

A Born Leader

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I first learned of NSR when he worked with Business and Engineering Associated Consultants (BEACONS) and I with International Business Consultants (IBCON), both management consulting companies that used Frederic Winslow Taylor's time and motion study principles to increase productivity in all walks of life, particularly in industry. N. S. Ramaswamy (NSR) served BEACONS as a management consultant to India's largest cement company, Associated Cement Companies, for about six years before being selected in 1959 for a National Productivity Council (NPC) foreign study fellowship to the UK and USA financed by USAID.

When NSR returned from the fellowship he debriefed with NPC Executive Director Hari Dev Shourie who asked him where he wished to work. NSR was keen to be in Bombay so Shourie sent him my way, as I was NPC's Regional Director in Bombay. We talked about possibilities in NPC but he decided to join Voltas under Rana Pratap, a former IBCON consultant. Less than a year later he took up a teaching post at Bombay University under Professor Murthy and after a year moved to Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management under Dr. K. S. Basu, a popular President of the Bombay Management Association and Hindustan Lever's Director of Personnel.

It was clear to me that NSR was not a follower but someone who preferred to be a leader, much like his father Srinivas Iyer, who retired as the I. G. of Police of Kerala State. NSR flourished after being appointed as head of the National Institute for the Training of Industrial Engineers (NITIE) funded by the United Nations Development Programme and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the joint ministries of labour and education. NITIE was the brainchild of Dr. R. L. Mitchell from ILO's Management Development Branch in Geneva, where I was heading the Asian Desk developing projects like NITIE and NPC across the Asia region. On home leave visits to Bombay I would invariably visit NSR at NITIE, which was located across Powai Lake facing the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. Our close professional and personal rapport grew during his seven-year tenure at NITIE as I helped him plan fellowship visits to the UK and US for senior management, identify potential training opportunities for staff, and provide ILO experts to serve NITIE as well.

During this period NSR moved the Indian Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIIE) to NITIE and took over the chairmanship

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from IBCON's Managing Director H. N. Thadani. NSR was an organiser par excellence. As IIIIE chair he hosted the World Congress of Industrial Engineers at the Oberoi Hotel where he invited me to facilitate several sessions. He was ably assisted by IIIIE Secretary, V.K.S. Menon, who had earlier worked with me at NPC's Regional Office in Bombay before joining NITIE.

After 1969 when the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, a number of initiatives were launched including computer-based Management Information Systems (MIS). As part of the latter, I oversaw a team of four experts to six Asian countries including India. NSR made excellent use of the team and launched MIS programs at NITIE for all public service sectors (ex. road, rail and municipalities).

Soon thereafter I was transferred to ILOs regional office for Asia in Bangkok. While NSR continued as Director of NITIE he was also in the process of establishing the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIM-B). I leveraged additional UNDP/ILO resources for NSR to return to the UK and US to recruit staff for IIM-B. We pulled the NITIE cart together until he doffed his NITIE cap and donned his full-time IIM-B cap.

Upon retirement NSR established a non-governmental organisation, Centre for Action, Research and Technology for Man, Animal and Nature (CARTMAN) supported by India's Ministry of Environment and Forests. Since 1994 my brother-in-law, T. N. K. Kurup, became NSR's right hand man in this effort. CARTMAN's design of an efficient bullock cart that reduced animal

suffering and trebled productivity earned him the nickname "Bullock Cart Ramaswamy".

Thereafter he established the Indian Heritage Academy in honour of his and his wife's parents, which was inaugurated by my mother-in-law. This effort inspired me to create the Dr. M. S. Nair Memorial Trust in loving memory of my uncle who was my guardian after my father died in a tragic accident while I was a teenager. The Trust has since 1996 supported the education of disadvantaged students through scholarships for MBBS and paramedical studies as well as meaningful cash awards to hundreds of top SSLC and CBSE students from 29 high schools in Perintalmanna, Kerala.

In 2006 when NSR received the Padma Bhushan and National Professor award at the age of 80, he delivered a keynote address on "Motivation" at a public event sponsored by the Trust. He spoke of how he and I had motivated workers with money, through wage incentive systems, and compared this with how the doctors who cared for him were motivated by their professional ethics or by a higher spiritual calling.

NSR was an inspired leader who motivated many along the way. It would be fitting indeed for IIM-B to honour their founding Director by dispatching a team of bright, young students to study NSRs dogged pursuit of his ideas through CARTMAN and Indian Heritage Academy. A thorough case study could provide concrete suggestions to NSR's family and staff who will no doubt continue to realise his legacy for years to come. —————●