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V A Shiva Ayyadurai

The man 'behind e-mail' speaks out

Postal Dept can step in and offer services, says Shiva Ayyadurai



Ayyadurai feels innovators must be willing to move out of the comfort zone and is happy that the fundamentals of the Indian education system is good.

ADARSH B

Chennai, Mar 24:

Any transaction, business, personal or frivolous, has always had communication as a vital part. From the era of stone tablets to cave paintings to post cards, today, this communication is predominantly electronic in nature. Asian-Indian-American V A Shiva Ayyadurai had a vital role to play in this. In the year 1982, the United States Copyright Office granted him a Certificate of Copyright Registration for EMAIL or Computer Programme For Electronic Mail System, by which he has a claim to have invented the programme for the now ubiquitous method of messaging.

Now the author of the book 'The EMAIL REVOLUTION: Unleashing the Power to Connect', Shiva speaks about email, innovation, the book, family, CSIR and Tamil while in the city.

Constantly remembering his journey of the email in the year 1978 as a 14-year-old in the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), Shiva describes the book, 'It has three parts. The first part 'What is Email?' is about the origin of email, what it is about and the fact that email is here to stay for a long, long time, to break some of the statements. It lays down the foundation of email itself.

Alluding about two lives with email after 1978, Shiva said, 'In 1993, coincidentally, I won a competition held by the White House while doing my PhD at MIT. President Bill Clinton received a growing number of email and wanted to use it to understand his constituents. That led to 10 years with a company called ECHOMAIL. One could extract sentiments and got great information. Clinton had 147 categories of email.

The second part 'The Power of Email' describes experiences in helping major companies obtain marketing information. It has 11 case studies'. The third part of the book 'Email Takeaways' is described with tips and dangers in using free email, Shiva elaborates. 'When using free email, you give away your privacy rights. Private companies own your email. My own view is that postal department should offer email services, even

for a nominal fee. This is because they have legal guarantees already that no one will open your email', he adds.

Shiva emphasises that his proceeds of the book will go to Innovations Corp, a project designed to mentor and create innovations by 14 to 16 year old children, six in India and six in the United States of America. 'Innovation can occur anytime, anyplace by anybody', he postulates.

Elaborating on the idea that postal department can provide email services and juxtaposing it with the fear many feel about NSA, GCHQ and other government intelligence agencies reading email, he insists that focusing on the fear, the big picture is being missed. 'The danger is

from private companies who can do anything. One gives up privacy for free service. A government can tell a company what to do but it cannot tell a individual, especially if right to communication is a right. That is why I feel postal department should offer email services, at a normal fee, and this will help the department as well', the resident of Massachusetts recommends while discussing about the issue brought to prominence in public discourse by Edward Snowden. Wading into his controversy with the CSIR to which was appointed to as Distinguished Scientist in 2009, Shiva narrates his tumultuous encounter with the seven-decade-old organisation,

its hierarchy and working. "I suggested a phased programme to spin off new ventures. Each phase would result in increased grants, similar to what venture capitalists do", Shiva reveals.

On a happy note, the Mumbai-born Tamil expresses his patriotism for India and Tamilnadu, in particular. 'We speak Tamil at home and registered an English language domain tamilnadu.com which is a comprehensive, modernised site about Tamilnadu and Tamil culture. Learning two languages will help your brain', he adds.

The son of a statistician and chemical engineer concludes by advising that innovators must be willing to move out of the comfort zone. 'Ultimately, the fundamentals of the Indian education system is good', he signs off.

Claim to fame

As a high school student in 1978, Ayyadurai developed a full-scale emulation of the interoffice mail system, which he called 'EMAIL' and copyrighted in 1982. He teaches Systems Visualisation at MIT and in 2012, launched Systems Health, an educational programme for medical doctors.