

## An Ode to a Visionary – Prof. S.H. Wandrekar

I was travelling to Jejuri for a lake conservation project when a message flashed on my cellphone in the early hours of Friday, 12 September 2014:” Prof. S.H. Wandrekar is no more”. It took some time for the message to sink in, and the thought of returning back to Mumbai on a five-hour journey came to mind. But then, as Dr. Joshi who was travelling with me, put it, “Prof. Wandrekar would have been happy knowing you are doing this work”. It gave me some consolation.



*With Prof. and Mrs. Wandrekar at Pali, August 2006*

Prof. Wandrekar was, for me, a father figure, a unique soul, one whom I looked up to, and who taught me a great deal about life, and about work.

It was in 1998 that I first began to know him as I was working on an international conference on Sustainable Architecture that was held at Rachana Sansad, jointly organized by the International Institute for Sustainable Future (IISF) where I then worked. It was the idea of Dr. Rashmi Mayur and Prof. Wandrekar then to start a postgraduate course on Environmental Architecture. I can never forget the moment when nearly 12 years ago, after the sad demise of Prof. Nishi Phondge, Prof. Wandrekar asked me if I would take over the reins of the Institute. The confidence he put in me drew me to excel. I was determined to make the Institute one of the best.

Although he was the Chairman of my Institute, he was more than approachable. I was lucky. Not many people get this opportunity to create, nurture and bring up an Institute under such a father figure. Prof. Wandrekar believed in people. And he put enormous faith in them. And in turn, people had enormous faith in him.



*Prof. Wandrekar with the faculty and students of first batch of the Masters Program, 2008*



*With Prof. Wandrekar during the visit to Shanghai World Expo in October 2010*

He was simple yet elegant and classy. He believed in quality and would never accept anything substandard. For him, presentation was as important. He had a global vision. And most importantly, he was humanistic. He cared for people and he deeply cared for the environment. And he believed in action.

There were numerous projects I can recall that we took up – the Pali eco-village project, the Goa mine restoration project, Sawantwadi, conservation of Havelis, tree plantation, and so on. For me, what is important is not how these projects fared but that we made an effort. There are people in my institute, particularly Rajeev Taishete, Mukund Porecha, Dr.





*Honored to receive an award from Prof. Wandrekar on his retirement day, 25 April 2012*

Lattoo and Dr. Joshi, who have all become part of this ethos. We took part in these projects because of the enthusiasm, the thought that we were doing something that was right, the thought that we had to lead by example, and there are numerous people amongst our faculty and students who have now imbibed this character. Despite his schedule, he always accepted our invitation and

knew each one of our faculty member. He always took the time to talk and motivate our students.

These were more than projects – they symbolized hope – for a better environment, better future and better planet – through education and through the application of knowledge. That is one message that Prof. Wandrekar gave – knowledge is important, but application of knowledge for the larger cause – is even more important.

Prof. Wandrekar believed in aesthetics. He would not hesitate in picking up a piece



*With Adv. Chitnis during the Workshop on 'Teaching and Research' in April 2013*

of garbage or telling off a student that he or she was badly dressed while using the elevator.



*Prof. Wandrekar addressing fresh students of M.Arch. (Environmental Architecture) in August 2013*

He was humble. He would attend and organize seminars and conferences – Knowledge was an endless realm for him – on which to paint his canvas. One thing that always astounded me about Prof. Wandrekar was his child-like curiosity, and his ability to make others also think likewise. He had enormous faith in knowledge and its power of transformation. This I

have come to believe very strongly. That people can change when empowered with the knowledge.

Prof. Wandrekar believed in networking. He met with all kinds of people – activists, ministers, artists, scientists. He conversed naturally and humanely. I believe he could see the connection through all of them. He saw the world as a unified progression.

Whenever any new or exciting project came up, I would never hesitate to walk up to his cabin and convey it to him. He, in turn, would encourage me and guide me. He always saw the positivity in things and would like to move in that direction.

‘Prof. Wandrekar is no more’ - I find it difficult to accept this. I believe he is with us – his guiding hand will be behind every endeavor we take up - to educate and to strengthen our bonds with nature.

- *Prof. Roshni Udyavar Yehuda, Head, Rachana Sansad's Institute of Environmental Architecture, 19 September 2014*

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