

# Lawyer's Life



*When he is not lawyering - what a lawyer does. LegalEra gets candid with B Gopalakrishnan, President and Head (Law), Axis Bank Ltd is a man of many talents. Despite having his calendar choc-a-bloc with professional commitments, he still finds the time to pursue his passions, be it globe-trotting or hitting the road to Kanyakumari and back or listening to his favourite music. LegalEra engages him in a brief chat*

**LE:** *In an earlier interview with this magazine, you said your original ambition was to become a pilot, the second choice being a professor of English Literature. Although you are now an established name in the legal profession, are you still pursuing your interests in any way?*

Yes, I am definitely pursuing my

ambition but not the ambition of becoming a pilot. As far as the second ambition is concerned, I do read a lot, especially legal thrillers of John Grisham, Jeffrey Archer. I repeatedly scan through Shakespeare. I also like poetry. I also read a lot in my mother tongue. I harbour a secret ambition of writing fiction set in the background of Kerala in English. I do not know whether I will be able

to fulfill the ambition or not, but I am determined to give it a try. As far as the ambition of becoming a Professor of English Literature is concerned, I love to teach and whenever an opportunity arises, I go and address the younger generation at law schools and universities. I was once a regular guest faculty at KC Law College. I do write a lot of legal articles.

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**LE:** *You said it was your heart's desire to be known as a literary figure. Are there any plans in that direction?*

The answer is the same as above, i.e. I am determined to publish.

**LE:** *By your own admission, when you couldn't become a pilot, you took to driving with a vengeance. Tell us how you developed this side to your personality.*

Although, it is not correct to equate a pilot and a driver, today, driving a motor vehicle, with the highways becoming crowded, is no longer mechanical work, as it used to be. You need to be alert and use of technology can help you avoid accidents and reach your destination without getting lost.

A man that has  
no music in  
himself  
Nor is moved  
with the concord  
of sweet sounds  
Is fit for treasons,  
stratagems and  
spoils

- Shakespeare

Very recently, I was prompted to take a long drive, all by myself from Mumbai to Kanyakumari and back. The only companion with me was my wife. We took one of the so-called 'not safe' route but it was a good experience. I developed this side of my personality when I was young, say at the age of 15 when I attained enough "height" to drive the car. I started wooing my

father's car driver who taught me driving and since then, I started driving. Even today, I remember him as I have never forgotten the basics of what he taught me for a safe journey. As my father always owned only a Black Ambassador till the early 80s, my tryst with driving was only an Ambassador. Thereafter, I shifted to Jeep and drove the entire length and breadth of Kerala.

**LE:** *You are also a music enthusiast. What kind of music do you like listening to? Who are your favourite singers? What do you think of Hindi film music today?*

I listen to all kinds of music, be it classical, pop, rap or film music or ghazals. Music I believe has no language. Good music of any language attracts me but if I am to give my preferences, Carnatic music is an ocean, which is still not fathomed. I love to hear Carnatic music recitals. Ghazals for me are soothing when I am upset. Bhajans transport me to a different realm altogether. My favourite singers are Kishore Kumar, K.J. Yesudas, SP Balasubramaniam and late Jagjit Singh. Lata Mangeshkar to me is really Ma Saraswathy's gift to the world. She ranks first in my preference. I am not naming many of the young singers who are good but who are not serious to sing good songs. Many of them are one song wonders. Today's Hindi music or for that matter, any film music, I should say produces only fast food culture. None of the songs will be remembered or sung by the coming generations or even after a decade. They will still remember Kishore Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar and Rafi.

**LE:** *Apparently, you have a passion for music of the instrumental variety. Please elaborate.*

In Instrumental music, I love the Veena and fusion of all sorts. Violin by late KunnaKudi and Flute by Dr. Ramani transport me into a different world altogether. Of course, I am not commenting

anything about maestros like Pandit Ravi Shankar and such others. They are in a different class altogether. My instrumental music is mostly pertaining to Carnatic music. Equally, the Violin and flute recitals pertaining to western music attract me a lot. I do have a good collection.

**LE:** *As an avid traveller who has seen almost all of India and many countries across the globe, can you please share some interesting travel anecdotes with us?*

One of the most interesting experiences I have had was when I visited Taiwan. I was in the capital Taipei. Taiwan especially is always prone to typhoons. Out of the five days I was there, I had to be holed up in my hotel for one day because of the typhoon. I was really surprised by the readiness with which they handled the situation. There was no panic.

I had been to a restaurant in Taiwan and even though I used to take chicken and fish, the experience in Taiwan restaurant prompted me to be on a diet of bun and butter for my entire stay there. When I entered the restaurant, the first room resembled like an Aquarium where all sorts of crawling creatures including snakes were displayed in various tanks. A man was standing with a mike and I was asked to choose which was the creature I would like to have for my dinner. For a minute, I could not get it and when he explained me that whatever is ordered will be served to me and he will give direct orders through the mike to the kitchen, I had no choice but to walk off.

I couldn't trust the non-veg food served in Taiwan. Equally in Beijing, vegetarian food means the chicken or mutton or beef or pork with lot of vegetables. In Beijing, language was the big problem and in the night, when I was travelling in a taxi and got down at my hotel and handed over the fare in Yuan currency which I had, the driver looked at the Yuan and started



saying something in Chinese and that too vigorously. I didn't know if he was abusing me or not. He threw the note back at me and refused to accept it. I gathered it was a fake note. The thought that I was given fake notes by a money changer i.e. the Yuan currency, sent a shock through me as I did not want to spend the rest of my life in a Chinese Jail. So till I returned from Beijing, I had the fear which of the currencies in my possession are real or fake. This gave me a lot of tension. Otherwise, it was all fine. In Taiwan, I went to a restaurant and when I got out, it was raining. I had no umbrella. The restaurant gave me an umbrella for free. I still have it with me.

**LE:** *While travelling broadens your horizons and is a huge learning experience, if asked to compare India with the rest of the world, what would your most significant observation be?*

I would like to state that when comparing India with other countries, India lacks much in terms of infrastructure, cleanliness and civic sense and abiding by the laws of the country I recently undertook a tour to Sri Lanka. It was a pleasant experience. The roads were very clean. Even though the roads were wide open and not a single policeman was seen on the road, my driver Mr. Tilak, a Sinhala, never crossed the speed of 80 km. I asked him the reason for the same. His answer was so simple that the allotted speed on the highways is 80 km and crossing the same is an offence and he would be penalised and therefore he did not want to be on the wrong side of the law. Imagine if it was in India. We make it a point to break the law and come back and boast that we broke the law. This is because of the fact that we know that if we get caught, we can easily get away and catching itself will not happen.

However what I missed all over the world, except the Asian countries, is the happiness of staying together with the near and dear ones which is very strong in India.

**LE:** *With such a high-profile career, do you think you are able to strike the right kind of work-life balance? Are there still some grey areas you want to improve on?*

Yes to a great extent, I do strike a balance by trying to cut off from office, however, there are certain areas which I need to improve.

LE