



My few Precious Moments with Prof. Shaheer

1997 same time of the year. Prof Shaheer slammed the door shutting me inside, to wonder what Next !!... I was told that I cannot sail through my thesis with such an uninspiring topic of designing a mere secondary school campus that too in an obscure location in erstwhile Bihar. I was sitting in his room in SPA and he himself had walked out of it ... in disgust !!

The next review, I shared with him a panorama of site snaps and not a single drawing. I remembered his eyes sparkled. He instantly realised that the soul of the project hinged on the response to the pristine beauty of the site . He asked me to redesign the architectural blocks although it was a landscape thesis. At the same time he did not miss out on apologising openly for being harsh on me the last time. That moment I experienced Prof Shaheer much deeper than just the "roaring lion" of the department. He was indeed very Kind, Gracious , Grounded and Simple.

During my working days with him I discovered him more as I was learning in leaps and bounds, everyday from his immense wealth of knowledge and wisdom. Also his humility and wry wit added an uniqueness to his personality. I fondly remember those drives along with him or travelling with him for an out-station project..... where I discovered that beyond his solemn and towering persona, was this amazingly youthful person who loved to chat, crack jokes and laugh heartily.... I think I bonded with him beyond work best, during those precious moments. To the world he would always speak very little and his precise words would be packed with wisdom but there was also childlike curiosity within his shell. Not many people can combine this exuberance of youthfulness and vast wisdom of age.

My penchant to work for my city Kolkata was always high and with a heavy heart after 4 years of working with him I requested him to allow me to pursue my dreams ... The dreams shattered in 6 months time and I realised I have done a big mistake and it seemed irreversible. Although I came back to Delhi with nothing in my hand , I did not have the courage to get back to him. One such clueless day when I went to catch up with Sameer outside one of Prof.

Shaheer's clients cabin, he walked in unexpectedly. I did not know where to hide neither did I have the guts to face him. It took him seconds to read my wary eyes and what I was going through. He not only gave me back life but also ensured that my little pride of getting started with a start-up is not overshadowed. He decided to give me the space, time and inspiration to grow as well. There was no greater honour for a me than his words at that stage of my life. During my second stint with Prof Shaheer, he was more of a 'mentor' to me. He instrumented my personal evolution and entrusted me to move ahead.

Prof Shaheer touched my life and taught me things beyond work. He taught me to appreciate Art and Aesthetics of Nature. His brilliant sketches inspired me to reconnect back with my love for sketching. He liked having short discourses with me on the world of European period artists and he would always ask me to revisit Tagore and Ramkinkar Baij more vividly.

He would occasionally mutter a word or two under his breath while sketching out his half-a-minute-doodle and he would always tell me "Design also happens as a Surprise ... you have to be ready for the moment ". But to get on the right chord of thinking along with him one had to be sure of the zone of conversation. He allowed no room for empty posturing.

We talked on the evening of 27th November. When I expressed my apologies for my false promises over last three months about visiting him, he with his unfailing light laughter comforted me and diverted the talk saying "Drop into 155 Zakir Bagh studio on your way here and there ! Some Nice Art work waiting that I would like to share"

28th early morning I was gazing glassy eyed at his brilliant sketches on the studio walls, but without Him, .. it seemed he had a lot more to share

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