

BOOKS

Work, Wisdom, Legacy-31 Essays from India

Reviewed by Vijayalakshmi. V.*

YV Reddy, with three others (Ravi Menon, Shaji Vikraman & Kavi Yaga) has effectively presented a compilation of 31 essays by successful individuals, including some leading luminaries of modern India. In the first essay, YV Reddy and Kavi Yaga have presented some reflections titled God Laughs and other reflections. The authors have highlighted the need for integrity, intellect, industry, humour and reflections of Mr. Reddy's work life. The 29 essays are classified in 6 sections-Public life (3 chapters), Private sector (7 chapters), Public Policy (6 chapters), Banking (6 chapters), Media (5 chapters) and Academia (2 chapters). The last essay (Summing Up-Rare View) explores the unique time and context covered in this book.

Arun Shourie in his essay (Never Give Up; Lessons from changing professions, losing jobs & downs of life), emphasizes the need for pursuing excellence. He has also highlighted the need for learning other jobs besides the one excelled as changes are fast necessitating the need to adapt. He has emphasized the need to fight till end and never give up. P. Chidambaram (Three work places & Lessons learned) narrates his experiences as a lawyer, politician and as a government servant (Minister during UPA regime). He emphasizes the need to keep pace with science and technology. Yahwant Sinha (Teaching, service, politics, Government) details his

journey starting as a lecturer in college in Patna, clearing his Civil Services exam and the lessons learned at the IAS Academy, Mussoorie, subsequent career in Civil service and lessons learnt while serving for two decades, his entry

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into politics influenced by Jayaprakash Narayan and later being one of the Ministers (Finance Minister in the Chandrashekar government and later in AB Vajpayee's government). His advice to present employees and executives is not to compromise rules or procedures when political bosses seek to cross lines.

In the section Private sector the narration includes the experiences of Narayana Murthy (Infosys), KV Kamath (ICICI Bank), Nageshwar Rao (LV Prasad Eye Institute) Yezdi Hirji Malegam (Chartered Accountant), K Srinath Reddy (Public Health Foundation of India) Jamal Mecklai (Mecklai Financial Services) and Joydeep Mukherjee (Standard & Poor Rating Services) during their student days and while working. They have highlighted the lessons that they learnt from their parents, elders in the family teachers and mentors (both at educational institutions and work place) and how it has helped in shaping their career and personal development. These

essays provide an insight into the significance of ethics, commitment and integrity.

The section on Public Policy consists of essays by Shankar Acharya (Economist, served as the Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India, 1993-2001), Sheela Bhide (IAS officer), Nitin Desai (Economist, International Civil Servant), Nand Kishore Singh (bureaucrat, economist & politician), K Sujatha Rao (bureaucrat, public health worker) and V Anantha Nageswaran (economist, policy maker; 18th Chief Economic Advisor to Government of India). Shankar Acharya has narrated his experience as a student at London School of Economics, and later at Oxford, his part time jobs during his college days, and lessons learned through such jobs, his experience as World Bank Economist and in 1980s as Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance, and his experience at preparing policy document.

Sheela Bhide clearly has explained her reflections during her journey as IAS service, life-long impact of training indelible impressions, magisterial responsibilities, lesson learned, and need for adapting to changing technologies. Nitin Desai has narrated his experience as work at Tata Economic Consultancy Service, his induction to Project Appraisal Division of Planning Commission and later as international civil servant. He has highlighted the diversity of employers in academia, private sector, national government and international organizations.

Nand Kishore Singh through his narration has explained how his

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decades of work life have the power of abiding friendships and building trusts. He has stated that investing in people and places and winning their genuine affection has been a long-term value. Sujatha Rao through her essay has highlighted that experience as IAS officer has taught the importance of values that are learnt from interacting with fellow human beings. As administrative systems become more efficient by deploying technology to create paperless offices and faceless grievance redressal systems it may result in increased isolation, a loss of emotional intelligence and loss of sense of humanity opines Sujatha Rao.

According to Anantha Nageswaran, fulfilment of job could be classified into 4 elements-core content of the job, ecosystem (includes values and integrity), material compensation and social or public impact. He opines that public sector taught him more. He opines that with emergence of technology, there is more displacement of labour; work place and labour market stability undergird social stability as well.

The section on Banking includes five officials who worked for Reserve Bank of India (Usha Throat, Vittal das Leeladahr, Kaushik Jayaram, Radha Binod Barman & Shyamala Gopinath). while Usha Throat explains the journey of challenges and joy during her 4 decades at RBI, Shyamala opines that her service at RBI has taught her practice of varying views into account and having a professional approach. There are several ways in which one get mentored.

V. Leeladhar highlights as to how he benefited by mentorship (from his aunt as a school boy) during school days and later from work places. He mentions his mentor as the Chairman of Syndicate Bank (his first job) and at RBI YV Reddy. He narrates his experience at Tata Group after

retiring from RBI. Kaushik Jayaram details his experience at RBI (his first job) and was deputed to Bank of International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland (worked for 22 years). His preference, as stated by him is a clear distinction between office and home, with a lot of social interactions at work. Sambamurthy explained his career starting from Canara Bank, Syndicate Bank, Indian Bank and Corporation Bank. After working for various banks till 2008, he served boards of financial market infrastructure organizations (till 2023). His narrated his journey from soapstone to ChatGPT.

Radha Binod Barman, another official of RBI has narrated his experience at RBI in various positions. He advocates the need for converting huge volume of transactional data, captures through business and e-governance and survey data information and knowledge ragged with the GIS as part of the data model; such a model is capable of shedding light on the life styles of people in each village panchayat, their interaction with market players surrounding them, the financial and fiscal systems they deal with and the effect of much learning lessons of governance.

The five essays in Media are written by journalists who opine that journalism is perhaps the only profession where one gets paid to learn. Besides one's sources in the corridors of power, colleagues in the newsroom are a source of much learning. Technology has empowered journalists. Ram Manohar Reddy opines that as societies across the world increasingly turn regressive and as States turn repressive, the space for honest media is getting squeezed. Tamal Bandyopadhyay, in his has emphasized the need for people communication to source stories; understanding colleagues is equally important. AI and machine learning cannot replace these.

Two essays are included in the section Academia. Man Mohan Sharma's narration starts with his college education in University Department of Chemical Technology (UDCT) Mumbai, his experience as temporary lecturer at UDCT, his acceptance to University of Cambridge with full scholarship with travel grant to carry out doctoral work in the Department of Chemical Engineering and on completion of doctoral programme being appointed as professor at UDCT. His experience as Director of UDCT in 1989 us also included in his narration. He has highlighted the importance of building people and institutions.

MS Sriram narrated his experience at Cooperative Development Foundation, Hyderabad (where he interned during his student days), his induction to Ph. D programme and later his work in Bengaluru and later to Institute of Rural Management, Anand. He also narrates his experience of working with a start up in Hyderabad for a short period and later as a faculty at IIM-Ahmedabad and IIM-Bangalore. He believes that employment is an institutional construct.

The final essay (Rear View) explores the unique time and context covered in the book. The essays shaped and were shaped by the nation's tumultuous journey from Independence. The last essay aims to provide a time and context for the readers by exploring the constantly evolving relationships between State, markets and citizens all of which define the working lives. Some of the essays are anecdotal, some contemplative, some others analytical and some are philosophical. A recurring theme in all the essays is work as a deeply social endeavour. For many contributors work without an office is unimaginable. The collection of essays and arranging them as sections is commendable. This book could be an interesting read and highly inspirational especially for the younger generation. □