

Speech by T. Krishna Kumar
(Read by his brother Thomas K. Rao)

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Conference in Honour of Professor T. Krishna Kumar

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Professor VM Rao, Prof Ramamohan Rao, Prof. Surekha Rao, Prof Chang, Prof Mallick, Prof Mishra, Prof Rajluxmi, several other Professors who gathered here this morning, participants of the conference, ladies and gentlemen,

I bring greetings to you from me and my wife from Nagpur where we have been staying now. Today I feel both honored and humbled at the same time. Honored by this overwhelming conference on a theme that is very dear to me, with participation by people with most of whom I had the privilege to interact during my long professional journey. I am humbled by the galaxy of experts and variety and quality of the papers being presented. The coverage goes much beyond my sphere of knowledge, and hence some of it beyond my comprehension. It is a rare event where many of my professional acquaintances are meeting each other all at once.

I am taking this occasion to address some of my students for the first time as Professors. My student professors would perhaps pardon me as I don't do my characteristic role and define who is a professor and who is a teacher. A teacher is one who has higher stock of knowledge than his students and transfers some of it to them. As the knowledge becomes obsolete over time he keeps replenishing the stock by continuously acquiring additional knowledge. A student is one who has a lower level of stock of knowledge than his teacher and is keen to acquire additional knowledge from his/her teacher and tries to acquire more and more knowledge. Many problems in the academic world, particularly in India, arise as these definitions are not adhered to in either the selection of teachers or the students. In fact in one of the places I worked in India the teachers there, except me and a few others of course, were like students and students were like the teachers. The Greek philosopher Heraclites once said; "There is nothing constant in life, except change itself". There are a lot of changes that I see. One change is that students become professors and professors become the students, but over time, unlike in the previous example. My students are now my Professors.

Occasions such as this establish a continuity of an eternal relay race for acquisition of knowledge from teachers to students, who then become teachers and have their own students and so on. So, this is an occasion for me to recall my indebtedness to my teachers. I recall my high school class teacher, Nanduri Venkateswar Rao, father of NJ Yasasvy, the founder of ICFAI institutions. I always used to miss the high ranks in my class as there were more brilliant and more hardworking students in the class than me. Nanduri surprised me at the school final graduation function by conferring on me a prize for "all time consistent performance with good character", the latter having been hoisted on me by him. This was a prize that did not exist until then. I would like to recall three most significant teachers at the collegiate level. These are:

- Prof S. Minakshisundaram who taught me mathematical physics and taught me what scholarship really means
- Prof C.R. Rao who taught me foundations of statistics, and has been my role model
- Prof Karl A. Fox who not only taught me econometrics of public policy but who extended personal love and affection by buying me an air ticket to take me from India to USA to pursue my doctoral studies and research when I could not afford it.

Professor Minakshisundaram, paid my hostel dues when I could not pay the same, and gave me access to abundance of knowledge that was in his personal library, a library he built

during his short and highly acclaimed stay at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. He passed away in 1968 before I could meet him on my home turf in Guntur, where he established Nagarjuna University. I had just written an article, at the suggestion of his daughter Mrs Girija Sarma, remembering him on the occasion of his birth centenary. I have been actively associated with, and working for, the CR Rao Advanced Institute for Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science established in Hyderabad in honor of Dr CR Rao. I am associated with the organizing committee of an international conference on his 90th birthday later this year. It is very rare that a teacher continues to teach a student when the student reaches the age 70, but that is happening between Dr CR Rao and me. He is my role model and even if I get inspiration to reach epsilon percent of what he achieved I will be thrilled. I hope my students use him as the role model. I have been in touch with Prof Karl Fox until two years ago. My wife and I met him and his wife Sylvia Fox in 2002 when we went to Chicago, USA to see our first grandchild. It was only a few months ago that Professor Sushant Mallick tried to contact him to inform him of this event and came to know from his daughter Karen Fox, a Professor of Marketing at Levey School of Business, Santa Clara University, California, that Karl Fox passed away on April 20 last year.

I jotted down my professional journey through “quantitative methods for public policy” and am circulating it in the hope that some younger scholars may learn a few lessons from it. I had more than average mobility of a professor, both in India and in USA and both according to Indian and US standards. That dynamism provided a very broad perspective and a wide experience, and extended my horizon. I enjoyed the variety of that experience. I say to Him, quoting Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore:

“You will startle me with new visions of fulfillment at every bend of the road and fashion my moments with immortal forms of joy.”

I must also admit, however, that my high mobility had created structural breaks in my professional output, and that is what others look at. The lesson I draw and pass on to others is this: Please think twice before you leave a good academic institution for reasons that could be transitory. I should not have resigned from Florida State University in USA and from IIM, Bangalore here in India.

I must say that every teacher must be blessed to have students like Sushanta Mallick, who used to supply me with his work faster than I could read and comment, and Srijit Mishra who used to provoke me to think beyond what I was aiming at. I am thrilled to see the publication record and achievements of Professor Mallick, and the variety of public policy oriented papers, reports, and books coming out from Professor Mishra. I had a special liking for Professor Nagaraju, as he seemed to reflect some of my own qualities of trying to help others at the cost of delaying his own work. He would work on research in his own way not swayed by the supervisor’s whims and fancies if he did not agree with them. This last part he shared with another student of mine Prof Jonathan Silberman, now a Professor, and formerly Dean at School of Business Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan.

Prof Nagaraju took his own sweet time to complete his work, about nine years and a year after I retired, but ultimately he got a gold medal for the best thesis submitted that year. I myself would have done like him if an interesting episode did not happen. There was another Indian student from Andhra, Ram Sastry, working with the same professor Karl Fox and we started our work the same time. He was very secretive and would never discuss with me what work he was doing for Karl Fox and for his dissertation. But his wife, Sita Sastry, used to be

a bit more open with me as she is a sister of my childhood friend. One day she said that Sastry was graduating that term and asked me when I would be completing my doctoral work. I simply said that if Sastry was completing I was also completing. But then how would I do it? I went to Karl Fox and said I would submit whatever I have done. But he said that it was hardly thirty pages! Then we had an interesting discussion on what constitutes an acceptable thesis. We both agreed that an accepted full length paper in the best known economics journal, *Econometrica*, would be acceptable. But I said the acceptance takes three years from the date of submission. Then again we agreed that if we simulate the review process and send the paper to three eminent Fellows of the Econometric Society and get favourable comments that would be acceptable, and Karl Fox was himself a Fellow of the Econometric Society. I quickly wrote a paper of 30 pages and Karl Fox liked it and sent that to Professors Kenneth Arrow at Stanford, and Hirofumi Uzawa, and Henry Theil at University of Chicago. We got favourable comments from all of them, and Uzawa even said that it should be submitted to *Econometrica*. I had a renowned professor of mathematics at Iowa State University, Professor George Seifert from whom I took courses, on my dissertation committee to make sure that the mathematics used in economics was flawless. But Fox said that he would have problems justifying a thesis that was only 30 pages. I said my thesis was mathematical in nature and that in mathematics it is possible to have such small theses. I referred him to a mathematics theorem running into one paragraph for which the author received a Ph.D. from Moscow University. Lately I have been trying to figure out who that author is and what that theorem is, as I forgot over these years. I shall appreciate if anyone in the audience can come to my rescue and get that information for me. I then brought from the library a thesis borrowed from Harvard University, a thesis by Anisur Rahman of Pakistan submitted to the Economics Department at Harvard under the guidance of Robert Dorfman. It was about 45 pages. It may also be mentioned here that Dr John Nash of A Beautiful Mind fame, and a Nobel Laureate in economics, had written a thesis, mathematical in content that was only 27 pages. I padded up my theorem with a lot more of literature review than what was actually needed and made it into a 107 pages. The original 30 page article was sent to *Econometrica* and was accepted as expected in three years!

If you ever have a lady as your student and if she tries to thank you innocently in her acknowledgements for sparing your precious time for her, make sure that she does not say somewhat like the following: “I thank.....for sparing his weekends away from his own work and his family”. One of my students said that, and that was the subject of some different interpretation by a mischievous and teasing relative of mine from my wife’s side!

I take this opportunity to tell a secret that I kept to myself too long. Being nervous of what a visiting professor from the Netherlands would feel about the quality of my first Ph.D. student’s thesis and of my supervision I was too tough and rough on Professor Se Moon Chang during his final Viva. That I was too tough and rough and that I should not treat a graduating student like that was a piece of advice my friend from the Netherlands, Professor Frits De Jong gave me. I offer my belated apologies to Professor Chang in the presence of Mrs Chang. Professor Chang and my former colleague Professor James Gwartney, who was the President of the Southern Economic Association, invited me to the Annual Conference last November in Washington DC. I could not accept it as I was in US just a few months earlier. The immigration authorities would not permit me to extend my stay and I could not visit USA again so soon thereafter. I am glad that Professor Chang could be here with us today. Professor Gwartney expressed his inability to be here with us today. Professor Chang is heading a Global Business Research Centre at his University and I hope he would spend

some time with Professor Pankaj Chandra and others at IIMB to see if there can be any possibilities for collaborative research and exchange of scholars.

There are others who will summarize at the end of this conference the wide variety of papers that are being presented here. I am fortunate to play the role of a catalyst, as it is my 70th birthday that is being used as an excuse to gather such an excellent collection of people and their work. I am fortunate to have been associated with many of them in some way. A Professor is known by the company he keeps. I understand from Prof Srijit Mishra that the professional contributions came from an extended professional family that included not only my students and friends, but also their students and friends. I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation to all of you for your contributions.

I wish I and my wife could be with you all to share these precious moments. She has been a member of this professional fraternity all along and is fondly addressed by my students as Aunty. She would accompany me to all professional meetings and conferences, and is appreciative of the Indian Econometric Society for holding its conferences at exotic places like Srinagar and Darjeeling. We could not be present there physically, although in spirit we are very much there. This is because my wife is not keeping good health.

I remember those days, it was soon after our marriage, and the students in my class on linear programming and economic analysis at IIT Kanpur asked me for a party to meet the *Bhabhi*. About 50 students gathered at our house and we had an entire evening of fun and food with singing and quizzes. My wife thoroughly enjoyed it and ever since started appreciating the academic world for such social gatherings among intellectuals. There was one such occasion when the Chairman of the Economics Department at Florida State University, Irvin Sobel, had a cocktail party at his house with Professor John Galbraith as the guest. This was after his Ambassadorship stint in India. He started talking to my wife for a very long time and when we went home she complained of a stiff neck as she had to look up to him all the time. My wife claims she is 5 feet tall. I have this as a puzzle to my granddaughter: What is the difference in heights of Galbraith and my wife if they were standing one and half feet apart and she was looking at Galbraith at a 45 degree angle?

When I was working at a private consulting firm in Cambridge my wife was bored, as the staff there did not have such an academic culture of having cocktail parties. So she suggested that we initiate one and we invited nearly 60 Ph.D.s in economics working in that company for a cocktail party at our house. The President of the company Clark C Abt and his wife Wendy Abt threw their shoes away, sat on the carpet for a nice informal chat, possibly for the first time, with so many of their economics employees.

I have taken more time than I should and my talk could have been as boring as my lectures. One of my German students at IIMB (I cannot recall his name) was sneezing one day in my class on econometrics. I stopped my lecture for a while to let him complete his sneezing sequence and had sympathy for him. I said perhaps he was allergic to the pollen in Bangalore. He was quick to respond "No Dr Kumar, it is not the pollen; it is the boring mathematics content in your lectures that I am allergic to!"

I thank Srijit Mishra for his comments on a rough draft of this. I thank you all for this honor and affection shown towards me.

T. Krishna Kumar