

[Translator's Note:

It seems that this Newspaper Column titled "As we read" (or "while reading", - the Hindi translation would be 'padhate padhate') by Prof. Ramdas Kelkar is primarily about books and reading. It looks as if the column also features some eminent person who has made a substantial impact on society - and for whom books mean a great deal. It is wonderful to see Gerry featured in this column.

I am aware that the flow of the text is not smooth. This is mainly due to my limitations as a translator. It also reflects to some extent the jerkiness of the printed column. It is quite possible that the original version as written by the author was longer, better and smoother, and the condensation during printing has robbed it of these qualities - those who contribute to newspapers have often complained about such things happening quite often.

I have taken a few liberties while translating the text - but the author of the original article has been most skillful on this front as well. Amongst the inspiring stories that appeared in the Reader's Digest, he has mentioned those about Dr. Narendra Jadhav and Ms Sudha Chandran. Most inspiring no doubt - but I will have much more to say about the role of these stories in inspiring Gerry. However, that can wait! ]

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Delaney : The man for whom serving the society is serving God

The well-known book 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' was about the pitiable conditions of the slaves in the United States of America, and it generated a world-wide wave of sympathy. Included in the roll of honour of our column "As We Read" today is someone in whom this very book kindled the love of reading : Mr. Gerald Delaney - educationist, former Principal and a superb teacher of physics. It is sheerly for his passion for teaching that Mr. Delaney gave up his excellent position in the National Institute of Oceanography and opted for a career in the teaching profession. Since then, he has demonstrated that he is not just an armchair reader of books, but also an active social worker who is quick to translate good thoughts into action. Thanks to the freedom, flexibility and an ambiance conducive to taking up initiatives towards the betterment of the society, he quickly adapted to the teaching profession; that he could continue to nurture his love for reading was of course an added bonus.

In fact, Delaney's mother was the one who introduced him to the joys of reading - and the love for books that started with children's books continues unabated as he settles down in Salgaon after retirement. The choice of books changed appropriately as he grew older and as a teenager, he discovered the Readers' Digest; his family had been long-time subscribers. The magazine contained not just fiction; it was a

rich storehouse of inspiring anecdotes and accounts, adventure stories, delightful humour that can be enjoyed by the whole family together and so on. This international magazine also carried articles about some eminent and inspiring Indian personalities - Ms Sudha Chandran and Dr. Narendra Jadhav, for example. All this reading also indirectly contributed to enrichment of vocabulary and sharpening of linguistic skills. Delaney warmly acknowledges the important part played by the Reader's Digest in personality development. The reading also helped to a great extent in his teaching career - in debates, in making speeches, in conducting meetings etc. Effective use of words and phrases, cogent articulations of ideas and thoughts, employing an attractive style of expression were some of the skills that served him very well in the many discussions with his colleagues and in the interactions with the students that he had when working as the Principal, and also in the preparation of the physics textbooks. In addition, he was also able dip into this collection gathered over the years, and quote appropriately as the occasion demanded.

Recently, when he came across a news item indicating that the Reader's Digest is likely to cease publication, he was deeply saddened. Fortunately, the magazine has continued bringing out issues very regularly to this day and is flourishing. Mr. Delaney says that such magazines are most effective in personality development and points out that unfortunately these do not seem to engage the attention of younger people; he was indeed lucky that his mother and his family ensured his access to this wonderful magazine.

Any way, coming back to the subject of books, the one that made the strongest impression on Mr. Delaney was, as mentioned earlier, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Harriet Beecher Stowe. It was this book that generated in him compassion for the poor, and the firm belief that serving the needy eventually is the same as serving Him. This was the motto that guided him as he took up many initiatives and various responsibilities during his student days at the St. Xavier's college at Mhapsa - and to nobody's surprise earned him the 'Best All Round Student' award.

The wide variety of books that he has read has helped him moulding his approach to life over the years. He points out how a lover of books never has to confront the dreaded post-retirement vacuum. Having been a sportsman, he automatically had a broader and more liberal outlook towards life. The love for reading made it more mature and enlightened. As he grew up, the entertaining children's books made way for engrossing mysteries - first of Sherlock Holmes, and then by Agatha Christie. During the college days, solving difficult puzzles proved to be an endless source of joy. It is the neglect of such activities that, in his opinion, has been responsible to some extent in many of the students not faring very well in the competitive examinations. If puzzles of some type or the other are included in the regular course of instruction, it will not only make teaching more effective, but may also make students more interested in the subject.

Moreover, having taken up reading books on puzzles, the students may begin noticing and reading other books as well.

Mr. Delaney's father worked for the Railways during the British regime. After independence, he joined the Indian Railways. As the job was transferable, Mr. Delaney had the opportunity to interact with students from many regions in India - Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra etc., and he became familiar with many different communities, religions, cultures etc. Being a sportsman, he had even more opportunities for participating in events alongwith students from a wide variety of backgrounds, and this naturally helped in imbibing and developing virtues like discipline, tolerance, compassion and decency.

It is the opportunity for studying in many different places, and strong interest in reading that generated in Mr. Delaney a passion for knowledge, and he continues to be keenly interested in learning new things. After taking Voluntary Retirement from his job, he has begun devoting his time to social work. Guiding and counseling those suffering from depression, rehabilitation of prisoners are some of the activities that he has been involved with, by participating in the initiatives from a few organization dedicated to social work. Mr. Delaney is also the president of the Salgaon Consumer Forum - and an active one at that. He, however, feels that all these interests have stemmed basically from his love for books and reading. He firmly believes in God, and also in the dictum that serving people is indeed serving Him. At present, he is reading books dealing with positive thinking.

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Translator's (somewhat snide and not necessarily relevant or appropriate) comments:

1. On the anachronism :

The stories on Dr. Narendra Jadhav and Ms Sudha Chandran are certainly most inspiring. However, these must have appeared in the Reader's Digest relatively recently. Dr. Jadhav started his life in a small dalit family in a village - and is currently (amongst many other things) a member of the planning commission, having served earlier as the Chief Economist in RBI, on IMF, as a VC of Pune University and whatnot. He is rightly described as the Booker T. Washington of the dalits in India. However, his B.Sc. (statistics) and M.A. (economics) degrees are in 1973 and 1975 respectively, and it is doubtful if he can inspire Gerry with retrospective effect.

The anachronism is even more pronounced in the case of the charismatic and stunningly beautiful danseuse Ms Sudha Chandran (a.k.a. Mayuri), who would have been at best a toddler (old fashioned courtesy of not disclosing a lady's age refrains me from quoting the year of her birth) when Gerry was being inspired by the Reader's

Digest. The courageous saga of Ms Sudha Chandran's regaining the top position as a classical dancer - using the Jaipur foot in place of the amputated right leg is certainly most inspiring too - but all this happened in mid 1980s. Gerry could have been inspired into crooning or writing poetry of course - but the article on him is silent about these facets of Gerry's personality.

2. The bit about the 'Jokes'

Almost all the readers of the column would have been puzzled as to why the author, while mentioning the humourous bits in the Reader's Digest, went so far out of his way to add the qualifier "jokes appropriate to be read by the whole family" - the reputation of RD as a family magazine is unquestionable.

However, it is we the students in the 1972-74 class who can fully appreciate how essential this rider is in an article about Gerry (a correction - certainly not ALL of us - Rohini insisted that all the jokes that she and Veena and Kamal heard from Gerry were of course appropriate for narration in front of the whole family) - as two of the three Sanjays have pointed out.

One can only surmise that the author of the article, Prof. Kelkar, has also been fortunate enough to have been regaled by Gerry - and must have felt honour-bound to put on record that the Reader's Digest's influence is limited to only a very limited and specific portion of the most fascinating and remarkable collection that Gerry has accumulated over the years.

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