



BUILDING *the* BUSINESS BRICK *by* BRICK

C R NARAYANA RAO CONSULTANTS PVT LTD
Champion of Chennai – Enterprise

The bright green tabletop is what catches your eye first – adding that pop of color in an otherwise normal looking office room, the office building on a busy Mylapore street.

Dr. Srinivasan, of CR Nayarana Rao Architects, in his all white attire, is all smiles when talking about the family business.

“I joined the business in 1963, while doing my post-doctoral at IIT. Back in those days, there was not much by way of career choice, and it was inevitable that I would join my father in his venture. After a short stay in the US, I jumped into the family business along with my brother, and have been here since”, says Dr. Srinivasan. He proudly mentions that CRN, as the firm is known more popularly in Chennai, is now in its 75th year of existence with three generations of the family actively involved in the operations.

Tracing back to the very beginning of CRN, Dr. Srinivasan recalls the story he has been told by his father. The story goes as thus Mr. Nayarayana Rao was Upper subordinate in Madurai, during the time of independence. The English Superintendent engineer came on a horse, and asked about the height of the compound wall. While the other engineer ran around to measure, Mr. Rao jumped the wall and gave the number. Impressed with this, the Superintendent promoted the Subordinate and was sent to Cochin Port Trust. Mr. Narayana Rao worked there 1 day and got another promotion! But he decided to come back home and he quit the govt job – a rare fire in his belly to do something for himself and thus was born CR Narayana Rao Architects!

Stressing on core values, ethics and strong value system, Dr. Srinivasan explains that these are the foundations on which

CRN still functions. “Core values cannot be taught, it has to be felt, and those who vibe with us through their passion are seamlessly integrated into our organization”, points out Dr. Srinivasan. Reminiscing about his family, Dr. Srinivasan fondly remembers his grandmother’s words which have been an inspiration for him over the years. He remembers her advising him to study well all the way in IIT Kharagpur, and come back to give a lending hand to the business. And the love and respect for nature came from her and Dr. Srinivasan

mentions that his son Raghuram has a passion for sustainability and nature, a leaf out of the matriarch’s life.

Dr. Srinivasan recalls that his father gave him the professional freedom to take decisions. And that he was encouraged to make mistakes and learn, the best way to correct yourself! The patience, perseverance and ingenuity of Mr. Narayana Rao is what has kept the family business in good stead, reaffirms Dr. Srinivasan.





His mother always said no borrowing no loans and that hard earned money will always stay, and this formed the next pillar of financial prudence and discipline. With his sibling Raghavendran by his side, the brothers formed a formidable team to take CRN into the next stage of growth. The year 1995 was the turning point for the family-owned business with the entry of auto companies in Chennai. The business and work that came CRN's way paved the way for the next big expansion of their services, both locally, nationally and on the International level. The business had offices in Dubai, Sri Lanka, Indonesia to name a few. "The auto companies gave us the chance to spread our wings, giving a new insight into doing and getting business. The opportunity to, concurrently, do these

projects gave an impact of working into large scale projects of three different cultures. Koreans were patient, Americans were in perpetual hurry and the Germans sticklers for quality. These projects also exposed us to Foreign Architects and gave us tremendous confidence in our technical skills. The hunger for growth and to stay in the competition, was the impetus for the expansion then. We were at the right place at the right time", explains Dr. Srinivasan.

Longevity in an industry like this calls for many adaptations. "CRN constantly upgrades its technology. We are very aware of changes and we infuse new blood at regular intervals. The creative process has to go on and there is no point in being insular. All working here have the flexibility to voice their opinions and it is my duty

to give each of them a hearing", says Dr. Srinivasan proudly. Some of the projects that showcases CRN's abilities are Lulu Mall, Hotel and Convention Center in Lucknow, ITC Grand Chola Hotel, Chennai, HAL Building in Bangalore, Launch View Gallery at Sriharikota, and many more.

The ease with which Dr. Srinivasan smiles when talking about the love, faith and trust his staff have for him, leads him to say, "The custodian role that I play is the burden we carry -- we are not the owners but custodians", he gently points out.

In an industry that has links to Vaastu / Feng-shui, Dr. Srinivasan admits he is not a believer! "The Vaastu culture is the biggest hurdle in our creative process. I once told a client, if you say you have

succeeded because of Vaastu, it is false modesty, and if you say you didn't succeed because of Vaastu, it is escapism...neither is good.", he candidly says.

Some management mantras CRN has stood by has effective communication as the main focus for the team to function well. "How to differ without being different - so long as the goal is known and everyone is on the same page, the project gets executed efficiently.", says Dr. Srinivasan.

On being asked if his dreams and plans over the years have been realised, he says, "I stand on the shoulders of giants. We are children picking pebbles on the vast sea of knowledge to be explored. I give myself pass mark for my achievements and I have tried my best. No complaints about my life decisions though I would like to change little things like be more patient and less anger maybe", he smiles.

An achiever in his own right, his passion for what he does comes through quite evidently and the smiles comes rather easily, showing his zest for life. This 80-year old has miles to go before he calls it quits on being a part of his business that is CR Narayana Rao Architects, Chennai.

Shobana Ravi