Lessons from Prof. K. S. Deshpande

Dr. S. K. Savanur
Former Faculty in LIS
sksavanur@rediffmail.com
Contact: 98201 50352

Late Prof. Krishna Shripad Deshpande taught us many lessons, not necessarily in a classroom. Some lessons he, no doubt, taught us in the classroom. In addition, he taught us some lessons as a working librarian, some as writer/editor, some as a social worker, many as a head of a family and many more by effortlessly inspiring those who came across him in routine conversation by setting an example. He was, and he is, a lighthouse providing right orientation and guidance. He played many roles to spread a mission comprising several lessons. Here is an attempt to recapture a select few lessons learned by us.

As a Teacher

Prof. Deshpande taught us 'Library Organization', and Prof. B.B. Hungund used to teach 'Library Administration'. On the face of it, the two topics were confusable and overlapping to our young minds. But, both brilliant teachers knew their boundaries, and hence they never encroached each other's area. As years passed, as a teacher, I realized the distinction. What Prof. Hungund taught was how to administer a library's internal resources within the boundaries of the library. It focused doing a job well according to the accepted norms and standards.

On the other hand, Prof Deshpande covered Library as an Organization or an institution or as information/knowledge resource in the society. He gave both national and international perspective of librarianship. His focus was on professional cooperation, ethics related to libraries, no matter where these were situated. He made us realize that we were being groomed to practice a profession, and not merely to do a job for a salary;but it is equally important to do a job well.

To achieve the above goals Prof. Deshpande never restricted himself to the letter of the syllabus. He met the spirit or the learning objectives of the syllabus with live anecdotes, personal experiences and his expectations from us. I used to take notes on loose sheets of paper. In Prof. Deshpande's

classes a quarter of a page was devoted to Library and Information Science and a three quarter of a page was for his English expressions, choice of words and their usage. Certain expressions like 'Photographic Memory', 'Ice breaking', Breaking New Grounds', 'Bending without Breaking','Cherry Picking' etc. were learned in his classes. He used to quote many authors off-hand from world literature about libraries, about reading culture etc. These inputs have become my assets in practicing and teaching librarianship during the last four and half decades. The real message was to blend rich content with simple, expressive language. These lessons from Prof. Deshpande have given me rich dividends both in teaching and writing.

As a Practicing Librarian

Prof Deshpande, as a professional or a practicing librarian believed in three things.

- Librarian should be familiar with his/her library's collection.
- Librarian should be well acquainted with the user community.
- Librarian should be accessible to the users at least during the working hours.

These are invaluable messages. In a sense, these were his 'Three Commandments.'

The first commandment is followed by regularly shelving different sections by the library staff according to some plan. At least 20 – 30 minutes should be devoted to this exercise. Besides, one should know which books get more reservation and which collection is weak/strong. In addition, one must spend some time with new books being added. Further, one must keep tab on the books being reviewed in journals and newspapers and in their special supplements. In internet era this is simpler than what it used to be.

The second commandment tells us to be cordial and friendly with the user community. Prof. Deshpande used to tell us to 'serve with a smile.' It is necessary to show through our body-language that we enjoy serving them. The users should feel comfortable to seek our assistance. They are not intruders in our business; they are our business. However, he used to instruct us not to be too close to the users. The required decent professional distance has to be maintained.

The third commandment was easy to adopt up to mid-1970s. But, today, a librarian is inducted on many committees of the parent body. He should give visibility to his library by participating and taking lead in professional activities in the city/state. He has to attend many meetings and programmes etc. Prof. Deshpande himself was on several committees at various levels. All such activities, according to Prof. Deshpande, were and are necessary to build goodwill in the Management and to lobby to get more budget allocation to the library. It gives visibility to the library in the eyes of the parent body. Today this message only means that a librarian should be in touch or aware of day-to-day happenings in the library in relation to users and collection. This requires the librarian to be highly organized.

As a Writer/Editor

Prof. Deshpande has written a few books and several papers. His experience and pain as an editor was expressed in his paper in Dr Kamath Festschrift volume.

> Prof. Deshpande edited *Timeless Fellowship*, a publication of the Department of Library and Information Science, Karnataka University. It ceased publication for more than one reason. It remained a regret in his life that he could not revive *Timeless Fellowship*.
>
> He launched *Journal of Library Development*. He could bring out two issues and its publication was suspended. Thankfully, it was revived through sincere efforts of Prof. Vinayak Bankapur and Prof. Tadasad.

Having burned his fingers at the two publications, Prof. Deshpande wrote a paper explaining the problems of being an editor of library science journals. This paper was published as a part of a festschrift volume, titled, *In the Library and Information Science Horizon: a collection of essays in honour of Dr. V.A. Kamath, presented by the Bombay Science Librarians' Association (BOSLA).* New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1986.

Prof. Deshpande's take-home messages for editors were and are as follows.

- Those who launch a journal should have a stock of papers for at least the next three issues.
- A journal should have an editorial policy. No compromise should be made with the quality, scope and style of articles.
- There should be regular features like book reviews, short communications, announcements of forthcoming events etc.
- There has to be an invited editorial relating to some current issue related to LIS.
- Advertisements should be used sparingly, but these are necessary to sustain the publication. But, advertisements should be within the ethical frame.

As a writer Prof. Deshpande brought out many innovative ideas. Generally, a library is considered to be a trinity of collection, readers and staff. He used five elements to define a library. These elements were referred as 5 Bs in his book, *University Library System in India* (terling, 1985). These elements are:

Books
Borrowers
Brains
Budget
Building

Prof. Deshpande knew that these words had limited connotations. He explains each word. 'Books' stands for all information media –analog or digital. 'Borrowers' would mean users,both in-house and remote. 'Brains' represents intelligent and technology savvy library staff. 'Budget' and 'Building' are the obvious resources that enable quality service. He used these word as icons.

According to him one should not hesitate to introduce an evidence-based new idea, even though it is contradicting an established thought.

He used to stress that we should write, as he knew that the professional journals starve for good articles. Prof. Deshpande used to hammer directly or indirectly the message, 'Publish or Perish' into us whenever we met.

As a Social Worker

Besides being a great librarian and teacher, Prof. Deshpande was also a sincere social worker. He was closely associated with the Family Planning Association of India and Gandhi Peace Foundation. He spearheaded the Bharat Scouts and Guides movement. He contributed all his might to activate *karnataka VidyaVardhaka Sangha*, Dharwad into a cultural hub. He made significant contributions in all these organizations.

Prof. Deshpande was called in for peacemaking in many family disputes of his friends and acquaintances. He was a great matchmaker. He must have initiated many successful marriages. He showed that it is necessary to take on social responsibilities, as nobody can lead an isolated life. We owe it to the society we live in. His involvement with the society around him was in itself a great lesson.

As a Head of the Family

Prof. Deshpande's home was the ultimate example of a joint family. Although I frequented to his house for more than forty years, I really do not know how many persons lived in it. There were children of different age, students of various courses, many transient visitors etc. All of them and the people in his neighbourhood referred to him as Kittanna. Everyone had access up to kitchen; there was no discrimination. All received Prof. Deshpande's love and warmth equally like sunshine. And, he used to read, write, discuss with visitors, undisturbed in the same hall at the entrance.

He was a live example of multitasking, yet he was a perfectionist in whatever he did. As he was highly organized, he could find time for everything. Clock watching was never a part of his work culture; while his colleagues left the library at 5.00 pm, he used to work up to 8.00 pm. He used to reply all the letters received by him within 24 hours. He gave several such lessons by being a role-model. He guided many more by effortlessly inspiring.

In essence,Prof.Deshpande was a blend of a friend, a coach, a mentor, a teacher and a Guru.