

October 29, 2019

## In Memory of Commodore Shridharan Shekhar (1943-2019)

The shocking news of the untimely death of Cmde. Shridharan Shekhar, a friend, philosopher and guide to many, brought profound sorrow to all of us who had known him for many years.

Commodore Shekhar passed away on October 22, 2019 at 1030hrs in Chennai, after a cardiac arrest. He led a cheerful and vibrant life, full of contagious energy and had been a trail blazer in many facets of his life.

I have had the distinct privilege and honour of experiencing Cmde. Shekhar's long lasting friendship for more than two decades - initially when I was part of DRDO, later when I moved to the academia to finally, when we both teamed up to serve the cause of indigenisation under challenging conditions.

Our initial acquaintance slowly blossomed from the days when both of us were with Ministry of Defence and evolved into a long lasting friendship while we traversed our different paths in life - with Cmde. Shekhar transforming himself from a highly respected Senior Naval Officer to a Veteran, and I from a Senior DRDO Scientist and Program Director to a Senior Professor and Director at the academia.

It was during the Summer and Fall of 2009, after many brainstorming sessions, Cmde Shekhar and I conceived CASTLE (Centre for Advancement of Science Technology, Law and Engineering), which we eventually started as a non-profit society based in Visakhapatnam in October 2010. Under the aegis of CASTLE, we journeyed together addressing many issues with full vigour (thanks mostly to Cmde. Shekhar's ebullience, unending energy and penchant for making a difference), travelled the world and mostly made a mark with the powers to be in the country, as well as made a splash overseas.

Our association grew stronger when we were Regional Directors (at Chennai and Visakhapatnam respectively) of the National Maritime Foundation, NMF - a think tank of the Indian Navy.

In 2015, when we finally realized that the photonic technologies which I had developed over the years were ready for commercialization, we founded, along with

another dear mutual friend, Biren Shah a high end technology start up - CATS - CASTLE Advanced Technologies and Systems.

Now, when we are on the verge of making a mark in the world with our indigenous systems and technologies, we are shattered by his untimely death.

Cmde. Shekhar was deeply respected for his wisdom, and his strong sense of ethics, by one and all. He was a very intelligent, vibrant, cheerful human being who made friends across all sections of society.

Having an uncanny flair for languages (Indian, as well as foreign - *especially Russian*), Cmde Shekhar was well read and possessed great oratory and organisational skills, which he used graciously to work for the common good causes.

Cmde Shekhar was among the initial few to join hands with Ambassador Smita Purushottam in effectively contributing to the cause of the High Tech Defence Innovators Forum, DIIA, SITARA. He later was instrumental in setting up AIDAT along with his namesake. In December 2018, Cmde Shekhar accepted to become the Chairman and Managing Director of TUNGA (Technological Upgradation of Naval, Ground and Air) Services Pvt Ltd, an SME started to cater to the supply of spares, manufacturing and technology requirements in the defence domain.

Cmde Shekhar's friends and contacts ran across different cross-sections of society - academia, defence personnel, diplomats, industrialists and religious scholars. Being a gregarious, fun loving but deeply committed individual Cmde Shekhar not only successfully networked with his contacts, but also consciously nurtured networking between his many contacts for the greater good of society.

His penchant for coining appropriate acronyms to his many projects, often led to lively discussions and fruitful solutions to many problems.

His scholarly writing skills slowly seeped into the public domain, when he released his first book last year, after a lot of coaxing from his well-wishers to pen down his thoughts in the form of a book, *Get onto the TRAMWAY* -the first of his intended 3-part Life Trilogy.

Being a Submariner and an Electrical Officer, Cmde Shekhar served the Indian Navy in many responsible capacities, including a diplomatic assignment in Russia. Having spent three decades in the service of the nation as a Naval Officer, Cmde Shekhar

was a treasure trove of deep knowledge in many domains and especially in matters related to the Submarine arm of the Navy.

His most recent contribution to the Nation (after he was suddenly called by the National Security Advisor Shri Ajith Doval who was his course mate at NDC) was in effectively tackling a pernicious issue of flared up egos and divergent views of two important arms of the nation's defence - which almost threatened to shelve an important program concerning Indian defence/ naval surveillance. Thanks to his sagacity and his unfailing commitment to support indigenisation, the nation now has a new platform for ocean surveillance.

Never one to brag about his contributions, Cmde Shekhar worked with dedication and sincerity towards building a strong nation and society, and therefore it was not surprising that his motto in life was *Run Deep, Run Silent*.

A thorough gentleman, Cmde Shekhar always treated everybody with respect and dignity. I had been blessed to enjoy his friendship and camaraderie and benefitted immensely from his thoughts which he graciously shared.

In spite of his immense knowledge and seniority, Cmde. Shekhar always joyfully used to address me as *Dr T*, which I most humbly cherish.

My wife and I, fondly remember and cherish Cmde. Shekhar's long, yet focussed interactions; interlaced with his usual cheer, humour and bonhomie.

Cmde Shekhar left behind his wife of many decades, Mrs. Malathi Shekhar; his two sons and their families and thousands of his friends.

On behalf of CASTLE and CATS, and of the many groups of like-minded individuals who crossed Cmde Shekhar's many and varied paths in his life journey, our deepest condolences to Mrs. Malathi Shekhar and the rest of Shekhar family.

His passing away left a great void in all our lives.

May his soul rest in peace.

- Prof. Rao Tatavarti (Dr. T)