# *The* BLESSED ONE

*"I did*
*the best*
*I could,*
*and there are*
*no regrets."*

# *The* BLESSED ONE

*The* Biography *of*

Sri P.M. PRAKASH

ENGINEER, DESIGNER, PHILANTHROPIST

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*It is the story of a mind that refused to stop growing, and a heart that never forgot its roots.*

# PROLOGUE

*—Prashanth Prakash*

To live with purpose and passion is a rare gift, yet it is the very essence of my father's life. Growing up under his shadow, I have always defined my father, P.M. Prakash—or PMP, as we fondly call him—as a builder, a creator, and an engineer at heart. Throughout his life, he has been guided by a defining mantra: "Always stay relevant, for nothing else matters." To this day, his whirring brain is constantly racing with new ideas, beautifully embodying the spirit of a true Karma Yogi who finds endless motivation in the act of continuous learning and creation.

As a child, I did not always understand the depth of what I was witnessing. I saw a disciplined father, a man of routine and precision, someone who valued punctuality, frugality, learning and hard work. Only later did I realise that he was quietly teaching us how to live—with purpose, with dignity and without complaint. His life has always carried a simple but powerful message: do your best, keep learning, help where you can and never seek applause for it.

For me, he has been much more than a parent; he has been my ultimate role model and a lifelong collaborator. Our relationship has often felt like two musicians talking—a seamless synergy where I was fortunate enough to have a fellow engineer to debate with, hand over responsibilities to and build alongside. This partnership truly came to life with the creation of Discovery Village, a project that organically allowed him to fulfill his passion as an architect/builder. His brilliant engineering imprints, sustainable design principles, and curious widgets are visible all across those spaces.

This biographical account chronicles the crests, troughs and extraordinary milestones of his journey—from the villages of Nandi and Patrenahalli, to engineering college, HMT, entrepreneurship, philanthropy and finally to the many experiments and creations at Discovery Village—and is not just the story of one man's achievements. It is the story of a mind that refused to stop growing, and a heart that never forgot its roots.

His philanthropy has always been silent and deeply personal, focusing on educating and uplifting those from challenging socio-economic backgrounds without ever seeking the spotlight. His love has often been practical rather than verbal. His affection has come through guidance, problem-solving, books, tools, opportunities and a helping hand extended at the right time.

As his son, I feel deeply fortunate to have had in him not only a father, but also a role model and fellow engineer. This book is a tribute to a life lived with passion, purpose, humility and no regrets. My hope is that this book serves as a timeless family legacy for generations to come. Today, looking back on a long and beautifully fulfilled life, PMP can view his grand adventure with complete contentment and declare: "I did the best I could, and there are no regrets."

# PRAKASH – MY FRIEND

*Shivakumar*

Prakash and I met when we enrolled in an engineering college in 1956 and opted for the mechanical engineering stream. In a new class, students form their own little groups depending on interests and personal chemistry. Our group consisted of Srinivas, Sridhar Chakravarthy, Bhavani Shankar, Prakash and I. Our many educational trips, around south and north India, helped us to develop a bond and friendship that has truly lasted a lifetime. Even now, we meet once a month at any venue, including one of the Go Native restaurants run by Prakash's granddaughter, Anvitha.

After engineering, Prakash and I joined HMT, which was, at that time, one of the largest public sector industries. Prakash served in the planning department, while I joined the Machine Tool Design section. After gaining invaluable work experience, we left HMT and started our entrepreneurial careers. I started a Machine Tool Factory in Peenya, and Prakash started in the ITI Industrial Estate. Later on, Prakash started manufacturing name plates and achieved considerable success in that field.

Although we were working at two opposite ends of Bangalore, we kept in touch, exchanging notes about our new careers as industrialists. When I took up the editorship of *Aparanji*, a Kannada humour magazine, Prakash became an avid supporter of that venture. He would regularly read the magazine and offer comments on the quality of the articles that appeared therein.

In the early 2000s, my wife Mangala took ill, and during this period, Prakash stood by me and gave me a lot of moral support.

Mangala passed away in 2004, after which Prakash continued to visit me regularly for a length of time. I will always be grateful for his affectionate empathy towards me.

In 2005, I happened to meet Mr. Ramji Raghavan, the founder of the Agastya International Foundation. He sought my help in designing and building science teaching aids to spread scientific knowledge to rural children. I discussed this proposal with Prakash, who was more than enthusiastic to join hands with me in this endeavor. We built models such as Whispering Disks, Bernoulli Ball, Bhishma's Chair, Zoetrope and many other teaching aids which inspired curiosity in children.

After a few years, Prakash lost his wife, Shantha. I was travelling at that time, but I returned home immediately, in time for the memorial function in Woodlands Hotel. A short while later, Prakash and I went to Discovery Village in Kanakapura for a few days to help him come to terms with the loss. I had taken my laptop with me and we listened to a discourse by Swami Paramarthananda on Bhajagovindam. From then on, it became a routine for us to visit one or the other resorts periodically and continue our scriptural studies.

In 2011, I wrote a summary of the Bhagavad Gita. Prakash read the summary and published it in book form, to keep as complimentary copies in all Discovery Village resorts. The first batch of the book was presented to the Swamiji to seek His blessings. Prashanth and Prakash were both present along with me for this event.

The most valuable memories of my association with Prakash which I always cherish are the technical discussions we would have on various design problems. These sessions would be intellectually creative and spiritually fulfilling. Be it the design of a teaching device or the structural aspect of a building, we would appreciate each other's views. Further, since I had a machine tool design background, I would help Prakash in designing the intricate components and assemblies of various equipment on the AutoCAD platform.

I have written three pen portraits titled 'Visit to Nandi', 'The Environmentalist' and 'Visiting the Swamiji'. Please read them to get a glimpse of the joy that we have been blessed with as a result of our long association and deep bond of friendship.

## Visit *to* Nandi

In the year 2010, Prakash was invited to be the Chief Guest of the annual festivities at a middle school in Nandi Grama. While he was on stage, listening to the speech by a local political leader, Prakash noticed an amputee sitting in the front row. The following events are narrated in his own words.

"Shivappa's right leg was amputated just below the knee in a tractor accident while tilling his fields and he could not afford a prosthetic leg. I felt sorry for him and promised to help him. Upon my return to Bengaluru, I found out the date of the next Rotary Club prosthetics camp. It was to take place in Bannerghatta in the next few days, so I called Shivappa and asked him to come to the venue. He agreed to come to the Jayanagar Bus stand as it was more convenient. I was present promptly on said day and time and waited for him. Even after a couple of hours there was no sign of him, so I contacted him and asked him where he was.

Shivappa replied nonchalantly that it was his son's birthday so he couldn't make it!"

Prakash completed his narration.

I asked him, "So what did you do?"

Prakash replied wryly, "What do you expect me to do? It's not easy to do social work in our country."

But Prakash was not one to give up. He requested his Rotary friends to conduct the next camp in Nandi Grama. It all turned out well. In addition to Shivappa, four others benefitted from the camp.

Speaking of him not giving up, another small incident comes to mind. Once, Prakash travelled to Europe with Shantha. They were very much used to a rice diet. Those days, you could not find rice easily in European hotels. Prakash found a clever solution. He had carried a thermos with him.

After breakfast, before setting out for sightseeing, he would put some rice and boiling water into the flask and close the lid tight. By lunch time, the couple would have well-cooked rice. Along with chutney

pudi and pickles, they would have a tasty meal. Easy availability of yogurt helped the enjoyment of the experience.

Now, coming back to Nandi, the residential building in Discovery Village was designed and built by Prakash himself, a mechanical engineer par excellence. Slim iron pillars support steel rafters, and the walls are made of a double layer of bamboo mats. The ventilation is excellent.

Prakash's cousin, Subhash, used to manage the entire place. His parents live in the nearby Nandi Grama. On one occasion of Ayudha pooja, Prakash and I visited the resort. Next to the resort, one can see the Kanive Basavanna. This is a stone carving of a huge bull, which is bigger than the bull in the Basavanagudi Bull Temple. On our visit, we went to see the Bhoganandeeshwara Temple. This is a ninth-century temple built by the Chola Kings. The beauty of their surroundings is breathtaking. Apart from Nandi Hills, other hillocks like Brahma Giri, etc., form a ring around this village. These have imbued a sense of divinity in this holy place.

While we were resting near the Vasantha Mantapa in the temple complex, Subhash, who had accompanied us said, "At last we could get permission to conduct the marriage ceremonies here."

Seeing my puzzled look, Prakash explained. "My uncle's grandson is engaged to be married. He insists that the marriage should take place here, in Vasantha Mantapa. My uncle, after a lot of efforts, has finally succeeded in getting permission from the temple authorities."

While we were coming out of the temple, I observed that there was a wide trench along the road in front of the temple. Just across the temple was the residence of Prakash's uncle. At the gate an elderly person stood smiling. Prakash introduced him as his maternal uncle. We entered the house.

Just by way of conversation, I addressed Prakash's uncle. "Congratulations Sir, I heard that your grandson is getting married."

"Yes indeed," he replied. "He insisted that the marriage should take place here only. Also, it was his desire that it should take place in Vasantha Mantapa. You see, his fiancé is an expert Bharatanatyam dancer. He wants to give her an opportunity to showcase her talent by dancing at the Vasantha Mantapa. After much difficulty I organized the permission. Now he says that the bride and groom would like to arrive at the temple in a decorated bullock cart. I have arranged the cart. My problem is how to reach the temple from the main road. They have dug up a huge OFC trench in front of the temple entrance."

OFC? I did not get that. Normally, I just ignore such puzzlements. But this morning I was in a knowledge-gathering mood. So I asked the old man, "Sir, may I know what OFC is?" He looked puzzled."You don't know Optical Fibre Cable? Prakash said you are a senior engineer!"

I never expected that an optical fibre cable would be getting laid out in this back-of-beyond place. "Is the bride from a known family or did your grandson meet her himself?" I asked him.

"It is LT, sir" he replied. I did not dare to ask what LT meant. Subhash brought some tea for all of us.

When we were returning to the resort I asked Prakash. "What is LT and why does your uncle talk only in abbreviations?"

Prakash laughed and replied, "Living Together. I am surprised a person with your travel experience does not know this." We returned to Bangalore that evening.

## *The* Environmentalist

Even those of us who are concerned with the environment and its protection are unlikely to have clear knowledge of what we can do in our daily lives to bring about green action. One of the few people who know exactly what can be done in this regard is my dear friend and classmate Prakash.

The other day, I asked him about his interest in environmental protection. At first, he was his usual self-effacing self. However, after some persuasion he opened up.

"Shivu, I am happy you have sought my views on this topic. All living beings are products of the Five Elements, namely earth, water, air, fire and sky. Since we have emerged from these elements, when it is time to depart, it is our sacred duty to ensure that they are as pristine and pure as they were when we arrived. Using this theme as my guiding principle, I started implementing certain actions when I took up the project of establishing this chain of resorts.

The first element is Earth. When we first bought land in Nandi, it was barren, full of sharp shingles like stone pieces. We cleared the stones and got a lot of red earth and spread it all over the site. The next step was to plant a lot of trees. Until the earth became fertile and green, we did not take up any other task.

The second element is water. In any resort, water is used in multiple ways—cooking, in the bathrooms, gardening. We first undertook the task of collecting rainwater and filled up all the lakes within the campus. We dug up many sink holes. This helped us raise the water table. Normally, the little children who visit our campus enjoy playing with water. We, therefore, created a long water canal and allowed flowing water. The depth of the flowing water was just six inches. Hence, the safety of playing children was ensured. Because of flowing water, the feet of the children always remained clean.

For cooking purposes, we installed a reverse osmosis unit to obtain potable water. For our guests, we kept glass bottles instead of plastic bottles in the cottages. In every cottage we set up a water dispenser. On every glass we arranged a name sticker so that the need for frequent washing of the glass is eliminated. We supply stainless steel straw for drinking water from tender coconuts, thus avoiding the use of plastic.

We collect water spilling over from the swimming pools and, through the use of a decorative fountain, aerate the water. The waste water emanating from the kitchen is collected in a sedimentation tank. This water is used for gardening.

The third element is *agni*. I think of it as energy. In our resorts, we use solar energy not only for hot water but for the generation of electricity as well. The electricity generated by us is fed to the grid. Thus, our fossil fuel-generated electricity consumption has a net zero value.

The fourth element is *vayu* or wind power. Except for the space where we have installed solar panels, we have grown thick, forest-like vegetation. Thus, our carbon footprint is low and oxygen from the greenery ensures clean air throughout the campus. Just like environmental pollution, electronic and information pollution is also minimized by not having TVs in our cottages. Because of this step, our guests are persuaded to spend more time with Mother Nature.

The fifth element is the sky. I have interpreted "sky" as open space. On this understanding, I have made sure that there are adequate open spaces between cottages. I have filled these spaces with greenery. This has given privacy to each cottage."

After listening to Prakash, I remembered the following *shloka* from Bhartrihari. Realizing that the end was near, Bhartrihari recites the *shloka* with folded hands in supreme gratitude.

"Affectionate Mother Earth, Father the Wind God, Friend, the Light-Giving Sun, Dearest Kin Water, Loving Brother Sky: Here are my salutations to you all. I have been immensely helped by you. Your kinship brought about such wisdom in me that all my ego has melted down and I can realize pure and eternal knowledge. Thus, I am now able to be one with the Cosmic Principle."

## Visit *to the* Swamiji

One fine day, my good friend Prakash visited me and we started talking about my project of last year, namely the Gita summary. He suggested that I send both my original Kannada and the English translation to Swami Paramathanandaji and seek his views on the publishing of the work. I did one final round of editing of both the scripts with my brother's help and mailed them to Swamiji.

Soon thereafter, I received a letter from Swamiji expressing his happiness about my summary and my brother's translation. He conveyed his congratulations and blessings to both of us. My brother and I were both thrilled beyond words. I wrote a reply to Swamiji thanking him for his kindness and sought a meeting with him to personally seek his blessings and guidance. He graciously consented and invited us to visit him in the third week of November.

Prakash, Prashanth, my brother Omprakash and I started on our journey to Chennai on a Wednesday afternoon to meet Swamiji the next morning at 11 a.m. For all of us it was an opportunity of a lifetime and we were very keen that everything should go as planned.

Swamiji stays in an apartment in Abhiramipuram. We stayed in a hotel which was within three kilometers of his place. However, since our taxi driver, Ravi, was new to Chennai, we decided that we first make a trip to Swamiji's apartment just to make sure of the route so that we won't lose time looking for it. Accordingly, the next morning we left the hotel at 9.30 a.m. and found the apartment in fifteen minutes.

We then decided to go to the Marina Beach to spend the intervening time and come back by 10.30 a.m. We returned at around 10.35 a.m. and I had the privilege of ringing the doorbell of the apartment with the name plate H.H. Swami Paramarthanandaji.

The door opened and we all saw Swamiji in his *kavi* (bright orange) robe standing there, smiling. He said, "Please come in and wait here," pointing to the four white plastic chairs along the right wall. We all trouped in after removing our footwear and sat in the chairs. Swamiji had moved into an inner room.

As we sat there I took in the scene. It was a smallish flat on the ground floor of the apartment building. The hall was L-shaped. In the L corner was a dining table with four chairs. Just opposite us was a wooden cot with a "chape" spread over it. A few rectangular boxes draped with *kavi*-coloured cloth were kept on that cot. There were only two rooms visible. The door of the one on the right was open and I could see bundles of books stacked on the floor.

Although the door of the inner room into which Swamiji had gone was open, it was hidden from our view because of a column. It was a starkly empty house save the bare furniture and a few bundles of books. I remembered from Swamiji's *pravachanas* that a sanyasi was not supposed to light a fire to cook anything. That authority is bestowed only on *grihasthas*. As far as we could make out, there was no kitchen area. I recall thinking, "Oh, wow, here is one sanyasi without any samsara."

At that moment, Swamiji appeared at the door of the inner room and invited us in. It was his study room. There was a cot with a mattress on which there was a *kavi* bed spread. A *vyasa peeta* was placed at the centre of the mattress. A side table with some stationery stood next to the cot. There was a linoleum sheet on the floor for visitors to sit in the *sukhasana*. We all did our pranams to Swamiji and sought his blessings. Prashanth gave the fruit basket which we had carried from Bengaluru to Swamiji. Swamiji asked him to keep the basket on the dining table.

We sat down. I introduced the visiting party. Prakash said, "Swamiji, I have completed the Gita study. I have also completed the study of Mundaka Kena and Kata Upanishads. I am now studying Thaitthareeya Upanishad."

Swamiji smiled and said, "Very nice." I observed that Swamiji's smile lit up his entire face. Prakash requested Swamiji to autograph a photo of Swamiji he had brought from Bengaluru. Swamiji took out a universal marker and gave his autograph saying, "I will keep this here for drying. You can take it when you go."

I told Swamiji about my spiritual yatra in the last four years and sought his blessings for the effort. I presented him with the bound scripts of the Gita, Hastamalakeeyam, Jeeva Yatra, Sri Dakshina Murthy Stotram and Dhanyashtakam. I also presented the summary of the first part of Viveka Chudamani, consisting of 210 *shlokas*. He said, "very nice," and systematically signed all the seven bound manuscripts with his blessings.

There was silence in the room. I knew he was waiting for us to start asking whatever we had planned to ask. Since others were not coming forward, I started with my first question.

***Self***: Swamiji, I have been writing these notes on your *pravachanas* as part of my *nididhyasana* for the past four years. I am now half way through Viveka Chudamani. What do you suggest I should do next?

***Swamiji***: Since you have already done the Gita and will be completing Viveka Chudamani, there is no need for you to take up ThathwaBodha. You may take up *mudaka* Upanishad after completion of the Viveka Chudamani. Subsequently, Kena and Kata Upanishads can be taken up. You will need the best part of the next four years to complete the ten major Upanishads. Do not rush through them. Take your time to internalize as you study. My guru Swami Chinmayananda would say, "It is not important how many Upanishads you have gone through. How many Upanishads have gone through you is more relevant."

***Self***: Swamiji, the first 210 *shlokas* of Viveka Chudamani are just fascinating. They seem to have covered the whole gamut of human condition. What can I look forward to in the next 330 *shlokas*?

***Swamiji***: More than 200 *shlokas* of the balance 300-odd shlokas are devoted to the art and science of *nididhyasana,* or meditation. From this you can visualize the importance Shankaracharya attaches to this practice in the spiritual evolution of a person. If you have enjoyed the first half, your enjoyment of the balance portion will be twofold.

***Self***: Swamiji, having done all these studies and internalization, what can the student expect as an end result? Enlightenment may perhaps

be a million *janmas* away. So what state of mind can one keep as a goal which one can hope to achieve?

***Swamiji***: The intellect first learns the outlines of truth from the diligent study of scriptures. Internalizing this study involves the ability to feel confident in the face of any situation thrown at you by life. Your intellect should be convinced that it is not alone and that a higher power is backing you throughout your entire journey. You should be like Sugreeva going forth to fight Vali with full confidence that Sri Rama is backing him. Your reaction to life should stem from this conviction and certain knowledge.

***Self***: Swamiji, all the three of us are *vanaprasthis* (senior citizens). We carry out some routine work and do some meditation and scriptural studies every day. What else can we do to progress on our spiritual paths?

***Swamiji***: By and large, what you are following is the ideal lifestyle. However, even though you may spend half an hour in meditation, you need to be extremely alert during the rest of the waking hours. Alert to the reactions of your body, emotional pulls, intellectual misconceptions and the temptations of *vishaya sukha*.

I was finished with my questions.

Prashanth said, "Swamiji, if I understand you right, whenever I write an email to a subordinate or a colleague which conveys unpleasant truths to him or her, I must pause for a day before I hit the send button. If the letter remains in the drafts tray, I may wonder the next day if it was me who wrote such a caustic mail. Is that right?"

Swamiji smiled in approval.

It was time for us to leave. We did *pranams* once again. Swamiji blessed us and gave us small packets of raisins and crystal sugar.

Prashanth suggested we go to Parthasarathy Temple as we still had time. On our way to Triplicane, the *darshan* at Parthasarathy Temple was excellent. As it was noon there was very little rush.

Our lunch at Anna Lakshmi confirmed its fine reputation as an excellent eating spot. At the central station, I thanked our taxi driver Ravi. We boarded the train for our return journey.

# INTRODUCTION

*"Always stay relevant —nothing else matters."*

—P.M. PRAKASH

*engineer, entrepreneur, creative designer, philanthropist, family man*

IN A QUIET CORNER OFF THE VERY BUSY, very broad Lal Bagh Road in central-south Bengaluru stands a house. It's a quaint, corner bungalow with an unusual triangular orientation, uniquely fitting of the octogenarian who calls it home.

P.M. Prakash, fondly referred to by his family as PMP, is a well-known industrial entrepreneur, engineer, creator and philanthropist. PMP has devoted his life to working tirelessly on diverse engineering projects, as well as building core businesses that, too, are driven by engineering. Alongside, he has created a legacy of quiet philanthropy with great dedication, focusing on educating those from challenging socio-economic backgrounds.

Born with a curious, whimsical mind that remains active and sharp as a tack to this day, PMP still finds everything around him of potential

interest. His ability to be detached when needed, and to stay away from unnecessary entanglement has been a big driver in his life. He has developed a unique life philosophy, and shares his wisdom freely. “Evolve into something higher, otherwise, it is not possible to stay focused on what life demands of you,” is one among his many philosophies to live a life of contentment. Moving in tandem with one’s nearest and dearest, and staying in tune with one’s own brand of spirituality define PMP.

While PMP has always liked to be surrounded by his engineering models, projects and artefacts, what completes his life is his deeply loving, close family of brothers, sisters, wife, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and a few wonderful friends whom he has held close for decades.

His large, close-knit family has also grown up with the mantra that relationships mean protection, being there for each other, being helpful and supportive. For them, after having seen PMP work tirelessly for decades to build an empire, there is comfort in the fact that the man is finally slowing down and resting his body and mind.

This volume is a biographical account of PMP, the man and the worker—vignettes from his life, with all the diverse hues and shades that make him an extraordinary man. PMP’s life has been a series of fascinating and rewarding chapters. Does one chapter override the other in significance? No, for PMP has lived through eight and more decades to be able to joyfully look back, reflect, and say, “I did the best I could, and there are no regrets.”

In the following pages, we will meet PMP in his own words and through his loved one’s eyes. What follows will show that as PMP was scripting his life, it is almost as though he knew that he would one day want to look back and read it like a book. Is that why he focused on doing the best he could? Or is it just who he is—a diligent engineer and businessman, a loving husband, father, uncle, grandfather, brother and a helpful, caring soul who has built a remarkable foundation of charity, donation and philanthropy? The answer to that question is why this is a story worth telling. May the reader enjoy reading it as much as PMP has enjoyed living life: blessings, challenges, the crests and the troughs, all of it. Here’s the story of an almost unsung hero and what he has started.

*Here’s the story of an almost unsung hero and what he has started.*

CHAPTER 1

# *The* EARLY YEARS

*"When India declared Independence, I remember the moment the red British flag was lowered and the hoisting of the Indian tricolour."*

In October 1938, in the small village of Nandi on the outskirts of Bengaluru, Karnataka, P.M. Prakash was born to Patrenahalli Mariappa, an electrical engineer, and Lakshmamma, a homemaker. He was the second of seven siblings, five brothers and two sisters: Ramakrishna, PMP, Indira, Chandrashekhar, Sunitha, Narendra and Surendra.

PMP's father, Patrenahalli Mariappa, lived a life marked with fortuitous moments that would come to define his son's future. As a young boy about to enter college, Mariappa's education came to a halt because his father did not have the money to put him through college. Sad to see this bright boy being grounded, Mariappa's sister-in-law, Hakkalamma, sold her gold jewellery to help him through college. This defining turn in the road led to Mariappa becoming an electrical engineer with the government.

When PMP was a child, Mariappa began working as an expert hydraulic engineer on the Mahatma Gandhi Hydroelectric Project, on Jog Falls, in the power generation division, along the banks of the River Sharavati in Karnataka's Shivmogga District. PMP's mother was the perfect homemaker for him. Like millions of people in this world, he has beautiful and fond memories of his mother. "My mother was intelligent and very good with her hands. Totally updated on multi-cultural culinary preparations, she also learnt different types of embroidery, knitting etc. She liked to read and even tried to learn English," he remembers.

PMP began his schooling at the Chikkaballapura Convent belonging to the McGann Hospital. In Kargal, PMP began his formal education at a government primary school. Then he had to move to the government primary and middle school at Jog Falls. With a lot of breaks in his education, owing to job displacements that his father went through working with the government's electrical department, PMP's parents and other elders took the decision to send him to the village of Nandi starting fifth standard. Here, he could benefit from extra coaching and mentoring. PMP still recalls the steam engine train they took from Talaguppa to Nandi. Through the long journey filled with dust and the smoke from the engine, the young boy was sad leaving his family for the first time. But soon, the comforting care provided by his maternal grandmother in Nandi helped him bounce back and become cheerful again.

In school, PMP remembers how they sat on floor-level wooden benches. The headmaster was one Mr Satar Baig. In those days the government schools were called 'Government Urdu School' in rural areas, with a separate Kannada section. There was little interaction with other children. PMP has a vague memory of a kid called Byanna, but that's where the recall ends.

Their house at the time was in an officers block at Jog Falls. A pucca stone building next to the house was the school, just at a lower level along the slope.

"I joined the sixth standard in the nearby school. I remember India declaring Independence, and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. There were street demonstrations in the evening. The cremation radio commentary was aired through speakers at the local tank area, and there was a large gathering." To the young, innocent boy, there could not have been much understanding of the momentous time in Indian history he was witnessing and living through.

PMP liked being in the boy scouts, especially because he found the uniform very attractive. "Our teacher, Annayappa, was the scout master. I remember trekking, the excitement of rice being cooked on an open fire, three stones propping up the vessel. Each of us scouts contributed a cup of rice. We enjoyed *bisi bele bhath* when we got tired of walking."

Other distinct memories PMP has is of the Hindustani Seva Dal founder N.S. Hardikar visiting their school, and the introduction of new, blue uniforms.

While he had a loving childhood at home, his years of schooling, learning and growing up also came with challenges—some socio-economic and circumstantial, others emotional and physical. PMP was short, dark complexioned and had a stammer, all of which led to feelings of physical inferiority.

In class, PMP was finding it difficult to read the blackboard in class while everyone was unaware of his myopia. As a result, two long years passed before he received corrective treatment and spectacles, by which time his eyesight had deteriorated quite a bit. Up until the eighth standard, assessments at school were only through one annual examination that no kid took seriously. But PMP recalls, "My handwriting was hopeless, too. I suffered my first educational blow by failing the lower secondary public exam."

* * *

A time came when Mariappa's work at the Hydroelectric Project became super exciting for the family, particularly the children—especially PMP: Mariappa was chosen to visit a generating equipment manufacturer in England. A foreign trip for someone in the family was unheard of in those days.

Mariappa's travel to England was most eventful. With the Second World War on, ships were restricted to a handful of routes. Mariappa's journey started from Chikkaballapur by narrow gauge railway. He was joined by three colleagues, and they proceeded to Bombay by metre gauge railway. From Bombay began a sea voyage to Cairo, then across

the Mediterranean by seaplane. The whole journey took a month. Food was not much of a problem as Mariappa was a non-vegetarian.

PMP's father would write letters to the family on special paper, which would be sent to India by microfilm; a printed photo would then be posted to the family. His father's impact on PMP was immense; it shaped who he grew up to become and informed much of his interests. There's even a Patrenahalli Mariappa Illusion Gallery at the Discovery Village in Nandi, PMP's tribute to his father.

* * *

From a very young age, PMP found himself drawn to activities, puzzles, ideas and work that could feed his endless curiosity. One of his first forays into experimenting was spurred by something Mariappa brought for him from England.

"My first do-it-yourself project was a magic lantern. Dad brought some books when he returned from England and the complete instructions were there. After reading it, I could venture to make it. Basically, it was to project a brightly illuminated matter. It was a wooden box, and I was not old enough to do carpentry so I took the help of a carpenter who worked at the generating station. I instructed the carpenter with dimensions and he was able to make it. The other two 100W bulbs' wiring I did without any trouble. The project called for a lens of 3" diameter which was not available in Jog.

"I went to Shivamogga, the district headquarters, riding 60 miles in the truck that would bring in ration. I found a smaller lens and had to be satisfied with that. This project also brought one major impact on my career because it so happened that Swasbrook noticed how I was bringing the drawing up close to read, so he asked me to try and read a board that was at a distance. Swasbrook was the duty engineer at that time at the generating station. Thanks to him we ended up at the optician, and my eyesight got corrected!"

As he grew, the young boy's affinity towards business and entrepreneurship came up in funny and curious ways.

"I found that there was an unmet demand for erasers and there were no stationery stores where we were. I started trading them through the class window by bringing the material from Sagar through the paper vendor Bhattru. I went so far as to slice the long single eraser to sell more pieces," recalls PMP matter-of-factly.

He also felt drawn towards all kinds of engineering activities going on around him, observing them keenly. "In the canal work, we saw the pile foundation and the construction of the aqueduct. At the Hirebhaskara Dam, we saw the RCC siphons designed by Ganesh Iyer, a professor at the Indian Institute of Science. I remember our visit to paper mills, iron and steel works and cement factory at Bhadravathi. [We also saw the] Gajanur Dam/Tunga Anicut under construction, sugar mills with candy plant in Mandya, a roofing tile factory at Mangalore, the stringing of cable to a transmission tower, plus a visit to a domestic generation station near the Bombay side of the valley."

PMP has a distinct memory of receiving a good quality cast iron stove at the house. "It was an interesting job to assemble it and commission it. It had a fireplace, with additional openings to keep extra vessels. The oven was heated by flue. We made some bread in the oven. It required a lot of firewood, cut small. Basically, it was a coal-fired stove. As electric stoves are more convenient, that stove remains idle," says PMP with some dismay.

With all this experience, PMP started his own related project in their terraced backyard garden in 1950, at age 12. The project was to build a generating station with a few friends that he roped in. "We used to start working by beating on a metal plate that announced the start of our work—much like a factory siren. We built a dam with stone and cement. For the penstock, we were able to procure (how, I do not remember) a 11/2-inch pipe about 6ft in length. Somehow, a Horlicks bottle cork made the perfect reducer. A glass ink filler made the perfect jet nozzle. I used one biscuit box the size of a shoe box. For the turbine shaft, I used a knitting needle. A Dalda tin came in handy for turbine material, and we used the scissors as tin cutters to form the turbine.

"This was extremely thrilling for all of us. I wanted to use the power generated to drive something. To start with, I made a rotating striker to hit a bell plate to generate a recurring bell sound.

"We also had the idea to fix a small electric generator, but it was not available. The nearest one available was a cycle dynamo, which

required a better head to drive the turbine. Incidentally, another team of senior boys was making a similar design, using sanitary pipes as penstock. We toyed with the idea of making siphons with a model reservoir but with little success."

This is what life in Jog was like, especially for the three oldest brothers, filled with excitement, creating quaint engineering projects for themselves.

* * *

It was in 1951 that PMP joined the government high school, which was English medium and located in Sagar, 30 kms away. PMP has a distinct memory of how uncomfortable the commute used to be, sitting in a mini truck with tarpaulin-covered seating that was either on benches or the floor of the truck. It was a miserable experience as the roads were not black topped and the rear of the truck was open. Anyway, the misery ended soon with a Chevrolet van making an appearance, with roll-up canvas windows! It was certainly a better vehicle, but still could not make up for bad roads.

Another thing that bothered young PMP, an inveterate foodie, was his simple packed lunch of dal and rice; that, he didn't much enjoy. But in a few years, he remembers, "The lunch problem was solved with my going to lunch at Muddappa, the revenue officer's house. He was related to us. Their sons were Sampath, one year senior to me, and Ramakrishna who was a know-all guy."

As PMP progressed through school, he started to feel a rising determination in himself to do better and improve at school. "Our head master, Ananth Thirtha Char, was a good mentor. He told me about the famous actor Varadachar, and helped me confront my stammering. He pointed out that I could easily work on improving my bad handwriting."

He doubled his efforts as a student and must have easily been among the most hard-working in class. "I was determined to fare better, and passed with a first class and was even awarded a silver medal."

* * *

*The young PMP was always happy with books. By nature, he sought knowledge as sustenance. Later, he devised a magazine sharing system with eight of his friends, where they shared issues of popular magazines like* National Geographic, Illustrated Weekly, Men Only, Pageant *and others via a library-style mechanism.*

However, one set of three books that left a deep impression on him was *Living Things for Lively Youngsters* by TJS Rowland. Filled with exciting content on physics, science and biology with cartoon-like illustrations, this book series was an eternal source of joy for PMP. Rowland, who wrote and published in the mid-20th century, also illustrated his own books.

With proximity to such diverse literature, PMP developed a lovely hint of understated humour, ready with light-hearted quips on the oddities of everyday life. Recalling a funny incident from his childhood, he says, "One day, while returning from school, we were overtaken by a goose flock returning home. When they left, to my surprise, I found an egg! I took it home and had an omelette." The family at the Lalbagh Road home even kept a pair of goldfish for many years.

* * *

There were more simple avenues for entertainment available to PMP and his siblings as well.

"The Ganesha festival, then a Jatra, like an annual fair, were such highlights for us," he remembers. During Ganesha, "In the evening we would go to each house and ask if they have enshrined Ganesha and offer namaskara with coloured rice. It was a competition among us kids to cover the highest number of visits."

PMP has an equally strong recall of the Jatra, mainly an annual cattle fair in the village. "Cattle for transaction would start arriving 15 days before Shivaratri and stay a week afterwards in makeshift camps in the fields. Sweet shops, pitched on high platforms for better presentation, would be selling heaps of *kallepuris*, *bathas* (sugar froth), *sehe kadale* (sugar-coated gram) and peanuts. There were also paper and clay toys, balloons, etc. It all looked so festive! There were a couple of temporary hotels as well as a touring talkies. With guilt, I bought a masala dosa once, costing a few annas that I had saved from the tips from the flour mill.

"Another major attraction were the stone wheel chariots pulled by rope and controlled by wooden pieces that looked like a wooden plough. The manipulations would create a jerking movement that would shake up the entire chariot, making it turn. Kids would shout in excitement at this drama!"

* * *

PMP started studying engineering at the BMS College of Engineering in Bengaluru in 1956, specializing in mechanical engineering. He considers his admission in that college divine intervention, saying, "In 1956, I passed my intermediate exams. I did not get admission to the agriculture college, the textile institute, any technical diploma courses, the government engineering college, etc. I was disappointed, and joined a BSc programme. However, there was an option to donate Rs. 1000 and get admission, which my parents were not in a position to pay. By providence, my father's friend came forward to advance the money. I was the last to enroll in September in the engineering college."

When PMP was 18 years old, he met Shivakumar. Loyalty, concern, and just being there for each other when you are most needed by the other—that's the sort of friendship PMP and Shivakumar simply stumbled into on the first day of college. The year was 1956, and the two young boys did not then know that their meeting was the start of a friendship and a special bond that would reach and cross a six-decade milestone.

PMP and Shiva shared the physical handicap of stammering. As young college-going boys they were both shy and withdrawn, self-conscious because of the stammer. But the lifelong friendship they started then was a game changer for both of them.

Defining friendships. Defining family bonds.

*"I had made a box for my cycle out of military sack material, just to keep my books and T-square when I cycled to college. The bag was purchased from Gujery at Shivaji Nagar. It was then enamel painted to make it stiff and water proof. A steel strap was used to make the bag rigid."*

CHAPTER 2

# *The* ENGINEER *Who* PUSHED BOUNDARIES

It is incredible how some people land up in a college and course that fuels their passion in an organic, natural way. This is exactly what happened to PMP in June 1956, when he took admission into a mechanical engineering course at the BMS Engineering College in Basavangudi, Bengaluru. The college is nearly eighty years old today, and known nationally for the quality of professional education it offers to students from across India.

The next four years were like magic. Our natural engineer had found his spot in the sun. He learnt and learnt, absorbing everything like a sponge. Despite his low self-esteem, stemming from his strong feelings of physical inferiority—not tall, not fair, dealing with a stammer—PMP knew this is what he had wanted all his life.

There were studies, of course, and exams, but there was also fun, college excursions and hostel life. Three friends—Shivakumar, PD Ravindra and Prakash—got together within the first few days of college. PMP found his classes fascinating and excelled in drawing and workshop practice.

It is one thing to be educated professionally, but another to use that education like it was your lifeblood. To PMP, very early in adult life, engineering became the pulse of his existence. In those days, after PMP graduated with a mechanical engineering degree in 1960, the no-brainer choice for work was to join Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT), a machine tools company famous for its watches that has endured the test of time and continues to put Indian machine tools on the world map. PMP joined the planning department, where he helped establish time standards in HMT Foundry, setting up the standard time taken to complete a task. Shiva joined the design world.

After gaining some work experience, Prakash decided to quit and set out on his own.

When the ITI Ancillary Unit was allotted to him, Prakash proceeded to buy all the machinery required for the project. There was a delay in commissioning, which led to some delay in production. Eventually, in 1965, the ITI Ancillary Unit was set up as S.V. Swami Electronics and S.V. Swami Industries, soon after he left HMT.

S.V. Swami Industries, the family's name plate-making business, is well-known and active to this day, managed now by PMP's younger son, Praveen. In PMP's words, "Engraved metal labels seemed to have demand. Anodized metal sheet used to fade. I started using black painted sheets with PU lacquer and no fading. The whole idea was a success! Ultimately, we became a full-fledged OEM supplier of all types of name plates: printed, engraved, screen printed, acid etched, laser engraved, dome label, heat transferred label, you name it. The name S.V. Swami became associated with name plates." An associated email id, svswamiprakash@gmail.com, was born. Simultaneously, a VSNL id was also created.

Praveen talks about his experience joining the family business, saying, "I quit my medical practice and joined my father in the business. He really helped me a lot, I had absolutely no engineering background. He guided me and now I am running the business."

* * *

In 1986, PMP dipped his toes into a new era of technology when he bought his first computer and learnt what a useful machine he had invested in. He learnt software programming to manage his business—his curiosity led him to learn programming at SPAN in his mid-fifties or so. He built an entire ERP system using dBase programming for his business and would've spent hundreds of priceless hours of his life doing this. In fact, from 1987 onwards he even started recording the highlights from his personal diary in dBase. He could've easily found someone to do such technical work, but this is in his DNA—to just keep learning, to do-it-yourself! Around 1990, he even started blogging on www.nandiprakash.blogspot.com about his innovations, creating a kind of educational guide.

* * *

In 1995, PMP and Prashanth decided to start a new business, spurred on by a computer-based engraving machine that Prashanth had brought with him when he returned from the US. This was a highly collaborative, energetic time, when the inventive duo worked together to set up yet another enterprise. The signage and engraving business has been a core business for the family ever since.

In time, PMP also turned his prowess to helping social innovator and entrepreneur Ramji Raghavan and the Agastya International Foundation. The Foundation was set up in 1999 in Bengaluru to nurture learning and spark curiosity in economically disadvantaged young minds by bringing together innovators and solution-seekers in the fields of STEM and art. PMP spent about two and a half years on this project. Shiva also became involved, and between 2005 and 2012, Prakash and Shiva built a number of models and conducted several scientific experiments. The Foundation put in the money and the two friends put in their talent. At this Foundation, where the core principle is to help transform learning into an experience for young people, PMP fit in naturally and felt very driven, given his own enormous interest in bringing science to children in unique ways.

Amidst all this, what kept PMP grounded and his mind free of distracting clutter was his spirituality. This is perhaps why PMP is able to stay so focused on what is today a hobby. To him, the practice of spirituality is closely related to his everyday life—how he remains passionate about engineering and design, his childlike curiosity and excitement when he sees any novel engineering ideas and the daily application of its science. Recently, PMP and Shiva collaborated on a design related to the Jaipur Jantar Mantar's Samrat Yantra, the sun clock. It is set up at the Nandi resort. Suffice it to say that age has not been a hurdle for PMP in his learning journey!

*To him, the practice of spirituality is closely related to his everyday life—how he remains passionate about engineering and design, his childlike curiosity and excitement when he sees any novel engineering ideas and the daily application of its science.*

*"When Prashanth was in school, he wanted a Dachshund puppy from his friend's house. We brought it home and it later became my pet. It gave me wonderful company for about 12 years, following me from home to the office. I didn't even need to use a leash!"*

CHAPTER 3

# *A* DEVOTED FAMILY MAN

PMP and Shantha got married in 1963 and started their own home and family life. They had two boys, Prashanth and Praveen. It was a disciplined family environment, but also defined by a lively kitchen and delicious food, for Shantha was an excellent cook. She loved to feed everyone who came to the house. Good food, combined with fun, was always something PMP made an effort towards. But yes, he was a strict disciplinarian as a father to his two boys.

Weekends were generally always special for the boys and their parents in the Prakash household. Creating small but happy moments for his family was always a priority for the man. Praveen and Prashanth share these memories with great happiness. "We would often go to Caeser's Restaurant on MG Road; it was our family haunt. Weekends were very special—from eating out to watching movies. Tickets were always bought in advance." Then there were family outings to the Cubbon Park bandstand. "People would be singing; all four of us would go. Birthdays, anniversaries, we used to go to restaurants, try out new places," says Praveen.

For PMP, memories of his own childhood have fueled his perspective about what a sincere father must do for his wife and children. From the village circus of his youth to Caesar's and Cubbon Park of his children's, it has been a journey of massive effort and endurance for PMP. He doesn't put too many of his emotions into words, so it may not be that evident to those around him. "For us children in the village, the circus was such a big highlight of our lives. Different troupes would come touring, and we really looked forward to our trips to the circus," PMP recalls. A few people from the village would go 25 kms away to Sagar to catch the cinema, but that was not what the little PMP was used to. He became an avid cinema-goer only after he set up his own family in Bengaluru. Meanwhile, the most special memories of childhood and his early teens were yearly milestones, such as the Christmas fête hosted by one Mrs D'Sa, "where Douglas was always Santa Claus." Throwing rings onto bottles, fishing with magnets, pellet gun shooting, a hand steadiness test, the wheel of fortune and a cap trumpet—PMP remembers these aspects as the most fun of the fête. Like most village fairs, this fête was always set up on empty grounds near PMP's house.

"Once, we four co-brothers had a combined car tour to Madras. We were driving ourselves. We also went to Mahabalipuram, where we got to experience our first thatched cottage! Then, Prashanth's first year tonsure was planned at Tirupati. I drove the car to Tirupati for the first time. On the way, I visited my brother at Kolar Gold Fields. Subsequently, I made many trips to Tirupati. When Prashanth was just three years old, I made my first trip to Ooty. Two years later I went to Kodaikanal. We also went to Kanchipuram to buy sarees for family weddings. When Prashanth was six years old, our whole family went on a tour to North India, using trains and taxis. We saw the Red Fort, went to Agra, Simla, Chandigarh."

PMP cherishes his memories of trips to Europe, the UK and the USA with Shantha and his family. From bus tours through Italy, France, Germany and the Netherlands to later trips to visit Sweden and Norway, then a trip to the United Kingdom on their own. He travelled to the US with the family, with Prashanth taking everyone around in his car. And the list goes on.

* * *

The choice to live independently as he grew older was always PMP's own. Almost 20 years ago, Shantha, whom he had been married to for 40 years, passed away, and that began one of the toughest and saddest periods of PMP's life. He missed her a lot, and had to take a hard look at the rest of his life as it loomed ahead. Today, his ability to keep an open heart, welcome anyone and everyone, offer his help and support in whatever way he could, and hold on to his mental abilities and acumen has ensured he is surrounded by not only his own nuclear family, but also cousins, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and many others. Visitors are a regular feature at the Krishnappa Layout home, as are calls from his best friends and family members.

Today, PMP is a great-grandfather and has no trouble bonding with the younger generations in his family. He is incredibly blessed with a quiet sense of humour that adds to the tradition of warmth and unity he has built around himself which thrives in him. He takes enormous joy in all of his familial bonds and the happiness they bring, big or small. It is heart-warming and endearing to see how PMP has maintained a whole network of relationships. If one nephew is close to him because he calls him in for helping with religious ceremonies, another niece is a favourite for their conversations and bonding over good food. In families, while trying to maintain relationships and nurture them, people often forget how each person is different. For PMP, this individuality that each member brings is very precious and he respects each one in his own inimitable style—age no bar of course.

* * *

***Praveen Prakash***, his younger son who now looks after the main manufacturing businesses that PMP built and set up, says, "From childhood he has been very strict with us. Very disciplined about timings and punctuality—this was deeply instilled in me. We follow this, to some extent, to this day." Despite his strictness, PMP has always been there for his boys. Praveen had originally started off his higher education with medical college, but then decided to leave. "When I quit the medical practice and joined the business, it was [PMP] who helped me learn and become familiar with everything, and he was very patient about it," says Praveen.

* * *

***Amitha Prakash***, Prashanth's wife and PMP's daughter-in-law, says, "Appa has been my source of inspiration my whole life. When I was a young bride and new to the household and family, I was in awe of his incredible discipline."

Amitha remembers how her father-in-law ran his daily routine with precision. "He would come home from work at around 10.30 am, when Amma would make him a cup of tea. They would sit together, and enjoy that tea. As a young bride, what do you look for? I saw that closely. There was such a defined rhythm to it that one could set the clock by that." The afternoon was marked by a glass of fresh orange juice, after which PMP would go back to work. The evenings were reserved for a walk.

"Appa and I have this unique relationship where we communicate very little but I know he understands what I need and I understand what he needs," she says. About PMP's relationship with her children, she is grateful. "I'm blessed to have Appa take care of the grandkids the way he did."

* * *

***Shubha***, PMP's other daughter-in-law, is equally reverent. She says,

"I am Appa's second daughter-in-law, and I cannot be happier to have him as an elder in my life. His leadership, wisdom and love have built an extraordinary family that I am blessed to be part of. Our kids are very lucky to have him as their grandfather."

* * *

***Anvitha Prashanth***, PMP's granddaughter, writes,

"As a grandfather, his relationship with me has been that of a guide and mentor. I'm sure he shares a similar relationship with many people in his life. He's someone who is truly unique, a person worth emulating in so many ways—and that naturally makes people look up to him.

I've also had the pleasure of being his student through most of my student life. Every science experiment I've ever done has been with him. My love for design and problem-solving—whether through nature or nurture—comes in large part from him. I can confidently say every minute I've ever spent with him has been productive, because if there's one thing I believe about him, it's that he would avoid an unproductive minute in his day if he possibly could. The guilt I feel every time I procrastinate or spend time on mindless pursuits is wholly due to his influence on me, either directly or through my dad.

When I think back on my childhood, I can't imagine a more wonderful grandfather than him. Not in any conventional sense—every hug we've ever shared, and there's been one every time we've seen each other, including every morning when I was in school, has been initiated by me :)—but in terms of a relationship that has fundamentally shaped who I am for the better, and that now serves as a template for what I ask of my dad for my son.

My grandad was gender-neutral with me before society ever told him to be. I don't remember, but I'm pretty sure his first gift to me was Meccano, and his last real gift—before he switched to giving money—was also Meccano. Our entire relationship was built on building, fixing and understanding things, because I'm sure that's what occupies his mind more than anything else. My unending curiosity, and my complete confidence that I can fix any gadget, has less to do with my engineering degree and more to do with my grandad.

As the first grandchild, and the only one for a while, I received all of the love and some of the discipline. The one way I think he treated me differently from my brothers was that he only ever hit me once—and to this day he remembers it. I think he was as shocked and shaken by it as I was :) (it happened because I'd broken something extremely valuable to him).

If I try to look at myself analytically, I've absorbed most of his love for design, his love for problem-solving and working, his curiosity, his understanding and his stubbornness. I've absorbed very little of his discipline or his realism.

Summer was always the time I spent the most with him. I did a science project with him every year for a camp I went to. My cousins and I did many projects with him, small and big—from a paper geodesic

dome to labelling the files in his office cabinet. He built us a park with a slide, a swing, a merry-go-round, a jungle gym—everything. He and I also built a world map out of coins from different countries, filling it in as I visited new places. It's the coffee table in his living room now.

Honestly, there's no real difference in how I saw him twenty years ago and how I see him today. I still think he's the most disciplined, principled, hard-working person I've ever met—with the exception of my dad. There's perhaps less fear in how I think of him now, because growing up, he was definitely also the strictest person in my family with me.

What I've come to appreciate more today are the relationships and the people he's built around him. He's someone who has built every relationship in his life on actions, not words—and over time, I've really come to appreciate how rare that is."

* * *

***Pranav Prashanth***, Prakash's grandson, has been running Discovery Village for the past two and a half years. To him, his "Thatha"—grandfather—is methodical, highly practical and a perfectionist—someone who prioritises ease of use and universal accessibility in design over aesthetics. Pranav himself works a little differently, with an eye for aesthetics and mindful of commercial considerations, which creates a comfortable push-and-pull dynamic between grandfather and grandson. Pranav describes an instance where PMP wanted to install grab bars in every single toilet at a particular location; Pranav felt this compromised the look. So the two met in the middle—grab bars were fitted in three of all rooms, which represented over 10% of inventory at that location.

The two hold bi-weekly half-hour meetings to discuss the goings-on at Discovery Village, which can be nerve-wracking for Pranav. "It's like meeting your boss," he says.

Pranav remembers his Thatha being very present for, and engaged with, his grandchildren. He would encourage the kids to tinker, experiment and work with their hands from a very young age. Pranav and his cousin, Pranith, would sit with Thatha every day and build Meccano (car model sets) and work on other experiments for at least half an hour every time. He remembers building a periscope and a tin-can telephone, but the kids soon moved to LEGO, which PMP did not rate very highly. Still, Pranav, at 26, continues to enjoy building LEGO, finding it meditative.

Pranav describes PMP as not outwardly affectionate, but that hasn't stopped Pranav from hugging his Thatha every time they meet. Pranav's grandmother passed away when he was 10; after that, Pranav, Anvitha and his father would dine with Thatha every single day for many years until Anvitha moved to Singapore.

* * *

***Pranith Praveen***, PMP's other grandson, recalls how until age 10, he had no idea that Thatha wasn't PMP's actual name. "I believe he has had a monumental impact on my life," Pranith says. "My decision to become a software engineer was largely influenced by his work as a mechanical engineer. Growing up, he'd always build these experiments which we could try out, as well as [give us] puzzles to solve, and playing around with these was incredibly enjoyable. I think that grew into me pursuing a career as a software engineer."

One of Pranith's earliest memories of ever using a computer was in Thatha's office. "He showed me how to burn contents onto a CD, and also connect to the Internet through a dial-up connection (a lost art these days). I can't really recall my first ever memory of Thatha, but I do remember that after Nannamma passed away, Thatha would sleep in my room, and he'd recount stories about his childhood: how he walked many, many kilometres to get to school, how he was at school, and so on. I can't remember the exact details, but I do remember feeling a lot closer to him than I was before, as it's probably the first time I really had a chance to hear more about his personal life."

Pranith's view of taking advice from his grandfather evolved as he grew older. "There's a quote by Mark Twain which sums it up: 'When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.' (swap father for grandfather)," Pranith says. "I think that as I grew

older, I understood the weight behind his words and actions a lot more. No one really expects a teenager to listen to your advice, and I was no different. But once I was in my twenties and had completed a few semesters of university, I would speak to him every time I was back in the country. We'd speak about a myriad of topics, ranging from something as asinine as the weather in Edinburgh to some hard-hitting life advice, which I'd jot down in my notes app, my favourite being 'your luck isn't bad, it's just delayed,' which, in all honesty, turned out to be true."

* * *

***Pradyun Praveen***, the youngest grandson, looks up to PMP, and says, "He has been one of the most influential figures in my life. Growing up with him, I always saw him as a calm, disciplined and principled person whose presence shaped the environment around me. One memory I strongly associate with him is him showing me his Swiss knife and enthusiastically explaining its many intricacies. Even at his age, the curiosity and fascination he had while talking about it stayed with me

As a child, I saw him as someone who was disciplined and firm, but always caring. As I grew older and learned more about his life and values, I came to admire and respect him even more."

* * *

PMP's sister, ***Indira Srinivasamurthy***, now 85, recalls how her brother helped her husband get a teaching job at Dayanand Sagar College of Engineering. After her husband's passing, she inherited some money, and it was PMP who guided her with finances, taxes, etc. From childhood until today, the singular quality she associates her elder brother with is that he is always ready with a helping hand, no questions asked. Until recently, they spoke to each other every Monday.

* * *

*The late PM Ramakrishna, PMP's elder brother, if alive, would have had volumes to say about his brother, says his younger daughter, Anu. They were not just biological brothers but soul brothers and the best of friends.*

***Dr PM Chandrasekhara*,** PMP's brother, is an accomplished anaesthetist and says,

"At the outset, I should confess that I am lucky as well honoured to write a few reminiscences about my legendary brother "Prakashanna" that refuse to fade away from my memory at the age of 83.

The earliest memory of the three siblings dates back to 1948-50 at Jog. My father, the late Mr P Mariappa, was working as an Expert Hydraulic Engineer on the Mahatma Gandhi Hydroelectric Project, envisaged by Sir M Visvesvaraya under the aegis of the Maharaja of Mysore. During the years in discussion, my elder brother PM Ramakrishna and second brother PM Prakash were my leaders as well as an inspiration during our elementary scientific activities.

Our government quarters was a big bungalow on a small hillock. We brothers took the advantage of the steep gradient in the rear of the house and built a working model of a hydroelectric project duplicating what our father was toiling day and night to install the turbines that they brought from GE company in the UK. Our model turbine was shaped out of a tin base and was connected to a copper coil cannibalised from a hand-ringing telephone power generator. We had installed water pipes across the gradient and a water jet from an artificial tank was projected on the wings of the turbine, to rotate and generate power to light a torch indicating our successful joint venture. Father had provided us with an advanced model of a Meccano set to articulate several models as per the instruction book.

Prakashanna was a genius in assembling several models, like the excavator or the dump lorry, on his own without any reference except what he had seen in action at the project site. Obviously, Prakashanna opted to become a mechanical engineer and joined HMT as a time study supervisor. Throughout his studies and afterwards, he would think and think and come out with ideas and innovations. If you show him something or a contraption, first he will take out his thick glasses and study each and every part in detail with his naked eye before giving his verdict and declare the mechanism that is involved. Even when his present house was being built, he introduced several innovative ideas on his own.

I should confess that he took a personal interest in my welfare and he was instrumental in teaching me how to drive a car. Every Sunday morning, he would take me towards HSR layout and Koramangala extension to give me driving lessons. Here, I recall an instance, where he confessed that was horning hard when he came across a stone while he was on the wheel! He is an avid old coin collector and owns a treasure of rare coins and coins from all over the world since time immemorial.

He is an authority as well as a genius on designing and building working models of contraptions that explain the principles of physics. Even today, he will be constantly working on new working models that will interest everyone. He is instrumental in building museums that display all his models as well as skill testers at several school grounds to inculcate the enthusiasm to learn about nature and its principles. When we are talking about the schools and education, Prakashanna endorses and guides the pet project of his philanthropic son, Mr. Prashanth Prakash, by donating libraries, school furniture as well as adding additional amenities to several schools for good learning.

He is a living legend and lover of nature and the environment. So as to preserve our heritage for the future generation, he has restored the historical Nandi narrow gauge railway station to its original glory at a huge cost. His most intriguing aspect is his humility, simple living and an exemplary patience to listen and learn. He is an avid reader of *National Geographic* magazine in addition to being a listener of discourses on the Gita and the Upanishads.

He is a legend, and there is a lot to learn from him since he is a practical person who is showing the world how to live modestly and contribute towards a healthy society."

* * *

PMP's sister, ***Sunitha***, remembers their childhood and youth with a full heart.

"I cherish [the] good old days with you. You cared about your siblings very much, more than our parents. That is great. Back then, with seven children, our parents had little time to take care of each of them. When Surendra and Narendra fought you disciplined them, [it was because] you loved them. When I was in seventh standard you conducted an

eye examination before a calendar to read the numbers. I couldn't see the numbers correctly. So I was checked and was asked to wear specs. How beautiful the world was when I saw things the first day wearing specs. Thank you. I couldn't see the blackboard in the school till then. I used to come first rank in seventh standard and received Saraswathi idol for first prize. When I showed it to you, you were so happy and shared it with my parents. You got married to Shantha sister-in-law. You both loved me. We are very lucky to have such a sister-in-law who gave a lot of affection to our family. You cared for mother very much and took her for health check-ups and bought her favourite dishes. We enjoyed trips when Narendra came to visit us. When I was unwell you both visited me and wished me good health. May God give you good health as you are very good at caring for others. Shantha sister-in-law still lives within ourselves as we all love her very much. I am very lucky to have you as a father figure. I cherish the good old days. Thank you for your support and love for me."

* * *

***Narendra,*** PMP's brother, writes,

"I grew up in a family of seven in 1960s Bangalore. My brother Prakash was thirteen years older than me—he was the second oldest, and I was the second youngest. That age gap meant that by the time I was a curious ten-year-old, he was already a working adult. But instead of creating distance, it made space. In many ways, he was the person who most directly shaped my early intellectual and practical world.

One of my earliest memories is of us hunched over a worn-out Meccano set—metal strips, nuts, bolts, tiny tools. Ours had missing parts, but that didn't matter. Under his lead, we learned to work with what we had. That was my first exposure to structure, mechanics and problem-solving. To this day, when I'm wrestling with an awkward bolt or blindly tightening something behind a piece of furniture, I'm back there—cross-legged on the floor, learning from him.

But the real foundation he laid came through reading. He had an appetite for knowledge I'd never seen before—or since, really. We weren't particularly well-off, but he spent a big part of his income on secondhand books and subscriptions. *Popular Science, Popular Mechanics, Reader's Digest, Time, Life, Popular Electronics*—they filled our shelves because of him. I consumed every issue, front to back, including the strange little classified ads promising x-ray specs or miracle devices. That reading gave me my first real view into Western—especially American—culture. It also taught me how to learn by myself.

He introduced me to comics that were adaptations of the classics—Rob Roy and the like—and then went further, borrowing full-length versions from friends so I could read the originals. I was maybe twelve. That's how my reading life started.

One day, he brought home a mechanical typewriter. It cost Rs. 600. I was itching to play with it. But Prakash being Prakash, he made me memorize the QWERTY layout before I was allowed to type a single word. Only then could I use it. That one lesson—discipline before access—stuck. Decades later, when others were still hunting and pecking, I was touch-typing like second nature. Because of him.

And then there were the projects. He taught me how to solder, and together we built several versions of a toy boat that ran on a candle. You'd light it, and it would putter around the bathtub, powered by heat and clever soldering—tubes, bottle caps and cut sheet metal from old Dalda cans. I even made one with my kids years later. He showed me how to build a crystal set—my very first radio—which I later upgraded with a transistor amplifier. These were not casual projects. They were lessons in creativity, precision and improvisation.

He had a thing for radios, too. We had an old vacuum tube set, and one day he took it apart and added a homemade servo system so it could auto-tune stations at the press of a button. This was long before anyone had heard of that feature. It seemed overly ambitious—even a bit quixotic at the time—but looking back, I now realize how foundational that mindset was. I've had my fair share of quixotic ventures since, and I think I inherited that streak directly from him.

Professionally, Prakash started out with the kind of job most families dreamed of: an engineering post at HMT. I still remember the pride when the company bus came to pick him up at our house. But a few years later, he quit. That was unheard of. You didn't just walk away from a government job—not back then. Pension, stability, lifelong security—that's what people worked toward. But he left, and he didn't falter. He started a small company making soldering irons for NGEF. Took out loans, set up a workshop and began.

At the time, people said he was foolish. He wasn't. That business, and the property he bought to support it, laid the foundation for the financial future of his family. He didn't call it entrepreneurship—it didn't need a name. He just saw a path and took it.

And then there was the gesture I'll never forget. When I was ready to buy my first Bajaj scooter, Prakash let me use his reservation slot. That may not sound like much today, but back in 1964, it cost him over Rs. 4,000—a huge sum—and was not a trivial sacrifice. But he didn't make it dramatic. He just did it. No fuss, no lecture, no conditions. It was one of the most generous things anyone has done for me.

Looking back, it's clear: he didn't just influence me. He shaped me. Not through preaching, but through example. He made autodidactic learning feel normal. He made building and tinkering a natural part of childhood. He modelled curiosity, self-direction and quiet generosity.

Who I became is rooted in who he was. And for that, I'm deeply grateful."

* * *

***Suri Surendra***, PMP's youngest brother, says,

"Mr. Prakash is one of my elder brothers and has always held a special place in my life. Being nearly fifteen years older than I am, he has been a guiding presence whose wisdom, maturity and steady support I have deeply valued over the years. From a very young age, I have looked up to him with admiration and respect. Whenever I needed advice, encouragement or direction, he was someone I could turn to with complete trust and confidence.

There are many cherished memories that come to mind when I think of him, especially the journeys we shared to Mahabalipuram, Goa on two occasions, Kerala and several other memorable places. Those moments were not only enjoyable, but also became lasting memories that I continue to treasure.

In my younger years, I saw him with the natural reverence one has for an elder brother. As I grew older, especially after I entered engineering college, our relationship deepened, and communication with him became easier and more meaningful. Over time, I came to appreciate him not only as an elder brother, but also as a thoughtful mentor and a trusted well-wisher.

One quality I have always admired in him is his innovative way of approaching practical problems. He has a remarkable ability to think clearly and find effective solutions, and that quality has always left a deep impression on me."

* * *

***Sudhir***, PMP's cousin, remembers,

"Prakash Anna is my father's sister's son. It is very difficult to single out one event, but I see how active he still is. I don't see any major change in him between before and now—except for age, of course.

PMP's main asset is his memory; he never forgets the day-to-day activities. Even today, he keeps very active tabs on everything going on around him through his phone.

Though he doesn't talk much, he listens to everyone and responds positively. I remember distinctly how so many of his employees look to him for all sorts of help."

* * *

***Tarakesh*** is PMP's nephew, one who has continued to live on the family farmlands of Patrenahalli. Whenever Tarakesh feels like seeing his uncle, he comes to Bengaluru and spends time with him. PMP has supported him all along. PMP's father had a share of the family property in Patrenahalli, which he gifted back to Tarakesh's family, "saying he didn't need a house here. Later, the house—originally made of mud—was renovated and given to our younger sister," says Tarakesh. "The affection that Prakashanna has for us is exactly like what our grandfather had. Whenever we see Prakashanna, we are reminded of our grandfather. I had attended Prakashanna's wedding when I was a boy of around eight or nine years old, studying in the fourth standard." For Tarakesh, it is of huge significance that both his sons were able to study engineering, thanks to PMP.

"Our grandfather had said, 'After my death, you must look after the people of Patrenahalli, especially when they are in need.' Prakashanna has upheld those words even to this day. A free eye camp was organised in our village in our grandfather's name. Surgeries were performed, and spectacles were given to those who needed them."

* * *

***Harish*** is a cousin who lives in PMP's maternal village, Nandi, in the very house that PMP lived in when in high school. PMP went on to become the benefactor who helped his cousins realise the importance of education. He keenly followed their academic progress as well as that of their offspring. He held conversations with the elderly and children with equal warmth.

Harish categorically states that PMP was supported wholeheartedly by his better half, Shantha, when it came to helping the families at Nandi. If someone wanted a phone to help with studies, he would suggest that a computer would be better. Such was his approach to help—always thinking ahead.

Says Harish, "Prashanth and Praveen, when young, were introduced to everyone at Nandi to realise their family ties. Among all the siblings in the family, PMP was the only one who valued these connections deeply. I still remember his Fiat 118 car. During his visits, he would also take time to show everyone around Patrenahalli, his paternal village, ensuring we knew the roots of his family."

His fondest memories were that PMP used to send books, storybooks and magazines to the children as well as educational toys that required assembly, much appreciated by his father, who was an avid reader. PMP would bring his mother and her three sisters during the Shivaratri festival which fostered a reunion between the sisters and brothers. PMP would visit the temple of the family deity, Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy to pay his respects.

Harish's lasting impression is that although PMP seemingly lives in his own world, he always offers a solution if approached with a problem.

* * *

***Arthi Reddy***, PMP's brother PM Ramakrishna's elder daughter, feels that what she got as a gift from her uncle and aunt was what was always beyond face value. Small things that she remembers from her stay with the couple—how he encouraged her to read the *National Geographic*, how he would always be working on some project or the other, and always finding new ways of doing things. Arthi, a retired academician in the US, says, "He has always believed in educating those who need help, feeding the poor. He has been quite an influence in my life, and I saw how important it is to think creatively and be philanthropic."

* * *

***Rajiv Srinivasa***, PMP's sister Indira's son, is based in the United Kingdom, and is the same age as Prashanth; the two were in school together. He feels very close to PMP, visiting him every time he is in the country, and considers him one of his role models (the others being PMP's two brothers, Ramakrishna and Chandrashekar, Rajiv's uncles). Rajiv, a doctor, says that it was their inspiration that led him to choose his specialty—anesthesia.

Rajiv describes how the family is referred to as the "KP family", KP standing for Kumara Park, PMP's parents' house where he and his siblings grew up. A striking characteristic of the KP family is their sardonic, dry and cutting wit, which outsiders might misunderstand as offensive. PMP possesses this classic dry wit, which Rajiv enjoys and believes is never intended to put anyone down.

To Rajiv, PMP's philanthropic efforts are unparalleled, stemming from a place of humility and an unselfish desire to help anyone that might need it. PMP's philosophy, particularly his emphasis on giving and helping others, likely stems from the Ram Krishna Ashram, where PMP stayed during his younger days. The philosophy focuses on humanity and service, believing in doing good and giving more than one takes, rather than seeking reward. Rajiv emphasized that PMP does not care about wealth or competing with those ahead; all that's important for him is lifting up those who are less fortunate.

A dominant sociological trend in India is the migration of individuals and families from the village to the city, or from smaller, mofussil towns to big cities. This has been the case for the Patrenahalli and Nandi-based families that PMP belongs to, but with one very big, and very significant difference—PMP has always been the one to stay in touch. In fact, he more than just stays in touch, because he always stays alert to his family members' needs, concerns, socio-economic dreams and aspirations. "We always have to help each other, whether it is one paisa or one rupee," he says, and "you have to reach out to troubled ones and offer help."

* * *

***Seema Ramakrishna*** (fondly known as "Anu" in the family) is the daughter of PMP's older brother, PM Ramakrishna, with whom he was very close, almost like a twin, sharing both a great love for innovation and a remarkable intellect. For Seema, PMP and Shantha were like Santa Claus. She keeps very close to her heart memories of the time the families spent together. Since she also lives in Bengaluru, uncle and niece try to catch up once in a while. Beyond their usual conversations, they bond a lot over food. "Prakash Uncle is quite the foodie," she says, and since Seema likes to cook, it is a win-win for both of them. Today, it is not uncommon for Seema to cook up some of his favourite dishes and take them for him.

At a time when children were disciplined by stern rebuke or a whack or two, PMP devised a unique method to discipline his sons. Seema recalls, "He would count 1 to 3 and if his admonishment was not aligned with by the count of 2, it surely was by the count of 3! I was a rebellious child, and my dad borrowed this sage method and employed it on me. Surprisingly, it worked every time. It neither occurred to me to challenge the count of 3, nor ask what would happen after the count of 3!

Not something I appreciated back then and I can only but smile when I think of it now and then."

The bond between Seema's father and PMP was a precious thing. "He and my father were very close to each other. They were much more than brothers; they were bonded by their love for technology, sarcasm laced with humour, and simplicity in all aspects of life."

* * *

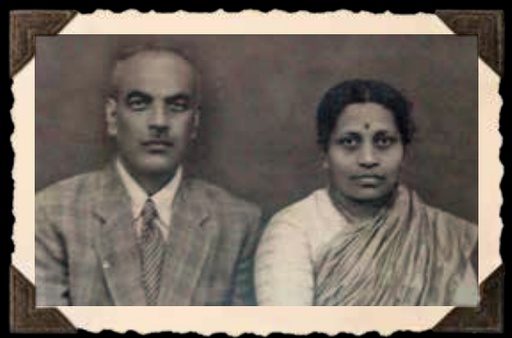
According to ***Babu***, another nephew of PMP's, PMP's paternal grandmother Kempamma is the nucleus of this strong lineage. "Despite having been widowed early, Kempamma's perseverance and strength held the family together through extremely difficult times when there were no male guardians in the household. Her contribution to our family is immense. If not for her, one wonders what path this family might have taken."

Today, for this 21st century family that is spread out across the world, familial bonds are still as important, still to be cherished and nurtured—not such a common thing in the world anymore, and therefore so precious.

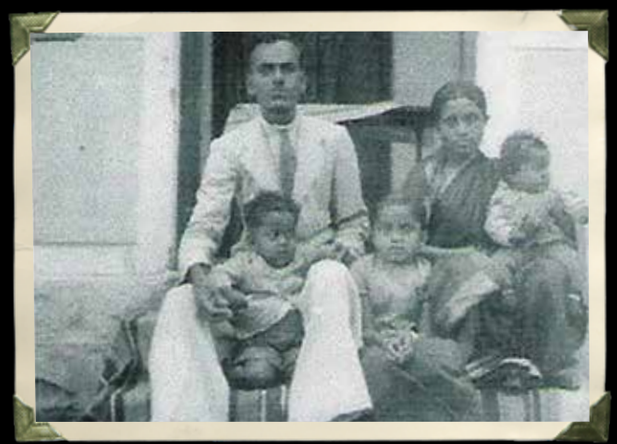




*Patrenahalli Mariappa*



*Mariappa and Lakshmidevamma*



*Annavaru, Akkavaru, Ramakrishna, Parijathakka and PMP*



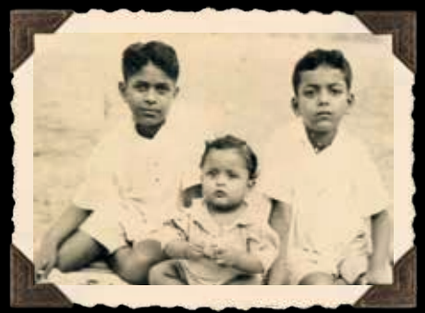

*Ramakrishna, Chennakeshavaiah and PMP*



*Mariappa*



*Chandra, PMP, Ramakrishna, Sunitha, Indira and Ammani in Jog*



*PMP, Baby Narendra, and Chandra*



*Ramakrishna and PMP*



*PMP in eighth standard, middle row, fourth from left*



*PMP in Nandi*



*A family vacation*



*Appavaru and Amma*



*PMP with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, bottom row, fourth from left*



*Amma and Appavaru at KGF*



*PMP at his convocation*



*Krishnappa, Shantha, PMP and Mariappa*



*PMP with family and friends at his wedding*



*Surendra, PMP, Baby Prashanth and Mariappa*



*PMP, Susheela, Arthi, Suri, Narendra, Shantha, Prakash, Sampath and PMC at Sunitha and Hanumaiah's wedding*



*Mamatha, Chandra, Shantha, PMP and Surendra in Goa on vacation*



*PMP and Shantha*



*Surendra, Narendra and PMP*




*PMP, Praveen, Shantha and Prashanth at Qutb Minar*



*PMP and Munibyrappa in Nandi*



*Ramakrishna and PMP in Nandi*



*PMP and Shantha at Tortoise Beach*



*PMP's architectural creation*



*PMP at a gober gas plant*



*Shubha, Praveen, Chandra, Mamatha, Shantha, Sunitha, PMP, Ramakrishna, Susheela, Prashanth, Anvitha and Amitha*



*Dr Srinivas, Indira, Srinivasmurrthy and Prashanth*



*Baby Pranith and PMP*



*Sampath Kumar, Hanumaiah, Srinivasmurthy and PMP*




*PMP engaging Aniruddh in a game*



*PMP and Prashanth share a moment of leisure*



*Baby Pranav and PMP*



*Anvitha and PMP*



*Anvitha, Nishi, Susheela, Shantha, PMP and Ramakrishna*



*PMP, Shantha, Anvitha, Nishi and Narendra in Coorg*



*Anvitha, PMP and Nishi*



*PMP and Nishi*



*Pradyun and PMP*



*PMP, Shantha and Baby Pradyun*



*Pranav and PMP*



*PMP with Narendra and Nishi on a trek*



*Prashanth, Surendra and PMP at a resort in Kerala*



*PMP relaxing with a cup of coffee*



*Family gathering*



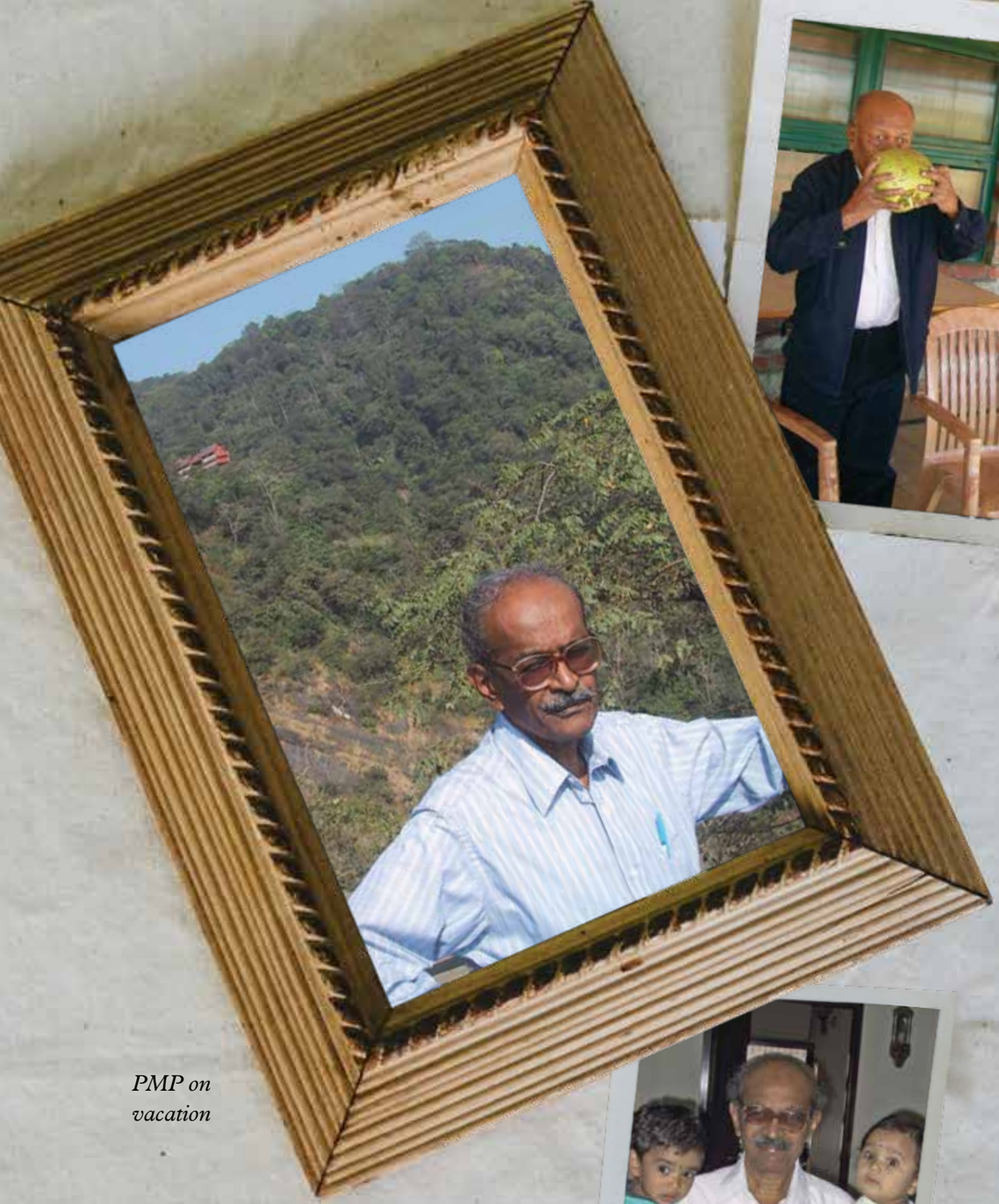
*Another family gathering*



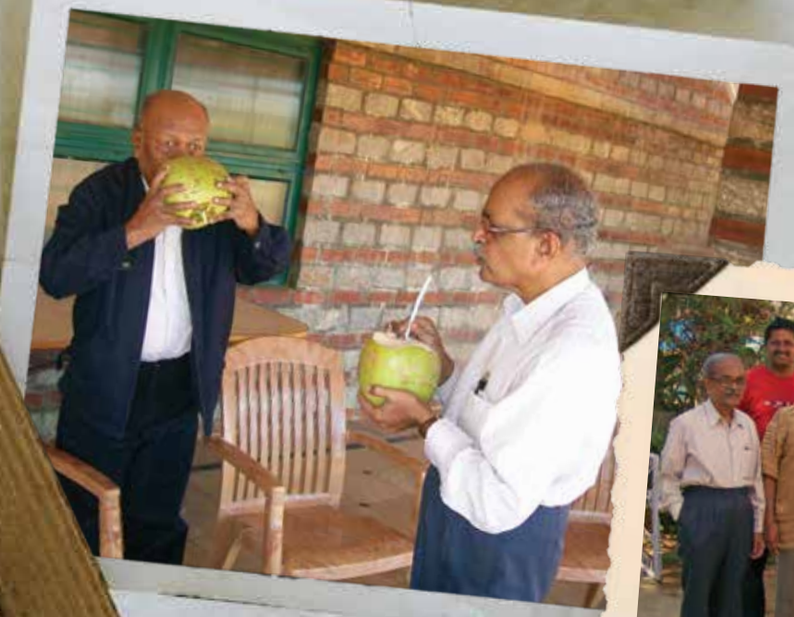
*PMP with Surendra's family at Nandi Hills*



*Siblings, spouses and children visit Jog Falls*



*PMP on vacation*



*Ramakrishna and PMP*



*PMP, Ramakrishna, Suri and their maternal family at Nandi*



*PMP with his first three grandchildren*



*PMP with his siblings and brother-in-law sometime during COVID-19*



*PMP on a site visit*



*PMP with his elder brother reminiscing*



*Suri and PMP at Indira's house*



*PMP, Chandra and Suri*



*PMP and Suri at the Nandi Resort*



*Ramakrishna, PMP, Indira, Chandra, Sunitha and Suri*



*PMP and family*



*PMP and family*



*Surendra, PMP, Ramakrishna, Indira, Suntha, Susheela and Chandra*



*Mark, Surendra, and PMP,*



*PMP, Surendra, and Indira*



*PMP and Surendra in Mysore*



*Suri and PMP at DV Kabini*



*Suri, PMP and Munibyrappa*



*Seema, Arindam, Praveen, Surendra and PMP*



*Heather, Surendra, PMP and Gene*



*Indira's 82nd birthday party*



*PMP and Surendra at the Nandi Resort*



*Suri and PMP at Go Native*



*Suri and PMP in Masinagudi*



*PMP and Surendra at Koshy's*



*PMP having a festive lunch with Amitha's father, Venugopal*



*PMP recently with an experiment*



*PMP and Anvitha*



*PMP relaxing at DV Nandi*



*Surendra, PMP, Pranav, Prashanth, Anvitha and Amitha at a resort in Kerala*



*PMP with his family, great-grandson included!*



*PMP at Anvitha's Haldi ceremony*



*PMP at Anvitha's wedding*



*PMP, Baby Kabir and Anvitha*

*"Always feed*
*the curious mind*
*—I have learnt*
*this from my father."*
*—Prashant Prakash*

CHAPTER 4

# *The* ASPIRANT ARCHITECT *and* HOSPITALITY WORKER

Prashanth and his wife Amitha had been dreaming of creating a novel space away from the hustle of the big city where people could have an immersive experience of nature, of unusual activities for young children—something different. Quite in synchrony with this thought process, PMP had always dreamt of bringing together his passion for engineering and real estate design. He had gathered a lot of experience while developing his wife's and his own properties, and those of his family's. After all, coming from a traditional farming community, love for the land was ingrained in him.

So, when Prashanth started discussing the new dimension of hospitality that would soon emerge as a family business, PMP's interest piqued.

This is how the idea of Discovery Village was born, and in 2005, PMP, along with his son and daughter-in-law, founded Discovery Village as a resort where people could reconnect with nature. The first one came up in Kanakapura, then two more followed, in Kabini, and then in Nandi Hills, all just a short drive out of Bengaluru. The central idea is to offer nature-centric activities for families, schools and corporate groups in a healing, natural environment that offers a respite from daily, work-dominated routines.

Shivakumar feels that this connection that PMP was able to develop with a hospitality-focused property and business has been a significant catalyst for enjoyment and stimulation in his later years. Of course, the fun that both of them have had, taking trips together to Kanakapura and Kabini, are cherished moments of their friendships. But at the centre of it all is how Discovery Village became the ultimate engineering project for PMP, for whom engineering is life and life is engineering.

Prashanth likes to say, "Discovery Village as an initiative has three separate dimensions—one is being able to create engaging activities for children and adults, and wherever possible, bringing back traditional games and science as mechanisms for this engagement. My father has always strongly believed in bringing back forgotten activities. Creating gadgets and widgets to feed the curious mind, and using novel materials, techniques and architectural and engineering principles. Then, most important, frugality was the idea: how can you be frugal and cost effective in building something? The third dimension here was that he wanted to build a data-driven mechanism for managing the business. He always insisted on collecting data on customer feedback, building mechanisms for making sure that we track through WhatsApp and visuals, as to how everyone is experiencing everything."

PMP has found particularly enjoyable the outdoor aspect of supporting all the Discovery Village work. Stepping out of the house, especially as one ages, is invaluable, and for those who do normally get that opportunity, it can be quite special. He would often travel to Nandi, Kanakapura and Kabini, and the added bonus of engaging and interacting with people was also a joy. It gives Prashanth a lot of happiness that his father, whom he always saw as a "wannabe" architect, got to chase that passion through the Discovery Village avenue. Always driven by wanting to conceptualise and create new things, PMP really made Discovery Village the nucleus of his attention and care.

*Discovery Village started as an activity centre for children but soon became a family collaboration that actualized individual passion projects. For PMP, it is a baby he has cherished, with all kinds of memories of time spent there.*

Discovery Village started as an activity centre for children but soon became a family collaboration that actualized individual passion projects. For PMP, it is a baby he has cherished, with all kinds of memories of time spent there. "Subhash used to bring lunch and dinner when we would stay there. At night of course we had armed security. I used to go for lunch brought by Shubha and Praveen. Anvitha used to come. A new year was also celebrated there." The inveterate family man that PMP is, all this means the world to him.

To PMP, some features of the units that were built at Discovery Village[1] are major standouts. The railway station at Nandi is of Victorian design, and at least one century old. This became the inspiration for the resort, and a replica with steel frame and bamboo board was constructed to house the front office reception, with birds printed on glass panels.

From his notes, a lot of interesting facts emerge.

## Leisure Cottage Hulimavu

- The first leisure cottage was conceived at Hulimavu after our visit to Jungle Lodge at Kabini. The highlight of the cottage is to have a steel rolling shutter material for the ceiling, doors and windows. Subsequently these materials were recycled when Nandi cottage was done.

There's another story about Hulimavu that PMP thinks of as divinely fated. He recounts, "A piece of land in Hulimavu was ready for conversion, pending an approval from the BDA; it was eventually cleared when Chandrashekar became minister. When the plot was put up for sale, no one took it, and thus the land was saved.

The then tenant was dodging to vacate, but something unfortunate befell him that made him act. Another dodging tenant vacated when rainwater flooded his godown.

It was decided, then, that a commercial complex will be built at 110/8. However, banks were not interested in financing it. By providence, our ancestral property was put on sale. The property was equally divided between seven siblings. I managed to get the entire amount as loan from them at interest. A developer from Bombay wanted to enter the local market. We struck a good deal with him, and the project was completed in time.

In 1970, we had a narrow escape when the roof of our factory collapsed. We were using a century-old Madras terrace building for our work. One edge of the wooden beam yielded due to rotting. Fortunately, the roof came down in the morning when the factory was not yet open!" Another indication of divine intervention!

## Discovery Village, Nandi

- The first cottage for Nandi was of a unique design which entailed a steel structure of basic six panels made of rolling shutter steel material welded to a steel frame to form a hexagonal shape. The structure was designed to house two rooms and one pantry equipped with a gas stove and a water cooler. A masonry foundation was done for the building on a plot that was small. The entire structure was spot welded on the grounds at our office in Bengaluru and assembled on the foundation at site. It was thereafter fully welded.

  The panels were punctuated with steel doors and French windows. Similarly, the roof panels were also of steel and topped off with terracotta tiles. The eave boards were salvaged from a centuries-old building from Lalbagh Road and used here. A deck of steel finished with bamboo board was constructed and was upgraded to wood later. An extended cantilever was then made with stone slabs. The sanitary connection was with a septic tank and sink tank.

  A lean-to roof was added around the building over the corridor, with one dormer. Inside the building the walls and ceiling were clad with recycled packing wood which was duly varnished. A masonry wall enclosure was constructed on one side with a steel sheet roof.

  The water tank was placed above the building with a weather cock atop which was eventually brought down by a storm.

[1] Some abbreviations to note:
DVN - Discovery Village, Nandi
DVK - DIscovery Village, Kanakapura
DVKb - Discovery Village, Kabini

- The steel frame for some cottages had a basic design where steel square sections were welded in a panel-like design. A typical room was sized to accommodate three / four beds.
- The roof was held on a steel beam. Steel rafters and steel purlins were welded on top of the beam. Load was borne by one masonry wall and balanced towards the periphery by a steel structure. So the room was with two external walls with bamboo board infills, one internal stone clad wall and one internal masonry wall which facilitated plumbing routes. The roofing was with a zinc sheet covered with tiles. The MDF false ceiling was fixed to the frame.
- Subsequently, upgrades were made to some cottages. An MDF-painted board or cement board was fixed on the purlins over which a tar sheet was spread. Tiles were drilled to take the dowel pin and were held fast. This innovation solved the roof leak problem.
- Welded steel roofing was made for the first floor with a deck slab and over which a standard room was constructed which was steel frame.
- Cottage block: Entire construction was with masonry walls and RCC column. A sit out was provided for each of the 8 rooms.
- Wooden cottage: Twin cottage with duplex floor was fabricated with wooden planks. This was supplied by a vendor. We modified the first floor to add a shower. On the ground floor, doors were introduced to isolate the duplex rooms, which made 4 rooms available to the guests instead of 2 duplex units.
- Wooden Gazebo: This was imported from Bali in knock-down condition packed in a container. Treated coconut was used for the entire structure. We used local grass for the roof top.

## Discovery Village, Bengaluru

- A yurt building by the river at DVB was constructed.
- Twin halls were constructed along with a stage to facilitate weddings. Side panels were added in some cases.

## Discovery Village, Bengaluru and Kabini

- An amphitheatre with a fabric roof was supplied by a vendor. The seating was clad with stone which was done by our team.
- An activity hall of basic 60X60 design with a roof of steel sheet. Natural air operated exhaust fans were installed. The flooring was with artificial turf eventually replaced by tiles.

## Discovery Village, Kabini

- Villament Cottage: Ground floor was with RCC Columns. The first floor was constructed on it. A spacious sit-out was provided. Jacuzzis were provided in each room.
- Row Cottage: This was a block of 3 rooms with steel frame design. A bamboo mat wall was provided on one side.
- Solid 4-inch-thick wooden plank dining tables were imported from Bali in containers.
- A yurt building was installed as a spa room.
- The steel round building is predominantly used as a dining hall. The idea of a round structure came along to reuse the 12 windows released when PPH took over the 110/8 office building. The roof was designed after a dome design to form a 40 ft. diameter hall.
- Round building: Steel frame twin rooms with French windows. A pool with jets was provided in each room. A 12 ft. projection deck was added around the pool cottage. The roof was designed like a combined cantilever structure. A bamboo mat was pasted on plywood to form the false ceiling.
- Tensile fabric roof: Amphitheatre with fabric roof was supplied by a vendor. The seating was clad with stone which was done by our team.

* * *

PMP has always been passionate about tree planting and greening. At Discovery Village in Nandi, saplings were initially planted along the boundary of the plot. About two acres were planted with teak saplings raised through tissue culture. Some eucalyptus trees were planted, but those were later removed. A mangium nursery was created by procuring seeds from Kerala. Later these mangium trees were removed. Different varieties of aged saplings were brought from Hyderabad. In total, the resort has about 500 trees of about 150 varieties. At Discovery Village Kanakapura, fruit trees of sapota and mango were planted even before the family purchased the land. Fruit-bearing saplings were procured from the nursery and planted. About two acres of car parking land was planted with shading trees. Similarly, at Discovery Village Kabini, about two acres of land was already planted with coconut trees. Some flowering trees were planted as well.

With so much emphasis on tree-planting and greening, little wonder that there is a huge diversity of birds at the resorts. For PMP, that's a really special thing. There are about 100 types of birds in the resorts. An effort was made to document them. Well-known bird watchers Shantharaju and Krishna MV were assigned to the project.

The birds move according to season. Based on sightings, a study was conducted for months at Nandi, Vaderahalli and Kabini. A book was published in colour with photos and text, and rooms at the properties were subsequently named after the birds, and the picture was imprinted on the key plates. PMP's dry sense of humour peeps through here as well. "The promotion of the study of birds was done by keeping bird photos under the dining table glass. Earlier we had fixed printed bird pictures to the main gate. After some time, the surprise was that some of them seemed to have flown away!" PMP obviously meant that those pictures disappeared from the main gate over time.

Of course PMP's passion for books shines through in the properties. Each room is provided with a bookshelf. The books acquired are documented and classified, then wrapped in transparent PVC sheets before being cleaned with sanitiser. An effort to computerize operations was also made. All business activities were made to run through a single opening with plenty of menus. A validation process at each stage was programmed. The coding was done in DBPLUS 3. PMP recalls a system being developed on MS Excel, "The control data was entered on a single page, and the required analysis was programmed into the relevant cells. The output was a monthly summary facilitating effective management control."

Prashanth's assessment, that his father's passion for creating new engineering designs and the plans for the Discovery Village resorts would intersect deeply and bring a lot of fulfillment to his father, was absolutely correct. Several exhibits were created on the property over the years, with PMP working through one model after another, and they all now sit in a museum/activity centre at the resorts. PMP describes some of these models and exhibits:

- At Discovery Village Kanakapura, I made table models of exhibits that could explain the principles and properties of physics. Around twenty such models were mounted on a low table and housed in an 'Experientarium.' Some of them were working models of wind turbines, water wheel generators, and bio gas generators. Indoor traditional games, clay modelling, pottery wheels etc., were also made. Some of these were replicated at the other resorts.

- At a time, five models were selected for hands-on training. Each training batch had six students. These programmes were held at schools in Malleshwaram. The kits were supplied, along with a trainer. This was done for about 15 schools spanning about six weeks.

- A golf putting course was made at DVB. Kayaking and raft-building were made at the riverlet plot. Rappelling was started at DVN and DVB. Rope courses with basic elements were made at DVN, DVB and DVK.

- Hot water: For the first cottage I made a gas-heated water storage unit. Subsequently, a fossil fuel SS boiler system was adopted. The solar panel system with an SS storage tank was made standard. In both of these storage tanks, a leaking problem persisted. In order to have a reliable hot water supply system, individual electrical geyser systems had to be resorted to.

* * *

As we grow older, our bodies begin to lose strength, which is why the importance of physical activity and its close connection with mental

stability and health is such a big topic of conversation these days. This becomes even more significant if we understand the value of this engagement, and give it our best too. This is exactly what PMP has done, with active support from his family. So all the time that has been spent over the last few decades at Nandi, Kabini and Kanakapura, has shown its value.

*To PMP, there are other elements within the hospitality space that are very significant, and much needed. One of these—greatly evident at all the resorts—is the effort to use novel, sustainable and environment-friendly materials for building, the use of bamboo and novel architectural engineering principles. Being efficient and effective with costs and resources is a major principle that has influenced PMP's work.*

*Creating useful things using his intellect, practical knowledge and engineering skills has been one of Prakash's life's most solid cornerstones. In a tribute to his large, varied and enthralling life, here is a compendium of some of his most favourite things.*

CHAPTER 5

# "A FEW *of My* FAVOURITE THINGS"

## The Control Transformer

The control transformer was a standard item for any machine to have the required voltage for the control circuits and special voltage for brakes, etc. I started with a basic transformer. The design was given by my elder brother. I took training in manufacturing. The unit was then offered to various HMT units. There was a response from the Kerala unit. They placed an order for 100 numbers. I started the production by fabricating a hand winding machine. For the table, I used a wooden cot. I bought my first hand drilling machine. For working capital, I borrowed from my father's friend. I successfully completed the order. A portable typewriter was added.

## Fuse Unit

It consisted of a screw base, fuse cartridge and base. As the items are purchased independently, I took to the screw base first. It consisted of a silver plated turned brass screw which I sourced from Venkateshwara R rolling mills. The base was porcelain which I procured from the government porcelain factory with the help of my father. This was my first investment. I then contacted the purchase department, but unfortunately the item was superseded by another type. So my first product was not sold.

## Innovations

Cement block, thermos cooking, heat transfer film, tile roofing, windmill blade, biogas, solar heater, room cleaner, centralized hot water system, room music.

Using progressive shearing tool design, I advanced the capacity of our power press. Brass-etched plate: a novel idea of masking the plate with a plotted vinyl sticker.

## Model-Making and Digital Inputs

A digital format of Toys From Trash was procured from Arvind Gupta. An SD card of the same was installed in a tablet. 10 high schools were selected, and the Sikshana Foundation mentors were asked to supervise.

I also supplied a collection of optical illusions and housed it in the Mariappa Memorial Hall.

I have made a collection of items that were used by me and have exhibited in a showcase at the DVN indoor games room.

## For HMT

Fuse units, control transformer, brake magnet and the AC solenoid.

It was a primary task to procure orders from industries. This was done through contacts developed by club and bar culture which I was not after. With difficulty, I was able to supply a test pencil, gauge, alarm type fuse, ringer, headgear, lamp, etc. There was difficulty in inspection. During the journey, I was to face an IT raid also. I used saw blades in punching dies in Mica from the Hemavati canal. I fabricated a double silk wire covering machine. A gold plating was also used in the micro switch.



CHAPTER 6

# PHILANTHROPY

"A friend helped me with hand-loans when I first started my industry, and soon became one of my component suppliers. He came into contact with a racehorse breeder. Soon he started betting and lost a lot of money! To pursue this addiction, he started stealing tools. He was finally caught and dismissed from the job. Out of compassion, I gave him a job in my office. But he hadn't yet overcome the addiction, and soon started stealing money from my cheque books. His family requested that I not complain to the police. I let him go. Turns out I did the right thing, for his two sons worked hard and became NRIs." PMP goes on to add that were it not for the addiction, this friend would not have taken to stealing. Such is PMP's ability to forgive.

## Publications

"A book in Kannada called *Attekamadenode* was compiled and published in 2010. There was a slump in the business world, and I used my staff for the translation and composition of the volume. The book told the stories of the Arvind Gupta projects, the Agastya International Museum, and the Discovery Village exhibits. It was published in A4 and has 312 pages, priced at Rs. 180. 200 copies were given free to middle schools, and 100 copies were sold."

## Computer Awareness

"We started a computer awareness campaign, the object of which was to make hands-on experience a reality. Three high schools were selected for the project which was conducted through the Sikshana Foundation. Two computer systems were installed in the school for one week to provide training to students."

## Donation

"In 1974, we had a business problem. An advisor of ours told us to provide food to those in need once a week for a few weeks. We selected the Abalashrama for this purpose. The process began and I started to arrange feeding at other NGOs as well. In addition, I donated funds to them to procure necessary items.

To schools, we donated desks and benches from time to time, as well as stainless steel lunch plates with stands. Near Ajvara, we provided boiled eggs at certain schools for the kids' meals, and even an RO plant for drinking water to a particular school. In gratitude, the Ajvara school facilitated me with *sanmana* (respect, honour).

The materials were gifted to the schools through the Sikshana Foundation."

## Scholarships

"After my father's death in 1982, I wanted to remember the educational assistance he received from NGOs and pay it forward in his honour. By chance, one opening was available at Rajajinagar Kalyana Mantapa for a nominal amount. They were providing boarding and lodging from the income of their Kalyana Mantapa. I collected the contribution from my siblings. At a later date, I was able to add two more seats. Two more seats were opened at the C. Byregowda Institute of Technology from my funds and were immensely helpful to engineering students. From my funds, I also provided a yearly contribution to primary school children from North Karnataka to encourage them to go to school. For English-medium children, a fee was needed (Kannada-medium was free) which we facilitated. For college students based in Bengaluru and Chikkaballapur, suitable financial assistance was provided.

*To ensure our help continued in the future, I decided to start the P Mariappa and Lakshmi Devamma Trust and initiated a fixed deposit.*

This was possible with the help of my siblings, after I persuaded them to donate part of their earnings from the sale of our ancestral property. The annual interest received is being used for donations.

*To look at a life built on precision and tireless effort is to understand that true mentorship isn't delivered in grand speeches, but through a lifetime of deliberate actions.*

# EPILOGUE: THE BLUEPRINT

ANVITHA PRASHANTH

From the Meccano sets of my childhood to the science projects of my summers, my grandfather taught me a fundamental truth: that anything broken can be understood, and anything understood can be fixed.

While I am still chasing the effortless discipline he embodies, his favorite Kannada reminder—"Tomorrow is destroyed—do everything today"—remains my ultimate compass. The strict patriarch of my youth has softened into a source of immense, grounding respect. He is a man who built every relationship on actions rather than words, pouring his love directly into the things he created and the family he steadfastly supported.

The coin-filled world map we built together still sits in his living room, a physical marker of moments shared. But the true map he created is the one etched into my character. As I look at my own son, I see the quiet continuum of this legacy. The template for what a grandfather should be was set decades ago by a man of pure purpose and curiosity. He remains, without a doubt, the blueprint.

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P.M. Prakash