

## CONNECTING LIVES OF MILLIONS

By *editor*

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Last year in December, on receiving his Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters at the National Books Awards ceremony, E.L. Doctorow had remarked, "And this world of theirs is a world of simulation, clearly evidenced by its language. Never mind that text is now a verb. More radically, a search engine is not an engine, a platform is not a platform, a bookmark is not a bookmark, because an e-book is not a book, and a cookie is not a chocolate chip cookie." Back in 1978, little



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did a 14 year old boy know what impact his invention of email would be on posterity. Evading the hushed conversations from the corridor, we entered the Taj and there he was the inventor of email in a polo T-shirt, jeans and sneakers. In the summer of 1978, Dr Leslie P. Michelson hired Shiva as a Research Fellow in his Laboratory for Computer Science at the University of Medicine and Dentistry (UMDNJ). "I could have been a sportsman, I was equally good in baseball and mathematics I was done with calculus at the age of 14, man! And I wanted to do something in the field of medicine. So when I was asked to create a computer programme that would be the electronic version of UMDNJ's interoffice, interorganisational paper-based mail system, I took it as a stepping stone for my future ambitions," says Shiva. Though Shiva managed to do a lot in all these years, perhaps much beyond his ambitions, the road wasn't as smooth as he had thought it would be. His claim as the inventor of email led to a major debate, which was regularly being taken up in media. It was either Shiva or Roy Tomlinson. "They just don't want to acknowledge the fact that someone without any institutional backup and who doesn't belong to their race could create something as big as email," says Shiva. "The fact that one is not given the due acknowledgement of what he has done, is a bit bothering for me," he adds.

During these years several thinkers have come to the defense of Shiva's claims including the "intellectual superstar" Noam Chomsky. In a statement he said, "They suggest an effort to

dismiss the fact that innovation can take place by anyone, in any place, at any time. And they highlight the need to ensure that innovation must not be monopolised by those with power — power which, incidentally, is substantially a public gift.”

The Email Revolution: Unleashing The Power To Connect is the book written by Shiva where he has documented the entire debate and has also explained the invaluable role of email.

Talking more about the book, Shiva says, “I felt the immediacy of the book, when I realised that the idea of email has to be explained and they should know the immense value it holds for an entrepreneur. Email is much more personal than any other social site.”

According to Shiva, Email is actually a system — a system of interlocking parts intended to emulate the interoffice mail system: Inbox, Outbox, Folders, Memo, Address Book, etc. the now-familiar components of email. Email as a system is not simply the exchange of text messages.

V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai was seven when he left his small apartment in Chembur and shifted with his family to Paterson in New Jersey. “There we were in one of the poorest of the cities in the United States at a time when it was all about counter culture,” says Shiva, who had different things to encounter and thus his subversion was way beyond the limited span of nihilism.

After creating the email, Shiva went on to run his own business, Echomail. Meanwhile, he also attended MIT where he studied under Chomsky. Through the years, Shiva has followed his passion for innovation, so much so, that he even had to suffer “threats from the Indian government” as well. In 2009, Shiva was “recruited by the Office of the PM of India to head a new initiative within the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)”. But soon he saw through the “feudalism still prevalent in the system” and wrote a few articles, which landed him “threats from the Indian government”.

“It has been tough, I could have easily given up, but I think I tried to converge my energy towards telling the truth and to move forward with innovation in medicine.” He is developing medicines for pancreatic cancer, which incorporate the Indian Ayurveda and science, which will soon be launched.

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