

Happy  
Birthday  
RK



April

22



**CALLOUT**

*Tribute  
Edition*

Volume 2, Issue 3  
April 2019





In 1980, K.A. Ramakrishnan, a young man in his twenties, quit his job at Excel Industries. Just the day before, another young man, Raj Nair, had convinced him to join hands for a new venture. The two men didn't know each other till very recently. They met when Raj was looking for someone with knowledge of Chemistry to help him on a project, while he was at Grindlays. Raj's colleague introduced him to his brother-in-law, who agreed to pitch in. As the study progressed, Raj realised just how impressive the young man's Chemistry prowess was and Ramakrishnan realised he was having a lot more fun at this than at his current job. And so, what was meant to be a casual collaboration, turned into a partnership that spanned nearly four decades.



Along this journey, Ramakrishnan, or RK as we came to know him, touched the lives of many folks in many ways – as a teacher, friend, father-figure and boss. In this Issue, we try and capture the essence of the legend that he was, with some of the fondest memories we have of him.

### AVALON'S DAD

If RK sensed you needed him, he would put his shoulder to the wheel and see you through it. His well-meaning advice could be

about anything - chemistry equations, consulting frameworks, food choices, career choices, even major life choices. If he felt a gap had to be filled for you - professionally or personally – he would quietly stand in and do whatever was required. He could pull an all-nighter with a Consultant just like that, if he felt he was needed.



And like fathers do, RK yelled at you. When you said something particularly daft, he would tell you quite loudly how stupid he thought you were being, bang his fist on the table, show you how to do it right, ask you to go fix it and then promptly forget all about it. With RK, there was no judgement, ever.



*We once interviewed a candidate we both liked but whose understanding of Finance was wanting. RK spent half an hour during the interview coaching him on aspects of Finance. We picked him eventually and he did very well in Finance projects in the 3+ years he was with us - Santosh*



He came from a family deeply rooted in doing good. Their family home in Matunga opened out in a balcony facing the street. Here you would find them in evenings, sipping coffee, catching up on the day and hollering back greetings at acquaintances passing below. Their home was the default base camp for family back in the village and RK, his brother and father, took on many an aspiring relative and ensured they got on their feet in Mumbai.



After his children were born, RK committed himself fully to helping his children Jahanve and Karthik realise their potential. And without realizing it, he also took on the role of Avalon's Dad, approaching each one of us with the single-minded intent of making us better versions of ourselves.

## SPIRITUAL GIANT

Money didn't matter to RK and neither did social status. He never felt compelled to act a certain way and lived in remarkable simplicity for a man of his means. It was not unusual to see him coolly boarding a local bus or train to get to a meeting. In a profession crawling with aggressive go-getters, RK effortlessly won people over by simply being who he was. His refreshing lack of flamboyance in an uptight Consulting world actually endeared him to clients.



*My first and last impression of RK were identical. Money and position didn't change him at all. He was very comfortable with who he was - Raj*

Though he could never be bothered to network, he invariably left a trail of awestruck clients in his wake, who reached out to him when needed. It was quite normal for a client or ex-colleague to remember him five years, ten years, even twenty years later. And he was remarkably unattached to them, he would pass forward a key account to another Partner, just like that – selflessly, without ego.

## JOIE DE VIVRE

Fun was serious business for RK. The first one to hit the dance floor at parties, he made up for lack of killer dance moves with boundless enthusiasm. People not familiar with this side of RK, would look on in utter disbelief at the stern-faced senior Partner who was now rolling on the floor with his signature snake-dance. And none of the enthusiasm was alcohol-induced – his poison was filter coffee.



He had the soul of a percussionist and all flat surfaces were fair game. He took music rather seriously too – we know at least two instances where he rejected candidates in their final interview because they claimed to have knowledge of the mridangam and veena but couldn't clear his pop quiz on the finer points.



*He liked to give people nicknames. He especially loved to call me "Dev". When I would correct it to Dave, he would say "Dave, show me The Way"! – Naimish*



## THE FOODIE

RK was always cooking or feeding people. Hungry eyes would follow his lunch box as it was brought in and everyone knew there was something in there for them. And everyone got turns at their favorites – either at lunch or evening snacks - because RK always remembered just what you liked. For those of us who have tasted his legendary cooking, idli, payasam and filter coffee will never be the same.

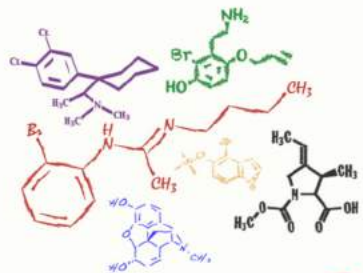


*After a meeting, I invited RK to my new home for a cup of tea. As he entered, he went straight to the kitchen, rolled up his sleeves and cooked up the most amazing upma for me and my wife - Jaldeep*



## THE SAVANT

He had a hunger to learn and keep on learning. When the world was waking up to the reality of computers, RK, then in his forties, had insatiable curiosity about how things were going to be done now and lapped up lessons in how to create folders and save files.



His passion for Chemistry was legendary – he was always reading, building his knowledge, talking to people and basically knocking the socks off of all those who met him.



*You could count on him to remember every chemical equation, even those taught at school - Prem*



He had a remarkable head for numbers and often watched in amusement as some poor consultant frantically banged away at a calculator while he waited, ready with the answer.



He had a unique way of client management – he could dash off a proposal in an hour post the client meeting and bag a project just like that. He could remain silent in crucial meetings, leaving the team wondering and anxious, only to enter softly at a make or break point, speak for just five minutes, floor the client and withdraw. Such was the impact he created professionally.



*One key client, who has worked with Avalon for many years now, loved to talk about RK as the perfect embodiment of Avalon - diligent, unpretentious and unafraid to speak the truth - Sridhar*



Being interviewed by RK was trial by fire and if he thought you were ok, it made that offer from Avalon all the more ego-boosting. You would be thrilled at having impressed this awe-inspiring, scary, super-intelligent being. And of course having joined, you would really want to stay on, learn from him, eat his food and get yelled at.





*On his birthday, we are grateful for the honor of having known him. We hope his life will be a constant reminder for us all to be a little truer to ourselves, a little kinder to those we meet and to give more of ourselves to our passions. RK lives on in the values we live by at Avalon – hard work, honesty and having each other's backs – the simplest of things really.*







“And testimony to how much RK was loved and respected, is the way our wonderful Partner Group took time out, at short notice to share their RK stories. Naimish shared his thoughts while undergoing treatment at a wellness retreat, Santosh pitched in while on holiday and Raj actually made time for this while in the midst of a serious personal emergency. Also fondly remembering RK with rich stories and personal memories were Sridhar, Jaldeep and Prem.”