to form a good team under me for the distribution network. Subsequently, voluntarily, Boss even named my firm SR Enterprises and helped me to become an entrepreneur. Further, he gave instructions such that the team should frequently travel the entire country for sales, marketing and collection purposes.

Consequently, because of Boss's constant motivation, encouragement and guidance, I got the courage to face the market situation such as ups and downs in our on-going business, and build a trustworthy team of ten. Initially we were selling around 20 various types of gold plated, SS and leather straps. Subsequently we were able to sell and market at least 500 different types and varieties of watch straps throughout the country.

A few traits of the Boss I must confirm here: he would always encourage feedback from the market. So I was constantly updating him about the overall market feedback on our products, market pulse, market requirements, market trends and key information about other dealers and retailers, and how to expand the market for Sona products. Boss would always listen and encourage my feedback, and this has resulted in putting more effort on further new product development, which helped to increase product portfolio correspondingly. And more importantly, as I expanded

my business and met my collection targets, Boss was kind enough to increase my credit line to support my business. Fortunately, I also became one of the faces of Sona and represented Sona at various business meetings with other dealers and retailers, and more importantly, further exposed to both domestic and international business for exports.

I also want to recollect one more incident. This happened at the time of my wedding in the year 1999. Boss was kind enough to accept my wedding invitation and graced the occasion which was held at my native place, Kaup. One of my relatives, a prominent Professor at KREC/NITK by name Rajagopal Samaga had also graced the occasion. During the wedding, Boss happened to meet Samaga as they knew each other very well. In the course of the conversation, Boss introduced me as one of Sona's biggest distributors for entire India. Samaga did not have much information about my position then, and had only perceived me by my previous background. On hearing that, he was really surprised and admired me. This glorious introduction by Boss to my relative changed the entire perception about me in my native place, particularly in our family circle. Consequently I was given a different kind of treatment and respect altogether!!

With this, I want to conclude that with the grace of God and Boss, I completed my 30 year-long journey with Sona, and I am now well settled, living happily with my family and my team in a very good locality in Bangalore.

I am ever grateful to my Boss and thank my Boss once again for all the motivation, support and encouragement in this long journey!!

Vikram Bhat

27) Writing from Ravi Prakash

Writer, Watch Industry Production specialist

A Glorious Life Journey



Becoming a successful entrepreneur doesn't happen by accident or by chance. It is a long process that involves various strategies, characteristics and quality of the person who toils hard to reach his goal. Yajnanarayana, as a successful entrepreneur, is the leading name in the manufacture of Watches and Watch components in the state and abroad. As the pioneer, he has established various companies like Sona Horologicals, Sona Leathers, Sona Band, Kammaje Industries and Unisoft India under the Sona Group umbrella.

As Yajnanarayana himself says, “Becoming a successful entrepreneur is not an easy task!” There are certain qualities and strategies that are absolutely necessary if you want to become successful in your business ventures. Yajnanarayana is a living example of how some characteristics, qualities and strategies come together to make a successful entrepreneur.

Born on October 22, 1949, at Kammaje of Dakshina Kannada District, Yajnanarayana graduated in BE (Electrical) at KREC, Surathkal (6th Rank). He completed his M. Tech in Industrial Electronics at Mysore University with 1st rank. He has visited Japan, Germany, Holland and Austria to learn about Industrial Technology in depth. He has obtained training in the Electronics Industry in Watch technology in Japan's Citizen, Hitachi and Maxel plants and at NAL in Bangalore.

As a first step:

In the initial days, Yajnanarayana worked as a Professor in Electronics for a few months at RV Engineering College. In 1974, he worked as Assistant Director in the Department of Industry and Commerce of the Government of Karnataka. From 1974 to 1990, he worked in the HMT watch factory for 16 consecutive years, gaining immense experience. During his tenure, he was the first to make and market the QUARTZ Watch in India in collaboration with the Japanese Citizen Company.

Turning point in life:

During the above period, his experience and embedded dream of job creation gradually and consciously developed in him. He decided not to stay within the confines of others, so with the help of a small amount of money that he had earned, and with the assistance of a bank loan, he established the first small industrial factory called **Sona Plating** in 1987. The purpose of this industry was to help the educated poor, the backward, the illiterate and the underprivileged.

Initially, he was successful in producing and supplying watch Strap Gold Plating to HMT company. He later launched his own watch strap production plant at Attibele Industrial Area in Bangalore Rural, under the name **Sona Band** (in 1989).

There was a flurry of orders coming from Titan, which slowly started competing with HMT at that time. **Sona Horologicals Pvt. Ltd.** (1993) was started in the Sipcot Industrial Area of Tamil Nadu to cover these orders.

When there was a demand for orders simultaneously from Alwin, Shivaki, Westar, Maxima, OE, Duco, Gemini, Roches, Khanna Watches, Bentex, Bifora, Sartime, Timewell, etc., **Kammaje Industrial Unit** (1993) was established in the Veersandra Industrial Area near Electronic City, to backup these orders. Side by side, Sona Plating which was situated in N S Palya was shifted to this unit.

Over time, there have been many changes in the manufacturing units of Sona Plating. Straps such as Leather Straps, Gold Plated straps came to light in 1997. Realizing the demand, he decided to make his own leather straps, and on a small scale launched a watch strap unit called **Sona Leathers** in 1997. The company has grown to become the largest exporter of leather straps in collaboration with China's Banda Bracelet, which later resulted in the expansion of the company, fulfilling the demand for a variety of straps and orders from several companies like Titan, Timex, OE, etc.

In the meantime, the small watch assembly unit in Kammaje was moved to Sona Leathers and its expansion took place. The Titan low-end watch unit was completed and converted into **Sonata Unit** in 2005, which is constantly fulfilling the requirements of watch manufacturing companies. Sona arranges all the equipment needed for a watch, converts it into a full watch, and assembles more than one lakh

watches every month and supplies it to Titan. Later, when Titan watch orders got multiplied, he built a watch assembly unit in the campus of Sona Horologicals at Hosur, which would proudly manufacture and supply one lakh watches every month.

As leather straps became popular over time, Titan demanded the supply of high-end leather straps. Similarly, when orders were more from other watch companies, he decided to build a Leather Strap unit inside Sona Horologicals at Hosur. Yajnanarayana is seen as the visionary leader who elevated the company by producing and delivering 60,000 to 70,000 high end leather straps every month.

Around the year 2002-2003, when orders from the market and OE companies increased, with great insight, a women's watch strap unit in Tumkur was launched under the name of '**Sugama Enterprises**'. It is a unit dedicated exclusively for women, and comprises entirely of women employees, which has resulted in bringing regular income for the rural households of about 120 families; thereby this project has become a life supporting initiative for rural women.

Going a step further, Sona Leathers opened a watch making unit under the Sona brand in one part of the building, taking on institutional orders and manufacturing watches according to their requirements.

When Titan's low-end watches were getting sold out rapidly, the company launched a watch making and assembly unit within the Kammaje Industrial area, deciding to make the full watch through outsourced vendors. Later, when Kammaje started producing high end straps, Titan switched from Gold Plating to Ion Plating. As a result, the **Ion Plating Unit** (2007) was brought in at Kammaje Industries. Over time, gold plating has ceased to exist.

The Ion Plating Unit, which has grown so successfully, is now also successful in making rose gold plating, black plating and gun plating, thereby making Titan the No. 1 vendor across the country. The credit should be given to Yajnanarayana, who has provided the necessary facility, getting new machinery from time to time for the successful functioning of these units.

When the Titan watch assembly order increased, it was relocated to the now existing Sona Leathers at N S Palya. In 2015-16, he started the Ion plating unit

under the name of **Sona Coating** for the purpose of providing nickel coating for brass watch cases.

The watch strap generating units have grown to the point where they can deliver quality straps to multinational companies such as Fossil, Casio, Citizen, Seiko and so on.

In addition to wristwatch equipment production, the company also started a software unit called **Unisoft**, which employed a number of unemployed engineer graduates, hired workers to work on a contract basis, selected talent based on appropriate qualifications and ability, and led them to find their livelihood. Under Yajnanarayana, a number of software engineers got trained and they went on to hold high posts in the country and abroad.

In the meantime, another small business has been launched by the name **Time Creations** which through institutional orders produces items like gifts, pens and clocks according to the taste and requirements of the customers.

To provide on-time delivery of the products of the customers and to overcome the deficit of employees, he has outsourced out a few component assembly operations, buffing and polishing operations. Thereby, he provided an opportunity for more than a thousand outside entrepreneurs to earn and lead their life happily. Unemployed women were also a part of this initiative, and have derived the benefits of these generous acts of Yajnanarayana.

Awards and Recognitions:

Yajnanarayana's work as a successful entrepreneur has been honoured and recognized through hundreds of State and National Awards, while he has been felicitated by many reputed organizations for his social, religious and educational services.

His major awards, consolidated, go thus:

1. Technocrat of the year 2006
2. Model Alumni Award 2004 (KREC/NITK)

3. Gurunarasimha Award from Koota Mahajagathu
4. Global Man Award 2006 at the Global Kannada and Cultural conference held at Bahrain
5. Best Vendor and Best Performance Award from Titan
6. An Ideal Entrepreneur – an article in *Samyuktha Karnataka* daily
7. Participation in the Indian Watch Market Conference held at Ravindra Kalakshetra on the auspicious occasion of 20th annual celebrations of Sona Industry
8. Articles in many of the daily and monthly magazines of the state and the country
9. Felicitation by Vasudev Rao, President of '*Ananda Balaga*'
10. An article of Yajnanarayana's achievements in "*Sri Gurunarasimha*" weekly magazine sponsored by Koota Bandhu

His life time achievements cannot be summed up as just a couple of accolades. There are uncountable awards and felicitations that follow him. A book will have to be written to record his awards ranging from Titan, Timex, Vendor Partner Meet to the latest *TradePost* Life Time Achievement Award.

The deadly Covid 19 pandemic provided a fiery context to Yajnanarayana's social concern. Over 110 families of temple priests, cooks, their assistants who were unemployed and in distress during the corona lockdown, were extended financial support of Rs. 3000 each. There are so many such unknown acts of kindness shown at critical times by him. This is just a small illustration.

An example of financial discipline is that workers, including outsourced vendors were paid salaries before the 7th of every month and bonuses twice a year. Another important point is that his suppliers do not have any payment pending, be it a spring bar or steel raw material. Even if payment is delayed from other companies, he has been kind enough to pay the workers on time. He led the company successfully even through the financial crisis.

Words from insight:

Born and raised in a Brahmin family, Yajnanarayana received a scholarship, completed his education using his wisdom, and endured all the hardships of his

childhood, adolescence and youth. With all his strength, he never believed in the status quo, and being a virtuous person he has grown into a person who is exemplary by profession and personality.

Considering the manner in which he grew up, each step that he has taken at each juncture is truly commendable. It is his way of life that surprises all of us. It is a fact that nearly all contemporary companies have shut down strap manufacturing operations. Many years have gone by since they became financially insolvent. His continued presence has been a miracle in the Strap Manufacturing line, to lead this small business in a profitable manner for over 35 consecutive years, holding its workforce and providing products to customers at reasonable rates.

How is all this possible?

Yajnanarayana's hard effort, restless work, precise aiming, intuition, vision, and execution strategy are the keys to his success, starting from the strap manufacturing unit to his emergence as a successful businessman in the watch producing business. His wife, Vasanthi, is the backbone of his success. His success is also because of the hard work of his skilled and loyal workers who followed the way laid down by him. He has trodden on the successful path of life, overcoming all kinds of obstacles.

It's very important to understand that Yajnanarayana, who is living a contented life, has another successful face. It's worth mentioning some of his social, religious and economic contributions which play a vital role in the life of its beneficiaries.

The most important of them are:

- Financial aid for the education of Brahmin children.
- For the improvement of temples, formation of Trust and extension of financial assistance to them.
- Scholarship for children who are studious, but economically backward.
- Monetary help for senior workers to build houses.
- Employment for retired workers of reputed companies who showed willingness to work in his companies.
- As President of KREC / NITK Alumni Association, the establishment of a fund of one crore rupees as an aid to help talented poor students.

- Afforestation project of 300 acres land at Surathkal KREC campus.
- Providing scholarships for more than 100 poor eligible students in collaboration with the “Narasimha Foundation”.
- Establishment of a fund for the well-being of widows.
- Helping the elderly to live happily.
- Persistent efforts to create a supportive environment for women's self-reliance.
- Donations every year to social, religious and educational causes.
- Priority in employment for the rural educated poor.
- Financial support for many schools and organizations every year.

The way he empowered the workers:

The hallmark behind the success of the Sona Group is the persistent effort to empower its workers. A unique quality and practice of Yajnanarayana is to motivate his workers. The unit managers of Sona industry are trained by Yajnanarayana himself. He has managed to train them in such a way that each manager has been successful in bringing up his unit by sheer will, despite having no technical background, diploma, degree and other required educational certifications. Employees are selected for positions such as Supervisors, Storekeepers, Quality Managers based on their tactfulness, ability, demeanour, tenacity and agility, giving them full responsibility to run the company successfully. Most of the tool room - machine shop workers who work in his company are only SSLC, PUC, BA, BSc, BCom graduates. But their perseverance, desire to learn, and patience have made them successful tool makers and setters. They have become the strong pillars of the company.

In the past 15 years, Design and Development Centres are being set up in each unit to produce different types of Sheet Metal Holo Solid Model orders, in keeping with the changing situation, demand, quick expectation, on-time delivery, customer satisfaction and competition. There, he recruited skilled engineers who were trained in AutoCAD, three dimensional 3D CAD tools, who were successful in fulfilling the demand, proving that they were the best in this business.

The root cause of all this is the way Yajnanarayana treats his workers. It is amazing to see the way he nurtures and encourages their strengths by being sensitive to



Snippets of some Award Functions

wrong doing, forgetting their shortcomings. This is the reason behind Yajnanarayana's success.

The watch making industry is not as big as other businesses. Setting up an industry is neither a necessity nor a luxury for Yajnanarayana. There is no huge profit to be claimed from it. Moreover, it's an industry that does not come with complete automation but heavily relies on workers. Skill and experience are the two important requirements to make this business successful. The way he has handled it is truly amazing. It is a real achievement to have successfully run this business for 35 years without any hindrance. This is his unparalleled achievement. Because of all this, his lifestyle has always been an incomprehensible challenge to his contemporaries, and inspiring to the younger ones. Yajnanarayana's Sona Group of Industries is currently at the forefront of the Indian Watch and Horological Industry sector. The services provided in the field of employment, and his services in the social, religious and educational fields are mirror reflections of his successful life journey.

A solicitation to God:

Being a virtuous philanthropist, self-less donor, a great visionary and a successful job creator, Yajnanarayana deserves to get bountiful blessings from the Almighty. Let him serve the society as a centenarian. Let the Sona industry rise to fame and illuminate forever. Let his sons Raviprakash and Gautham successfully run the business, making Sona industry a universal brand.

Ravi Prakash

28) Contribution from Dr. Vasant Rao

Medical Doctor & Administrator

Pillar of Support

"I have known Yajnanna for the last 32 years (post my marriage) and I have been in touch with him more or less every week. Other than being the terrific business leader of our generation and living the rags-to-riches story, he is a pillar of support and guidance to his family and friends.



Success comes to those who have the passion to work, dedication, grit and determination and the motivation to achieve - all of which he truly has imbibed. While he may have achieved many successes, he continues to remain a very modest, simple and down to earth person. His ability to help all sections of society through all means possible (either by cash or by kind or moral support) is really appreciated and admired. He continues to be very kind at heart, go out of the way to help whoever is in need and is always willing to guide and counsel those in need.



He has always had and continues to have a large vision, extremely high motivation and is always willing to take risks / rise up to the challenges, notwithstanding the obstacles in the way. While he has seen many ups and downs in his life and in the industry, he has always taken everything in stride and has kept moving forward with a positive attitude.

A testament to his leadership skills is the fact that a few of his ex-employees have themselves become leaders in their chosen field. Very few in this world have successfully showcased this ability. The immense respect and love which he receives from his employees till date are also proof of his generosity and their gratitude. Among other things, in addition to the usual perks, **(i)** he has gone out of his way to help the employees fulfil their many dreams such as building their first home and funding the education of their children; and **(ii)** always has supported the cause of women's empowerment, which is shown across the excellent treatment meted out in his factories. Despite his numerous successes, he continues to be humble, the first one to give respect to elders and treat them with honour. He is an inspiration to us and many others in the family and society.

His work ethic, energy and ability to inspire everyone around him are unparalleled, putting many people in the younger generation to shame. Lastly, as the proverb says, behind every successful man, is a woman. My sister-in-law (Smt. Vasanthi Kammaje) has stood by him behind the scenes through thick and thin and they make a great combination.

Dr. Vasanth Rao

29) Contribution from Dr. Sahana Annadorai

Researcher in Chemistry

My Mava – A Story of Inspiration



My sister and I grew up in Delhi and would have the Bangalore connection only during our summer vacations, which were primarily all spent at our Yajna Mava's house. Although we were geographically removed from Bangalore, Mava's presence in our lives was an ever-present pleasant touch. Our mother loved retelling stories of her childhood - her father and her two brothers – older brother Yajna and younger brother Boya. We grew up listening to those stories of struggle, grit and love. Mava became a legend of sorts for us. As far back as I can remember, he had already established the Sona Group and was tirelessly working on building a brand and making a mark. He was among the only entrepreneurs in our family and it always gave me this imprint that if you work hard, you can break the norm and be successful in unconventional careers. That was one of the fundamental takeaways from Mava's life that still has a huge impact on me.

Mava presents so many qualities that are inspiring for the younger generation. His energy level is a marvel to me. No matter how long a tour, commute, waiting or working hour he may have spent, when he gives attention to you it is whole and with full vigour. His quest to learn is motivating. He constantly wants to learn and know more about things he may not know. He views things with a brilliant business acumen and would make a good case study of how a brilliant engineer acquired this expertise through experience.

One of my fondest memories of Mava is when Mava and Mayi visited me in Houston in 2013. It was some of the best times we have spent together. Since they were coming here after a heavy conference in Panama, the period spent here was their 'wind down' time. What I remember vividly and still makes me smile is his child like enthusiasm. He is such a widely travelled man, but when he sees something unique or interesting, his curiosity, excitement and genuine enjoyment is a treat to watch. We have peacocks in our neighbourhood and when I parked my

truck and a peacock landed on top of it, the excitement that I saw was so pure and utterly wholesome.

Any discussion of Mava's life and achievement will be incomplete without mentioning Mayi. She is the rock he leans on. Their friendship, companionship and inter-dependency is a model for us all. She brings the calm to his ever-bursting energy. She has been as hard working as Mava and has rendered her support to his endeavours throughout.

In a nutshell, Mava's achievements and legacy may not be measured accurately only through the empire of Sona Group he has built, but also through the countless of us whom he has inspired to dream big, to go after that dream and never forget the roots and the people who helped along the way. Mava's closeness to his brother and sister and their families, and how he has loved and motivated all of us children in the family is a beautiful story for generations to come. I wish and hope that my three children grow up with that closeness, and their childhood adventures with each other will shape their lives in such a way that they can recall lovely stories of each other to their children like my mother did of her brothers all through my childhood.

Sahana Annadorai

***Editor's note:** If you recall, Yajna has a younger brother (referred to as Boya earlier) and younger sister. Here are two letters from Sahana and Shobha, his nieces. 'Mava' is Kannada for Uncle and Mayi for Aunt.*

30) Contribution from Dr. Shobha

Researcher in Chemistry

Benign Omnipresence

There are some people in everyone's life who are omnipresent at all occasions and phases of life. Mava is one such person in our lives. He is like a pillar who continues to support our whole family. Me, my parents and my sister used to visit Mava and his family every summer during our childhood. He used to advise us on our education, career and future. He took a lot of interest in knowing our pursuits and encouraged us to follow our aspirations and ambitions. We all know his great association with HMT and how he built this huge Sona Group of Industries. He has such an astute business acumen which is demonstrated by the way his company is well established over the years. In the process, he has touched so many lives by his acts of kindness, generosity and goodwill. He has gone through a lot of struggle and hard work in the pursuit of his dream, and he knows that his quest has taken him where he is right now. So he used to push us also to strive hard and give our best to achieve our goals. He is a true inspiration to me, my entire family and whoever he has come in contact with. In fact he has changed the lives of many.



I have fond memories with him that I will cherish forever. I was the first child on my mother's side of the family and was really pampered by both my uncles. Mava treated me and my sister as his own daughters. He took the responsibility of my marriage celebrations upon himself to such an extent that till date even after 17 years, the grandeur of my wedding is remembered by all our family and friends. I really salute his energy levels. No matter what he is doing and how he has spent his day, he is up the next morning with a new zeal, energy and enthusiasm. His energy is quite infectious and really fills the room. He has child-like innocence and inquisitiveness to know everything at great length. Interactions with him on the matter of politics, business or travel are so enriching. Once I remember he wanted to understand Hussain's paintings and learn more about contemporary art despite his own busy schedule. He has come to my sea facing house in Bombay many times. Every time he has told me that the sound of the waves remind him of Surathkal and he felt quite nostalgic about his engineering days.

The way he has come up in life against all odds and achieved tremendous success in life is definitely a great story in itself. He has set the standards so high that I can only hope and wish that his legacy continues to inspire us and inspire our future generations.

Shobha

31) Write-up in Kannada by P Venkat Rao

Entrepreneur, Ex-President Koota Maha Jagathu Kendra Samsthe

**'ಸರ್ವಜನ ಉಪಕಾರಿ', ಶ್ರೇಷ್ಠ ಕೂಟಬಂಧು ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ
(ಯಜ್ಞನಾರಾಯಣ ಹೇಳೆರ್)- ಪಿ. ವೆಂಕಟ್ರಾವ್**



ಕರಾವಳಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ದಕ್ಷಿಣ ಕನ್ನಡ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಯ ಬಂಟ್ವಾಳದ ಹಳ್ಳಿಮೂಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಜನಿಸಿ ತನ್ನ ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯ, ಪ್ರತಿಭೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಸತತ ಪರಿಶ್ರಮದಿಂದಲೇ ಬದುಕನ್ನು ರೂಪಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು ತನ್ನೊಂದಿಗೆ ಅದೆಷ್ಟೋ ಕುಟುಂಬಗಳಿಗೂ ಬೆಳಕಾದವರು ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ. ಬಾಲ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಬಡತನ ಕಾಡಿದರೂ ನಿರಂತರ ಅಧ್ಯಯನ ಹಾಗೂ ಫಲದಿಂದ ರಾಜ್ಯದ ಪ್ರತಿಷ್ಠಿತ ಇಂಜಿನಿಯರಿಂಗ್ ಕಾಲೇಜಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರವೇಶ ಗಿಟ್ಟಿಸಿ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಮುಗಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು ದೇಶದ ಹೆಸರಾಂತ ಕಂಪೆನಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಉದ್ಯೋಗಕ್ಕೆ ಸೇರಿ, ಅಲ್ಲಿ ತನ್ನ ಕರ್ತವ್ಯನಿಷ್ಠೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಪರಿಶ್ರಮದಿಂದ ಉನ್ನತ ಸ್ಥಾನಕ್ಕೇರಿದರೂ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಆತ್ಮತ್ಯಜ್ಞ ಕಾರಣದ ಸ್ವಂತ ಉದ್ಯಮ ಆರಂಭಿಸಿ ತಾನೂ ಬೆಳೆದು ಕಷ್ಟದಲ್ಲಿರುವ ಸಾವಿರಾರು ಯುವ ಪ್ರತಿಭಾಶಾಲಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಬದುಕು ಕಟ್ಟಿಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ದಾರಿ ಮಾಡಿಕೊಟ್ಟು ಇಂದು ಧನ್ಯತೆಯ ಬಾಳು ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿರುವವರು ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ. ತನ್ನ ಬದುಕು ತಾನೇ ರೂಪಿಸುವ ಛಲ, ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟ ಗುರಿ ಹಾಗೂ ಸ್ವಂತ ಪರಿಶ್ರಮ ಇವಿಷ್ಟು ಒಬ್ಬ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಎಷ್ಟು ಎತ್ತರಕ್ಕೆ ಕೊಂಡೊಯ್ಯಬಲ್ಲದು ಎಂಬುದಕ್ಕೆ ಉದಾಹರಣೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ.

ಹೌದು, ಯಜ್ಞನಾರಾಯಣ ಕೆಮ್ಮಾಚೆ ಎಂದೇ ಪ್ರಸಿದ್ಧರಾದ ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ ಬಂಟ್ವಾಳ ತಾಲೂಕಿನ ಸಿದ್ಧಕಟ್ಟೆಯ ಪುಟ್ಟ ಹಳ್ಳಿ ಕೆಮ್ಮಾಚೆಯವರು. ತಂದೆ ಶ್ರೀ ಕೆ. ವೆಂಕಪ್ಪಯ್ಯ, ತಾಯಿ ಶ್ರೀಮತಿ ಪದ್ಮಾವತಿ. ಬಾಲ್ಯದಿಂದಲೇ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಚುರುಕು ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿತ್ವದ ಯಜ್ಞನಾರಾಯಣ ಎಂಬ ಪುಟ್ಟ ಬಾಲಕ ಪ್ರತಿಭಾಶಾಲಿಯಾಗಿ ಬೆಳೆದುದರಿಂದಲೂ, ತನ್ನ ಪ್ರತಿಭೆಯಿಂದಲೇ ಬೆಳೆದವರು. ತನ್ನ ಹಳ್ಳಿಯಲ್ಲಿಯೇ ಪ್ರಾಥಮಿಕ ವಿದ್ಯಾಭ್ಯಾಸ ಮುಗಿಸಿ ಮುಂದಿನ ವಿದ್ಯಾಭ್ಯಾಸಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಸುರತ್ಕಲ್ಲಿನ ಕೆ.ಆರ್.ಇ.ಸಿ. ಸೇರಿ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಬಿ.ಇ. ಎಂ.ಟೆಕ್, ಮುಗಿಸಿ ಎಚ್.ಎಂ.ಟಿ ಕಂಪೆನಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಟ್ರೈನಿ ಇಂಜಿನಿಯರ್ ಆಗಿ ಸೇರಿಕೊಂಡವರು. ಸುಮಾರು 15 ವರ್ಷಗಳ ಕಾಲ ಸೇವೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಿ ತನ್ನ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಎಲ್ಲರ ಕಣ್ಮಣಿಯಾಗಿ ದುಡಿದು ಹಂತಹಂತವಾಗಿ ಬೆಳೆದು ಡಿಜಿಎಂ ಹಂತಕ್ಕೇರಿದವರು.

ಆದರೆ ತನ್ನ ಕಾರ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ತ್ಯಜ್ಞ ಕಾರಣದ ಏನಾದರೂ ಸಾಧಿಸಬೇಕೆಂಬ ಒತ್ತಾಸೆಯಿಂದಲೇ ಸ್ವಂತ ಉದ್ಯಮ ಆರಂಭಿಸುವ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನದಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗಿದರು. ಆ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನದ ಫಲವಾಗಿ ಆರಂಭಗೊಂಡ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆ ಇಂದು ಬ್ರಹ್ಮದಾಕಾರವಾಗಿ ಬೆಳೆದ ಸೋನಾ ಗ್ರೂಪ್ ಆಫ್ ಕಂಪೆನಿಸ್. ತನ್ನ ಆತ್ಮೀಯರ ಸಹಕಾರ, ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನ, ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹ ಹಾಗೂ ಪರಿಶ್ರಮದಿಂದ ಇಂದು ಹೆಸರಾಂತ ಉದ್ಯಮಿಯಾಗಿ ಬೆಳೆದ ನಿಂತ ಈ ಉದ್ಯಮಸಂಸ್ಥೆ ಇಂದು ವಿವಿಧ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ತನ್ನ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಹರಡಿಕೊಂಡಿದೆ. ಸೋನ ಗೋಲ್ಡ್ ಕೋಟೆಡ್ ಸ್ಟಾಪ್, ಲೆದರ್ ಸ್ಟಾಪ್ ತಯಾರಿಕೆ, ಸಾಫ್ಟ್‌ವೇರ್ ಕಂಪೆನಿ, ಸಣ್ಣ ಮಟ್ಟಿನ ರಿಯಲ್ ಎಸ್ಟೇಟ್ ಒೀಗೆ ಈ ಕಂಪೆನಿಯ ವಿಸ್ತಾರ ವಿವಿಧ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಹರಡಿದೆ. ಆದರೆ ಎಲ್ಲೂ ಇದ್ದಲ್ಲ ತನ್ನೊಬ್ಬನದೇ ಸಾಧನೆಯೆಂದೋ, 'ಇದೆಲ್ಲ ನಾನು ಮಾಡಿದ್ದು, ಇದು ನನ್ನದು' ಎಂದು ಹೇಳುವವರಲ್ಲ ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ. 'ನನ್ನ ಯಶಸ್ಸಿಗೆ ನನ್ನ ಜೊತೆಗೆ ದುಡಿದವರ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನವೂ ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಕಾರಣ' ಎಂದು ನಮ್ರತೆಯಿಂದ ನೆನೆಯುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಅವಕಾಶ ಸಿಕ್ಕಾಗಲೆಲ್ಲ ಅವರ ಹೆಸರು ಹೇಳಿ ಅಭಿನಂದನೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸುವುದಕ್ಕೂ ಹಿಂದೆ ಮುಂದೆ ನೋಡುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ಆರಂಭದಿಂದಲೂ ತನ್ನೊಂದಿಗಿದ್ದು ತನ್ನ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯನ್ನು ತಮ್ಮದೆ ಎಂಬ ಭಾವನೆಯಿಂದ ಹಗಲು ರಾತ್ರಿ ದುಡಿದ ಸಿಬ್ಬಂದಿವರ್ಗವನ್ನು ಹೆಸರಿಸುವುದೆಂದರೆ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣನಿಗೆ ತುಂಬಾ ಋಷಿ. ಪ್ರತಿ ಹಂತದಲ್ಲೂ ತನ್ನ ಉದ್ಯೋಗಿಗಳ ಸೇವೆಯನ್ನು ತ್ಯಾಗವನ್ನು ನೆನೆಯುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಕೃತಜ್ಞತೆಯಿಂದ ಪುರಸ್ಕರಿಸುತ್ತಾರೆ.

ಆದರೆ ಬದುಕು ಎಂದರೆ ಕೇವಲ ತನ್ನ ಮನೆ, ತನ್ನ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆ ಮಾತ್ರವಲ್ಲ, ತನ್ನ ಮನೆ, ಸಂಸ್ಥೆ ಇಷ್ಟು ಮಾತ್ರ ಬೆಳೆದರೆ ಸಾಲದು. ತನಗೆ ಬದುಕು ಕೊಟ್ಟ ಸಮಾಜಕ್ಕೆ ಪ್ರತಿಫಲವಾಗಿ ಸಮಾಜದಲ್ಲಿ ಕಷ್ಟದಲ್ಲಿರುವವರಿಗೆ ಆಸರೆನಾಗಬೇಕು ಎಂಬ ಆಸೆ ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣನದು. ಬಡತನದ ಕರನರಳು ಯಾರನ್ನೂ ಅವಕಾಶವಂತಿಚರನ್ನಾಗಿಸಬಾರದು ಎಂಬ ದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಿಂದ ಸಮಾಜದಲ್ಲಿ ಆರ್ಥಿಕವಾಗಿಯೂ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕವಾಗಿಯೂ ಹಿಂದುಳಿದ ಅದೆಷ್ಟೋ ಯುವಕರಿಗೆ ತನ್ನ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಉದ್ಯೋಗಾವಕಾಶ ಕಲ್ಪಿಸಿದರು. ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಅಲ್ಲ, ಮುಂದೆ ತನ್ನ ಸಮಾಜ, ತನ್ನ ವಿಪ್ರ ಬಾಂಧವರಿಗಾಗಿ ದುಡಿಯಬೇಕು, ತನ್ನ ನೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಗುರು ಸಾಲಿಗ್ರಾಮದ ಗುರು ನರಸಿಂಹ ದೇವರಿಗೆ ಏನಾದರೂ ಮಾಡಬೇಕು ಎಂಬ ತುಡಿತದಿಂದ ಸಮಾಜಸೇವೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗಿಕೊಂಡರು. ನಿರಂತರ ಸಲಹೆ ಉತ್ತೇಜನ ನೀಡುತ್ತಾ ಕೂಟ ಮಾಹಾಜಗತ್ತು ಹಾಗೂ ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನದ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಗೆ ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನ ನೀಡಿದರು.

ನಮ್ಮ ಅವರ ಪರಿಚಯ ತುಂಬ ಹಳೆಯದು. 1980ರ ದಶಕದ ಅಂತ್ಯಭಾಗದಲ್ಲಿ ಯಾವುದೋ ಒಂದು ಕಾರ್ಯದ ನಿಮಿತ್ತ ಅವರ ಭೇಟಿಗಾಗಿ ನನ್ನ ಸ್ನೇಹಿತರೊಂದಿಗೆ ಅವರ ಕಚೇರಿಗೆ ಹೋದವನು ನಾನು. ಆಗ ಅವರು ಎಚ್.ಎಂ.ಟಿ ಕಂಪೆನಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಡೆಪ್ಯೂಟಿ ಜನರಲ್ ಮ್ಯಾನೇಜರ್ ಆಗಿ ಸೇವೆ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದರು. ಅವರ ಚುರುಕುತನ, ಎಲ್ಲರೊಟ್ಟಿಗೆ ಒಂದಾಗಿ ಬೆರೆಯುವುದು ಹಾಗೂ ಯುವಕರಿಗೆ ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹ ನೀಡಿ ಅವರನ್ನು ಬೆಳೆಸುವ ಗುಣ ಇದನ್ನೆಲ್ಲ ಕಂಡು ಒಂದರ್ಥದಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರ ಅಭಿಮಾನಿಯೇ ಆಗಿಹೋದೆ. ಅಂದಿನಿಂದ ಇಂದಿನ ವರೆಗೆ ಅದು ಕೂಟಮಹಾಜಗತ್ತೇ ಇರಲಿ, ಗುರುನರಸಿಂಹ ದೇವಳದ ಆಡಳಿತ ಮಂಡಳಿಯೇ ಇರಲಿ, ವಿಪ್ರ ಬ್ರಾಹ್ಮಣದ ಸಂಘವೇ ಇರಲಿ ಯಾವುದೇ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗಿಕೊಂಡರೆ ತನ್ನ ಸಂಪೂರ್ಣವನ್ನೂ ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿಯೇ ವಿನಿಯೋಗಿಸುವ ಗುಣವನ್ನು ಅವರಲ್ಲಿ ನಿರಂತರ ಕಂಡಿದ್ದೇನೆ. ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿಯೇ ಅವರೆಂದರೆ ನನಗೆ ಅಚ್ಚುಮೆಚ್ಚು, ಅಭಿಮಾನ, ಹೆಮ್ಮೆ.

ನಾನು ಕೂಟ ಮಹಾಜಗತ್ತಿನ ಉತ್ತರಹಳ್ಳಿ ಅಂಗಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷನಾಗಿದ್ದಾಗ ಹಾಗೂ ಆ ಬಳಿಕ ಕೇಂದ್ರಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷನಾದಾಗ ನನ್ನ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ನನಗೆ ಆಧಾರವಾಗಿ ನಿಂತವರು ಯಜ್ಞಸಾರಾಯಣ ಹೇರಳೆಯವರು. ಕೂಟ ಸಮಾಜಕ್ಕೆ ಅವರ ಕೊಡುಗೆಗಳನ್ನು ಗಮನಿಸುವುದಿದ್ದರೆ -

1. ನರಸಿಂಹ ಪ್ರತಿಷ್ಠಾನವನ್ನು ಆರಂಭಿಸಿ ಅದರ ಮೂಲಕ ತನ್ನ ಕಂಪನಿಯ ಹಣವನ್ನು ವಿನಿಯೋಗಿಸಿ ಪ್ರತಿವರ್ಷ ಸುಮಾರು 200ಕ್ಕೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಪ್ರತಿಭಾಶಾಲಿ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಧನಸಹಾಯ ನೀಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ.
2. ಶ್ರೀ ಗುರು ಯೋಗಾನಂದ ಟ್ರಸ್ಟ್ ಆರಂಭಿಸಿದ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಸಹಕಾರ ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹ ನೀಡಿದ್ದಾರೆ.
3. ನಮ್ಮ ಅಂಗಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ಆಶ್ರಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಗೋವಿಂದರಾಜ ನಗರದಲ್ಲಿ ಶ್ರೀಗುರುನರಸಿಂಹ ಕಟ್ಟಡ ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಅಡಿಯಿಟ್ಟಾಗ ದೊಡ್ಡ ಮೊತ್ತದ ಧನಸಹಾಯನೀಡಿ ಏನೇ ತೊಂದರೆ ಬಂದರೆ ನಾನಿದ್ದೇನೆ ಎಂದು ಭರವಸೆ ನೀಡಿ ಯೋಜನೆ ಪೂರ್ಣಗೊಳಿಸುವಲ್ಲಿ ಸಹಕಾರಿಯಾದರು.
4. ಎರಡನೇ ವಿಶ್ವಕೂಟ ಸಮ್ಮೇಳನವನ್ನು ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಆಯೋಜಿಸುವ ನಿರ್ಧಾರ ಕೈಗೊಂಡಾಗ ನಮ್ಮ ಜೊತೆಗಿದ್ದು ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹ ನೀಡಿದ್ದರು. ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಅಲ್ಲ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮದ ಆಯೋಜನಾವೆಚ್ಚ ಸುಮಾರು 70 ರಿಂದ 80 ಲಕ್ಷ ರೂಪಾಯಿಗಳಿಂದ ಅಂದಾಜಿಸಿದಾಗ ಸ್ವಲ್ಪ ಅಳುಕಾದರೂ ಆ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ನೀವು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಯಿರಿ. ನನ್ನ ಸ್ನೇಹಿತರ ಬಳಗ ದೊಡ್ಡದಿದೆ. ಮತ್ತು ಕಡಿಮೆಯಾಯಿತೆಂದರೆ ನಾನು ಇದ್ದೇನೆ. ಯಾವುದೇ ಕಾರಣಕ್ಕೆ ಮುಂದಿಟ್ಟ ಹೆಜ್ಜೆ ಹಿಂದೆಗೆಯಬೇಡಿ" ಎಂದು ಧೈರ್ಯ ತುಂಬಿ ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹಿಸಿದ್ದರೆ ಪರಿಣಾಮವಾಗಿ ನಾವು ಧೈರ್ಯದಿಂದ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮದ ತಯಾರಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗಿದ್ದಲ್ಲದೆ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮವು ದೊಡ್ಡ ಮಟ್ಟದ ಯಶಸ್ಸು ಕಂಡಿತು. ಆ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಕ್ಕೆ ಅವರ ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನ ಉತ್ತೇಜನ ಇಲ್ಲದಿರುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೆ ಎರಡನೇ ವಿಶ್ವಕೂಟ ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯಾಗುತ್ತಿರಲಿಲ್ಲವೆಂದೇ ನನ್ನ ಭಾವನೆ. ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಅಲ್ಲದೆ ಸಮಿತಿಯ ಮುಖ್ಯ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿಯಾಗಿ ತನ್ನ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಅನುಭವ ಹಾಗೂ ಪ್ರಭಾವವನ್ನು ಬಳಸಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಕ್ಕೆ ಉತ್ತಮ ಹಾಗೂ ಯೋಗ್ಯ ಅತಿಥಿಗಳನ್ನು ಸಂಪರ್ಕಿಸಿ ಅವರು ತಮ್ಮ ಈ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಕ್ಕೆ ಬರುವಂತೆ ಮಾಡಿ ಸಮ್ಮೇಳನವು ತುಂಬ ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯಾಗಲು ಕಾರಣರಾದರು. ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮ ಆಯೋಜನೆಯ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಏನೇ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆ-ಸಂಶಯ ಬಂದಾಗ ನಾವು ಅವರಲ್ಲಿಗೆ ಹೋಗಿ ಅವರ ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನ ಪಡೆಯುತ್ತಿದ್ದೆವು. ಆಗ ಅವರ ಯೋಜನಾಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯ, ದೂರದೃಷ್ಟಿ ಹಾಗೂ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ಷಮತೆ ಕಂಡು ನಾವು ನಿಜವಾಗಿಯೂ ಬೆರಗಾಗಿದ್ದುಂಟು.
5. ಇನ್ನು ಯಜ್ಞಸಾರಾಯಣ ಹೇರಳಿಯವರು ಶ್ರೀ ಸಾಲಿಗ್ರಾಮ ಗುರುನರಸಿಂಹ ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನದ ಧರ್ಮದರ್ಶಿಯಾಗಿ ಆಯ್ಕೆಗೊಂಡು ನಮ್ಮ ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನವನ್ನು ದೊಡ್ಡ ಧಾರ್ಮಿಕ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರವನ್ನಾಗಿ ಮಾಡಬೇಕೆಂಬ ಆಸೆಯನ್ನು ಇಟ್ಟುಕೊಂಡು ಆ ಬಗೆಗೆ ಯೋಜನೆಯನ್ನು ರೂಪಿಸಿದವರು. ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ತಮ್ಮ ಯೋಜನೆಯನ್ನು ಕಾರ್ಯಗತ ಗೊಳಿಸುವುದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಹಗಲಿರುಳೂ ಶ್ರಮಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಈ ನಿಟ್ಟಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಸತತ ಯೋಜನೆಗಳನ್ನು ಹಾಕಿಕೊಂಡು ಅವನ್ನು ಕಾರ್ಯಗತಗೊಳಿಸುವಲ್ಲಿ ಸತತ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನ ಮಾಡಿ ಯಶಸ್ಸು ಕಂಡಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಒಂದರ್ಥದಲ್ಲಿ ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನದ ಪಥವನ್ನೇ ಬದಲಿಸಿದ ಕೀರ್ತಿ ಇವರಿಗೆ ಸಲ್ಲುತ್ತದೆ. ದೇವಳದ ಸುತ್ತಮುತ್ತ ಮೂಲಭೂತ ಸೌಕರ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ವೃದ್ಧಿಸುವಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರ ನಡೆಸಿದ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನ ಹಾಗೂ ದೇವಳದಲ್ಲಿ ಆಗುತ್ತಿರುವ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳು ಭಕ್ತರಿಗೆ ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನದ ಬಗೆಗೆ ವಿಶ್ವಾಸ ಮೂಡುವಲ್ಲಿ ಸಹಕಾರಿಯಾಯಿತು. ಇದರಿಂದಾಗಿ ದೊಡ್ಡ ಮೊತ್ತದಲ್ಲಿ ದೇರಿಗೆ ಹರಿದುಬಂತು. ದೇವಸ್ಥಾನ ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಯ ಪಥದಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಗುವಂತಾಯಿತು.

ಯಾವುದೇ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಯಾವುದೇ ವಿಷಯ ಅಥವಾ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆ ಎದುರಾದಾಗ ಆ ಕುರಿತು ಹೇರಳೆಯವರ ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನ ಕೇಳಬೇಕೆಂದರೆ ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಅದಕ್ಕೊಂದು ಉತ್ತರ, ಪರಿಹಾರ ಸಿಗುವುದು ಖಂಡಿತ. ಈ ವಿಶ್ವಾಸದಿಂದಲೇ ನಾವು ಮತ್ತೆ ಮತ್ತೆ ಅವರ ಬಳಿ ಹೋಗುವುದಕ್ಕೆ ಪ್ರೇರಣೆಯಾಗುವಂತೂ ನಿಜ. ಎಷ್ಟೋ ಬಾರಿ ನಮ್ಮ ಚಿಂತನೆ ಅವರಿಗೆ ಒಪ್ಪಿಗೆಯಾಗದೇ ಹೋದರೂ ಅದನ್ನು ಅವರಿಗೆ ಸರಿಯಾಗಿ ವಿವರಿಸಿ ಹೇಳಿದಾಗ ಅದನ್ನು ಸ್ವೀಕರಿಸುವ ದೊಡ್ಡ ಗುಣ ಅವರದ್ದು. ಹಾಗಾಗಿಯೇ ಅವರು ಜನಾನುರಾಗಿ.

ಕೂಟ ಸಮಾಜದ ಏಳಿಗೆಗಾಗಿ ಸದಾ ತುಡಿಯುವ ಅವರು ತಮ್ಮ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕೂಟ ಸಮಾಜದ ಅನೇಕ ಯುವಕರಿಗೆ ಉದ್ಯೋಗ ನೀಡಿ ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಅಲ್ಲ ಅನೇಕ ಬಡ ಪ್ರತಿಭಾವಂತ ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳಿಗೆ ವಿದ್ಯಾಭ್ಯಾಸಕ್ಕೆ ಸಹಕಾರ ನೀಡಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ತಮ್ಮ ಬಾಲ್ಯದ ಬಡತನ-ಕಷ್ಟವನ್ನು ಅವರಿಂದೂ ಮರೆತಿಲ್ಲ. ತನ್ನ ವಿದ್ಯಾಭ್ಯಾಸಕ್ಕೆ ಮದ್ರಾಸಿನ ಟ್ರಸ್ಟ್ ಒಂದು ಸಹಕಾರ ನೀಡಿದ್ದನ್ನು ಸದಾ ನೆನಪಿಟ್ಟುಕೊಂಡು ಹೇಳುವ ಹೇಳಿಕೆಯವರು ಅದನ್ನೇ ತಾವೂ ಮುಂದುವರಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು ಹೋಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. "ಕೊಟ್ಟಿದ್ದು ತನಗೆ, ಬಿಟ್ಟಿದ್ದು ಪರರಿಗೆ" ಎಂಬುದು ಅವರು ಸದಾ ನಂಬಿದ ತತ್ವ. ಅದರಂತೆ ನಡೆದವರೂ ಕೂಡ.

ಅವರು ಸುಸಂಸ್ಕೃತ ಕುಟುಂಬದಿಂದ ಬಂದವರು. ಹಾಗಾಗಿ ಅವರ ನಡೆ ನುಡಿ ಎಲ್ಲವೂ ಅಷ್ಟು ಅಚ್ಚುಕಟ್ಟು. ಅವರ ಸರಳತೆ, ಡೌನ್ ಟು ಅರ್ತ್ ಗುಣ ಎಲ್ಲರನ್ನೂ ಅಯಸ್ಕಾಂತದಂತೆ ಅವರಡೆಗೆ ಸೆಳೆಯುವುದನ್ನೂ ನಾವು ಕಂಡವರು. ನಮ್ಮ ಬಂಧ ಎಷ್ಟು ಅತ್ತೀಯವೆಂದರೆ ನಾನು ತಪ್ಪು ಮಾಡಿದರೆ ಅವರು ಮುಲಾಜಿಲ್ಲದೆ ಹೇಳುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಅದರಂತೆ ಅವರಿಂದ ಏನಾದರೂ ನಡೆದರೂ ನಾನೂ ಹೇಳುತ್ತೇನೆ. ಅದಕ್ಕೆ ಎಂದೂ ಬೇಸರಿರುವವರಲ್ಲ ಅವರು. ಎಲ್ಲರೊಂದಿಗೆ ಅತ್ತೀಯವಾಗಿ ಬೆರೆಯುವವರು ಅವರು.

ಅವರಷ್ಟೇ ಉತ್ತಮ ಹಾಗೂ ಸಮಾಜಮುಖಿ ಅವರ ಪತ್ನಿ----. ಅವರದು ಬಲು ಅಪರೂಪದ ಜೋಡಿ. ಅವರ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅವರ ಪಾಲು ಸಹಕಾರ ಇದ್ದೆ ಇರುತ್ತದೆ.

ಅವರು ಅದೆಷ್ಟೋ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳ ಸದಸ್ಯರು; ಅದೆಷ್ಟೋ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶಕರು; ಅದೆಷ್ಟೋ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳ ಮಟ್ಟಿಗೆ ಕೊಡುಗೆಯಿ ದಾನಿ.

ಒಟ್ಟಾರೆಯಾಗಿ ಒಂದು ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ಮುಖ್ಯಸ್ಥನಾದರೂ ತನ್ನ ಸಮಾಜ, ತನ್ನ ಬಾಂಧವರು, ಬಡತನದಲ್ಲಿರುವವರು, ಕಷ್ಟದಲ್ಲಿರುವವರು, ಹಿಂದುಳಿದವರು - ಎಲ್ಲರ ಬಗೆಗೂ ಸದ ಚಿಂತಿಸುತ್ತಾ ಅವರ ಏಳಿಗೆಗಾಗಿ ಶ್ರಮಿಸುತ್ತಾ ಅದರಲ್ಲೇ ತೃಪ್ತಿ ಕಾಣುವ ನಮ್ಮ ಬಂಧು ಯಜ್ಞಣ್ಣ. ಅವರ ಮುಂದಿನ ಜೀವನವು ಸುಖಮಯವಾಗಿರಲಿ ಎಂಬುದನ್ನಷ್ಟೇ ನಾನು ಹಾರೈಸುವೆ.

32) Poem in Kannada by Vithal B Parvatikar

Industrialist, NIT-K Alumnus, Member of Editorial Board for this book

Any literary activity like this book writing does bring out creativity in everyone. Here is a poem by Vittal B Parvatikar, alumnus of KREC/NIT-K, an industrialist who served as a senior member of the editorial team for this book.



ಯಜ್ಞ ನಾರಾಯಣ ಕಮ್ಮಾಜೆ
ಯಜ್ಞರೂ ಅಹುದು, ನುರಿತ ಪ್ರಾಜ್ಞರೂ ಅಹುದು,
ಸುಜ್ಞಾನರೂ ಅಹುದು, ಅರಿತತಂತ್ರಜ್ಞರೂ ಅಹುದು,
ಗೀತೆಯ ಭಕ್ತರೂ ಅಹುದು, ದೇಶಸೇವೆಯಲಿ ಅನುರಕ್ತರೂ ಅಹುದು,
ಗೆಳೆತನದಲಿ ಆಸಕ್ತರೂ ಅಹುದು, ದುರಾಸೆಯಿಂದ ವಿರಕ್ತರೂ ಅಹುದು,

ಗುಟ್ಟೀನು ತಿಳಿಯಲು ಕಳೆಯಬೇಕು,
ಸಮಯ, ಅವರಜೊತೆಯಲಿ, ದಿವಸನಾಕು,
ಕೊಡುವರು ಸಮಯ ಪ್ರಜ್ಞೆ, ಗಡಿಯಾರದಿಂದ,
ಕಟ್ಟಿಹರು, ಸಮಯ ತಂತ್ರದ ಸಾಮ್ರಾಜ್ಯ ನುರಿತ ಜ್ಞಾನದಿಂದ

ತಿಳಿಸಿಹರು, ಸಮಯವೇಹಣ, ಹಣವೇಸಮಯ,
ಎರಡನೂ ಗಳಿಸಲು ಬೇಕೇ ಬೇಕು, ಶಿಸ್ತು, ಸಂಯಮ,
ಅವರ ತತ್ವವಿದು, ಹೆಣ್ಣೇ ದೇಶದ ಪ್ರಗತಿಗೆ ಮೂಲ,
ಕಣ್ಣಿನಂತೆ ಕಾಪಾಡಿ ಅವಳನು, ಆಗುವೆವು ನಾವೆಲ್ಲಾ ಪ್ರಬಲ,

ಅವರ ಸತ್ವದ ಮಾತಿದು, ತಂತ್ರಜ್ಞಾನ ಅವಶ್ಯ ನಮಗೆಲ್ಲ,
ಜೊತೆಯಲಿ ಮಾನವೀಯತೆ ಹೊರತು, ಉಳಿಯುವುದು ಹೇಗೆ ನಾವೆಲ್ಲಾ?
ಗೀತೆಯ ಜ್ಞಾನವನು, ಅರಿದು, ಅರದು, ಕುಡಿಯಲೇ ಬೇಕು,
ಅರಿಗಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕು, ನುಡಿದಂತೆನಡೆಯಲೇಬೇಕು

ಕೈ ನೀಡಿ ಇನ್ನೊಬ್ಬರಿಗೆ, ಗಳಿಸಿ, ಭಾರತಮಾತೆಯ ವಲುವು,
ನಮ್ಮ ಅಳಿವು, ಉಳಿವೆಲ್ಲ, ಅವಳಿಂದ, ಕೊಡುವಳು ನಮಗೆ ನಲುವು.
ಬನ್ನಿ, ಯುವಕರೇ, ನನ್ನ ಒಪ್ಪಿಗೆಯ ಅಪ್ಪುಗೆಯಲಿ,
ಉದ್ಯಮದಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗಿ, ಅಸಂಖ್ಯ ಭಾಗ್ಯದ ಉಪ್ಪರಗೆಯಲಿ,

ವಿಠಲ ಪರ್ವತೀಕರ ಕೊಡಿಗೆ, ಯಜ್ಞ ಗುರುವಿಗೆ,

Vithal B Parvatikar

33) Blessing by Sri. S Keshava Holla

Senior citizen, Elderly relative of Yajna Narayana Kammaje

We want introduce you to Sri S. Keshava Holla, Maternal Uncle of Yajna. At 83 years of age, he is the oldest contributor to this book effort. He contributed a beautiful poem in Kannada, adopting a three lines per stanza style, which is reproduced here. He wrote it by hand first and according to his son, personally typed it using Kannada typing software and contributed to this book. Kudos to being a torch-bearer for continuous learning.



ಸಿದ್ದಕಟ್ಟೆಯ ನೆರೆಯ ಊರಿನ
ಗೌರವಾನ್ವಿತ ವೆಂಕಪ್ಪಯ್ಯರು
ನನ್ನಕ್ಕ ಪದ್ಮಾವತಿಯ ಪಾಣಿಗ್ರಹಣ ಮಾಡಿಹರು | ೧ |

ಪೊಳಲಿ ನೆರೆಯ ಹಳ್ಳಿ ಕಮ್ಮಾಜೆ
ಮೂಲ ಸ್ಥಾನವು ಭಾವನವರದು
ಹೇರಳೆಯ ಮನೆತನದ ಸಂಭಾವಿತರು ಭಾವಯ್ಯ | ೨ |

ಅವರ ಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಮ್ಮ ಯಜ್ಞನು
ಭಾಗೀರಥಿಯೂ ನಾರಸಿಂಹನು
ಇವರೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಚಿಕ್ಕ ತಂದೆಯ ಪೌತ್ರ ಪೌತ್ರಿಯರು | ೩ |

ನನ್ನ ಹಿಂದಿನ ಜನ್ಮದಾ ಫಲ
ದಿಂದಲೋ ದೈವೇಚ್ಛೆಯಿಂದಲೋ
ನನ್ನಳಿಯ ಯಜ್ಞನಿಗೆ ಗೌರವ, ಪ್ರೀತಿ ನನ್ನಲ್ಲಿ | ೪ |

ಕಲಿಕೆಯಲಿ ಬಹು ಮುಂದು ಯಜ್ಞನು
ತಾಂತ್ರಿಕತೆ ವಿದ್ಯೆಯಲಿ ರ್ಯಾಂಕನು
ಗಳಿಸಿ ಬೆಳೆದನು, ಬೆಳೆಸಿದನು ಉದ್ಯಮವ ಹಲವಾರು | ೫ |

ಎರಡು ಸಾವಿರ ಜನಕೆ ನೌಕರಿ
ಇತ್ತ ಪಾವನ ಅವರ ಜೀವನ
ಮಾಡಿರುವ ನನ್ನಳಿಯ ಯಜ್ಞನು ನಿಜಕು ಮಹನೀಯ ೬ |

ನಾರಸಿಂಹನು ಆಂಜನೇಯನು
ರಾಜರಾಜೇಶ್ವರಿಯು ಸತತವು
ರಕ್ಷಿಸಲಿ ಅವನನ್ನು ಅವನ ಮಡದಿ ಮಕ್ಕಳನು | ೭ |

|| ಶುಭಂ ಭೂಯಾತ್ ||

ರಚನೆ :

ಸ್. ಕೇಶವಹೊಳ್ಳೆ, M.A. B.Ed

ಕಟ್ಟೀಲ್ಪೋಸ್ವ

Its rough English translation is provided for the benefit of non-Kannada readers.

Our Yajnanarayana

Honourable Venkappayya

From neighbouring Siddakatte

Married my elder sister Padmavathi, by sacred fire. ||1||

In village Kammaje, near Polali,

My gentleman brother-in-law.

Belonged to the Herle family. ||2||

Their offspring were Yajnanarayana,

Bhagirathi and Narasimha:

This young couple's sons and daughter. ||3||

By the fruit of my previous life's deeds,

Or through God's will,

My nephew Yajna loves and respects me. ||4||

Very good at learning, Yajna,

Grew, earning ranks in tech-studies,

And then 'grew' many an industrial unit. ||5||

Giving jobs and livelihoods to 2000-odd,
He rendered his life blessed.
Truly noble is my nephew Yajna.||6||

May Gods Narasimha, Anjaneya
And Goddess Rajarajeshwari,
Protect him, his wife and children, ever and ever. ||7||

May Goodness Prevail!

Written by **S. Keshava Holla,**
Kateel Post

Editor's note: Sri Keshava Holla is an Educationist and has positively impacted thousands through his work in academia. Yajna is thankful to his uncle for the blessing. Yajna has deep respect for people like Keshava Holla Sir & others like him like Dr. Kalladka Prabhakar Bhat who have rendered yeomen service through education.

We will end the book by publishing a collage that captures the growth of Yajna, as a person, his companies and him as a family man.





Yajna shouldered responsibilities for his immediate family AND for around 1000 odd workers of his company and their families, who form his extended family. He grew over time and helped many others grow too along the journey. All of us can get motivated by him and aspire to impact others positively, the way Yajna Narayana Kammaje did and is still doing, even after crossing 70 years.

As we reach the last page, we want to re-highlight that this book is not an autobiography or biography. It is more intended to capture business lessons for others to follow and grow.

The bulk of the material has been provided by various contributors. One of them is a younger relative of Yajna, Shashanka Rao (pursuing Ph.D. in Life Sciences at Louisiana University).

What better represents growth than a tree? Nature is the ultimate teacher and sustainer of all forms of growth, directly or indirectly. Here he is explaining Yajna's influence in his life, comparing him to a tree.

You are the Tree I look up to...

Life, it seemed to have pummeled you into the dirt.

Using everything at your disposal, you rose to the occasion and sprouted amidst misery,

Growing as a sapling did you struggle hard to become a tree,

Fostering care to every being around you, forgetting your own pain,

You sheltered many in your stems for growing their wings,

Only to realize that they have to flee when wings spread wide,

Yet, you shelter numerous who come by and pass along,

You are the tree that I look up to, who has sprouted under your shade.



--Shashanka Rao

Yajna believes that his endeavours for the betterment of others need not be restricted to his family members and few friends and associates. It can be taken far and wide. That was his motivation to sponsor this book.

You need not have started or owned a business in the traditional sense of the word. Even if you are working for a salary, treat it as YOUR business. Treat it as a Yajna (service with sacrifice). Treat your work as a spiritual journey. Don't treat work just as an instrument to earn a salary or profit. Let it become a vehicle to do social good.

While dwelling on the essence of work as 'Yajna', there is one more aspect that can be realized by splitting the word Yajna to Yaj-na.

The first part, 'Yaj', is clear. 'Na' in many Indian languages means "NO". The need of the hour is to learn to say NO to those acts that will not help in upliftment. Everyone in society should learn to say an emphatic NO to short cuts, compromises, unsavoury dealings. Modern business life can be a struggle between the forces of good and bad that goes on many levels. All successful people learn the art of when to say NO decisively to a few things and YES to many others.

We in the Editorial board have learnt a lot and grown under the tree called Yajna. Here is hoping that this book enables many more to take his story and adopt it, as a virtual Dronacharya, the teacher par excellence from the *Mahabharata*. Many more can become excellent students like Ekalavya. You can listen to him in the video interviews section of this book and related groups on the Facebook platform.

We wish the readers grow in their professional, business, and personal journeys. Allow us to repeat the prayer that Yajna added in his letter.

ॐ सर्वेभवन्तुसुखिनः। सर्वेसन्तुनिरामयाः।सर्वेभद्राणिपश्यन्तु। माकश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत्।
॥ॐ शान्तिःशान्तिःशान्तिः॥

:oṃ sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ. | sarve santu nirāmayāḥ| .sarve bhadrāṇi paśyantu mā
kaścidduḥ khabhāgbhaveta | oṃśāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ||

May all sentient beings be at peace, may no one suffer from illness, May all see what is auspicious, may no one suffer. Om peace, peace, peace.

Acknowledgements from the Editorial Team, and an appeal

As we come to the end of the book, we have a pleasant task to acknowledge all authors who have contributed to this book with their write-ups. In a way, it is THEIR Book. They gave the rich material which formed the basis for the editorial comments and sequencing. Our job was made easy, thanks to all their effort for jotting down memories of their interactions with Yajna. We have tried to use as much of the content in its entirety. If we have edited portions of the same for brevity and other reasons, we seek your understanding.

We took in suggestions from various quarters and have incorporated it along the book writing effort. If any errors have crept in, we own it and promise to correct them if brought to our notice, in the next revision.

Thanks to Yajna Narayana Kammaje for supporting the initiative of the KREC-NIT-K Alumni and associates and scheduling time for many interviews, accompanied by lovely dinner time chats.

What next for the core team that came together to author this book? We have internalized the message of Business as Yajna. We will set about spreading this message. We invite the readers of this book to also join us in this journey. We are readying ourselves to conduct many seminars in colleges, startup incubators, accelerators, leadership development initiatives and other related institutions in the industry ecosystem. The aim is to spread the message of **1) "You too can grow" and 2) grow you must while pursuing to live a life of integrity.** We are sure our effort will result in a few more Yajna Narayanas in due course of time.

A BIG THANK YOU, for your time and also a note of appreciation in advance for your effort to grow and assistance for others to grow.



Editorial Board and Key Contributors

Rtn. B. Anantha Bhat (Right) is an Electrical & Electronics Engineer and an entrepreneur. He has been working in VLSI/Semiconductor/Technology field from 1989 in India, Singapore, ASEAN & Asia Pac regions.

He considers himself influenced by Yajna and being one of the beneficiaries of his “Jambavantha Effect” written in this book. That is, to be aware of one's inner strengths, aim higher, work smarter and overcome temporary setbacks and re-dedicate to undertaken tasks.



Yajna & B. Anantha Bhat

Yajna strongly encouraged Anantha's interest in Sanskrit and various aspects of *Sanatana Dharma*. This was one of the motivations for committing to this book project. The spin on the name 'Yajna' the person, and 'Yajna' the ritual in this book title is an outcome of this interest.



SK Guru Prakash



V. B. Parvatikar



A.S. Karanth



Usha Somayaji



Hemal Kharod



We reserve the back page of this book for the extended SONA family. Here are three generations of the Kammaje family expressing their thanks to all customers, suppliers, vendors, partners, associates, employees, workers and all others who have contributed to the success of the Sona Group of companies over the years. We hope the group will get the chance to continue and intensify its journey of business as a spiritual practice with many social purposes, and grow with all its stake holders.

We hope readers and the society at large consider business as nothing short of a sacred duty, a sacred “Yajna”, which we firmly believe it is.

