

FROM BARCELONA WITH LOVE

People have known Christopher Columbus for his discovery of Americas. But not many people know what all he brought to Spain. I am not Columbus, but memories of my visit to ESADE, Barcelona under Euro-India Exchange Programme during 1991-92, remind me even today, 27 years later what one can gain from a single trip abroad.

1. Sister Conchita

The first thing that occurs to me whenever I remember Barcelona is Sister Conchita. She was my adopted elder sister in Barcelona. Never seen a sister who could talk to me with that authority, by affection. She was an elderly lady, Personal Secretary to Director General, who could talk fluently in different European languages while responding to calls to DG from different countries. She could get back within 12 hours flat, a suitcase of a faculty friend (who had lost it in Girona railway station, while transiting from French side to Spanish side) who was coming to meet me from Rotterdam.

While talking to her in Mid December 1991, for issue of a Resident Permit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Spain was not issuing visa for more than 3 months stay those days), I told her that I have to get it fast as I have to go to UK shortly. She looked at me and asked “are you going like this”. Seeing me baffled, she pointed towards my pump shoes and said “I won’t let you go this way. We will go to shop after the office and buy a pair of proper boots for you. You will freeze my dear”. This touching gesture reassured me I have at least a sister in Barcelona to take care of me.

One evening when my family joined me from India, Sister visited us. While my wife was preparing dinner, Sister asked me “what does she do”? I humbly answered, she was house wife. She could not understand. Asked again she said, “I am also house wife, but what does she do”? I had to narrate her whole day’s routine. Explaining I said “She wakes up in morning around 5.30. After getting fresh, she gets my second daughter ready and then send both the daughters to school around 7.30. Then she prepares breakfast for me. After I leave around 8.30, she gets BF ready for my father. Around 9.30 she takes breakfast. Then she starts preparing lunch. Around 1.30 pm I come and take lunch with father. The babies

return around 2.30 p.m. After feeding lunch to younger one, she takes lunch. By this time it is around 3.45 p.m. Then maid comes for cleaning utensils after which my wife prepares evening tea for all of us. By 6.30 p.m. she starts preparing dinner for us. By 9.30 p.m. I take dinner with father after which she takes dinner. By the time she is through with all this it 11 p.m.”, I summed up.

“What? Whole day cooking?”, Sister was taken aback with surprise. “Professor you are cruel to wife. Why can’t you buy a deep freezer for herin which she can keep the food prepared in the morning only and warm it in the evening, instead of cooking whole day”. “I agree” I said, “but there is a problem, it needs electricity”, I confessed. “You mean you don’t have electricity?” she was confused. “We have, but don’t know when we will have it”, I replied. It was too difficult for a lady in Barcelona where in the whole 9 month’s stay I had power off situation, to understand what electricity meant in 1990s, in then a backward state like UP.

2. CEMS

The Director General of ESADE was Chairman [Community of European Management Schools](#) (now known as global alliance for management education), which has 31 academic members and admits only one management institute as member from a country. Before returning to India in 1992, I met him to explore ideas of collaboration. He suggested that we become guest member for two years as there is no management institute in India, who is member. The Association may confer full membership after watching us for two years. Unfortunately the Director and other did not show any interest and we lost the opportunity. Only in the year 2012-13, IIM Calcutta got the membership under the directorship of my friend Prof. Shekhar Chaudhuri. I am happy at least some Indian management institution got into network of European management institutes and industry.

3. Collaborative Work

When I visited ESADE, I had thought of working on case writing on M & A issues, but was soon disappointed after meeting the Dean when the then Dean said, “We are trying to develop this area, but not much progress has been made”. But I was able to develop jointly a 3-part case

study based upon memoirs of a Doctors who was a faculty at ESADE. I was also able to develop a multi-country research proposal on [Perception of European Executives about India as a Business Partner](#), with another eminent Professor Emil, which was completed on my return to India. A third research project replicating study on lines of In Search of Excellence, was designed with Prof. Viedma and Vilahur, which unfortunately could not be started after the questionnaire was designed, due to paucity of time. The fourth project was preparing a proposal for establishment of [Euro- India Management Centre](#) was ready in collaboration with a marketing professor, Motania. It intrigues me even today that while in a short span of 9 months (after teaching 4 courses in the first term at IMX) [I was working on 5 projects, striking partnership with 5 teams of professors in four different areas, in a country where I did not know any one](#), but I could not develop a single joint project in 5 years of my stay at IMX. Was something wrong with me or there were other socio-cultural factors inhibiting it?

4. Casio, Kettle and Recorder

Barcelona was a place where I was almost a stranger. In those days English was not very common. I had gone to such a place because I was so sick at the end of my stint as PGP Chairman, that I could start sinking any moment. I had lost confidence and had stopped traveling. One day I felt there is no point in living like this. Just around 45 years old, I had young school going children and was worried about what will happen if someday I really died. So when director asked me to go I chose a place where I did not know anyone, neither the language. But that turned out to be a turning point in life.

(a) The Casio

How to spend time outside working hours of the institute, in the evening and weekends. One day while walking to the Mar, I saw a Casio on a shop, the keys of which looked similar to harmonium. I bought that and started playing as there was no one to object. In six months I was able to play few songs and could understand what Raag meant. Why there are typical styles of Naushad, C. Ramchandra, Shanker Jaikishan, Vasant Desai etc. Alas it was all stopped when I returned to back to India

(b) The Kettle

The other companion was an electric kettle. I was addict to tea. Buying electric kettle I could not visualise at Lucknow in India those days because electric kettle also needed electricity and one could not afford to assume its uninterrupted supply. This helped me in preparing tea easily, as I tea bags, milk powder and sugar cubes were easily available in departmental stores.

The kettle was in a way was instrumental in developing [Parc Tauli Case series, based upon memoirs of Dr. Manel Peiro](#). The Librarian allowed me to borrow English- Catalan dictionary for overnight use. Maurice, the computer centre head gave me a laptop which was a new thing for me in 1991. Administrative officer helped me in getting a cable TV on rent.

Every night I would finish dinner, prepare a thermos full of tea switch on TV (it used run up to 2-3 am) and sit on the bed. Pick one word from the memoir, and see its meaning in dictionary, which may give 2-7 meaning in English. Pick next word and so on. Then look at the whole sentence and try to guess what it could mean in English. After fifteen days I was able to translate a page and sent it to Dr. Peiro to check whether I have guessed correctly. He supported a lot by checking and correcting.

After I finished about 5 pages, some words became familiar and the translation picked up speed. After a month it started appearing to me what was happening in the case, perhaps I have seen in life. Gradually it occurred that something similar had happened in HE(I)L BHEL merger in 1972-74 which I had witnessed. “My God”, merger of two public sector engineering companies in India and here merger of four sick hospitals 000’s of kilometres away in Spain, having similar issues involved”?. I was astonished. With this in the next one and a half month or so a 3-part case series was drafted. Dr. Perio took me to the hospital in Sabadel and introduced me to people there. In next 15 days the case was finalised, cleared and after a month it was sent to EFMD along with the teaching note for closing seminar of EICEP. I wonder whether without kettle this would have happened.

(c) **The Recorder**

While walking on the roads, I was attracted by a small voice activated pocket recorder of Sanyo. I had thought of recording songs on Casio played by me, but it did something entirely different.

Back to India, I got a new secretarial assistant. While training her for Dbase and Mail Merge, I landed up sending 75 letters to some companies which were engaged in Indian business ventures abroad, seeking permission for case writing. Four of them responded positively. I met top executive of two of them to get going but right then my daughter fell sick and I had to suspend travel. An elder colleague in finance area, Prof. Varshneya, who was coming from Delhi, agreed to interview and record discussions with executives and collect other information. We got it transcribed and prepared a draft. I rearranged the information and prepared a teaching note. Prof. Varshneya was pleasantly surprised that he had been instrumental in jointly developing two important case studies ([Suman Industries and Growth Pharmaceuticals](#)) on Indian business ventures abroad, one withdrawing and the other expanding its international operation as a result of opening of India economy in 1991. These were the first two case studies on the topic at IMX.

What is common among the three friends, Casio, Kettle and Recorder, who helped me in Barcelona? They are still alive and my proud possession in operation. And I am using them post retirement, 25 years later, something that was hall mark of Indian products in pre-liberalised era, long life consumer “durable” products. In India in those days there was a concept of durability “dada le pota barte” (grandson can comfortably use what one’s grandfather bought). We don’t have any Indian items of that kind, thanks to dynamic obsolescence concept introduced in last 25 years.

5. [Off- Springs of Parc Tauli Case](#)

Case writing gives several benefits, but what Parc Tauli Case gave was truly amazing, almost everything that a faculty member wants to get,

- a) [An International case study,](#)
- b) [Teaching Note turning into a research paper,](#)
- c) [Attending first \(WACRA\) international conference to present the case study,](#)
- d) [Publishing a book,](#)
- e) [Launching a PGP course,](#)

- f) [Launching a MDP](#)
- g) Launching a professional body ([Strategic Management Forum](#)), which fulfilled the dreams of
 - organising conferences on a large scale and
 - helping in development of over 600 faculty members of management schools in strategic management area.

6. The Course Material

While in ESADE, I had to frequently contact EFMD. I learnt how to reduce cost of faxing, by writing 4 letter, reduce them to 63%, print it on A4 and fax a single page. It occurred to me the cost, time and manpower requirement of course material can be dramatically reduced if we make a master on A3 size by putting 4 A4 sheets (reduced to 63%) and print back to back. This will also reduce the size of the bulky A4 size course material to light weight book, especially if the course material is developed by the faculty member themselves.

I developed a sample 400 pages PGP course material of Merger & Acquisition course into handy A4/2 size book. The efforts could not take off due to refusal of many faculty members to follow the practice.

This dream however, materialised 27 years later, 7 years after my retirement [when I designed and published 15 books on standard](#) A5 (6''*9'') size in paperback and E-book format. If we had done it in 1992-93, the Academic Resource Park envisaged in Perspective Plan of IMX 1992-93, could have produced all the necessary course material for management education in the country.

7. Qué más

The two words Qué más (what else) still reverberate in my ears. The words were pronounced (that too with a smile) whenever the people finished the work you gave them. Even it at the time of closing hours of office. The smile was so infectious that you almost bowed to them with respect. In Barcelona I felt if there was to be a single measure (index) of happiness for the country, it could be number of times a person smiled in a day. I was so enamoured by this gesture that I changed my signature for family members and friends to now famous emoji ‘ 😊 Keep smiling’. I also tried to copy this gesture but even I knew it was fake not genuine as I saw on the faces there.

8. India Does not Occur to Us

I happen to visit with a friend, who was assigned to SDA Bocconi, the office of Commercial Office of Technology Transfer in the Govt. of Catalonia and asked which technology you transfer to India. He expressed regret “India does not occur to us”. Taken aback I asked “then where do you transfer technology”? To this his reply was U.K. France, Germany etc. I was surprised. But later while identifying leading firms of Spain to administer a questionnaire for a research study, I found there were several small companies which were product leaders in 4th digit of Index numbers. By that time the second issue of Dun’s Europa had been published which gave names, addresses and size of companies in Europe. I was stunned to find small companies that were world leaders in their small domain. Since they were not big enough to advertise in international business journals, which were in English, Indian did not know many of them and imported technology from the large companies whom small companies had sold technology. If we knew their languages, India could have imported technology as equal footing partners at much less the price.

If India did not occur to us they too did not occur to us. This I realised that we could be great partners in administration of research. A single questionnaire translation cost me €150, which was almost Rs. 6000/-, while we could get a 14 page questionnaire translated in French, German, Spanish in around Rs. 2000/- those days. Same was the case of secretarial assistance. While charges per day there was no less than €100 per questionnaire, here my secretary typed it without asking for anything extra and prepared 2000 covers in 4 languages. Thus a study ([Perception of European Executives About India as a Business Partner](#)) for which we were sanctioned €1000, we could finish it in just Rs. 10,000. We could be great research partners. But we missed all such opportunities.

By the time I returned to India, I had many ideas to develop for forging symbiotic relationship with Europe. I was convinced that India could get a lot from Europe and give a lot to it without sacrificing any national interest or creating adverse balance of payment, by emerging as a global player as advised by my Research Partner Emil.

9 The Blast

While moving on Avda Pedralbus one day I heard a big sound of blast. I was told some Muslim person from Morroco had done that. The tussle

between England and Ireland was visible to note. I wondered if Christians and Muslims can't live as good neighbour, if Catholic and Protestant religions divide the countries how vulnerable is India with all kinds religions, castes, languages and regional cultures, each one as powerful as the other to divide the country. I shuddered "Are we sitting on volcano?". As I returned to India, within six months, Babri Masjid was demolished and religious fanaticism started emerging. Just over a year back, the reservation issue had created crisis in the country, paralysing it for 3 months and ending with fall of the central government. What an uphill task India faces to integrate emotionally to capitalise on population, for economic development, is it not a managerial challenge going to decide the future of country, I thought? Is it not great achievement for a nascent democracy to keep united against all odds?

10 Realising What We Have In India

a) Water

The first experience was water. We gulp water in litres per day in India. Whenever I went for dining in the opening seminar in Germany, I was respectfully asked "what would you like to have Sir, whisky, wine or coffee"? When I asked for water they gave a peg of water. The cost of a 250 cc bottle of water was \$2. Luckily we were guest of EU and boarding lodging were free, but for extra items like water we had to pay from our pockets, which we could not and finally some drank tap water. I wondered if water was priced in India what would be our condition.

b) Bread

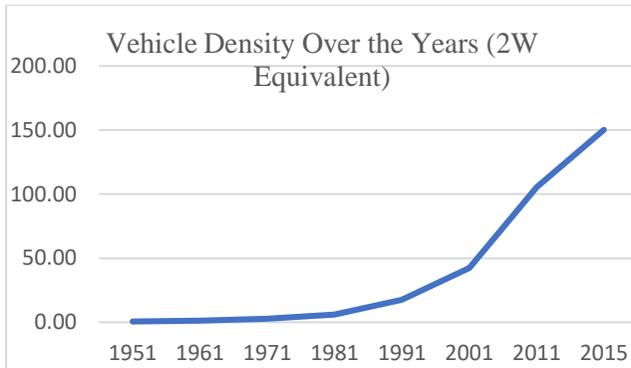
The same price differential were there in other items. In the price of 9 products compared in 1991 it was observed the price in Barcelona varied from 3.6 times (bottle of 500 ml milk) to 12 times (loaf of bread and two bed room house). It occurred to me that the GDP calculated based upon sale value (determined by price) is presents a highly distorted picture of Indian economy compared to other countries, when measured in terms of US \$ for the purpose of convenience. A different measure was required for getting correct picture, something that emerged later in terms of purchasing power parity based comparisons.

c) Language Lessons

Since I did not know Spanish or local language, ESADE sent me to attend classes for Spanish. There were 15 other non-Spanish of around 20 years of age, from different countries. After explaining colours, the instructor wanted to test the learning and asked each one “what is colour of your car”? Youngsters replied accordingly, but me, a professor from IMX in India replied “I don’t have car”. In the next round after explaining number, the instructor asked “how many cars you have”? My answer was same “I don’t have car”. Now the Instructor was baffled. “How do you go to office then”? “I walk” I said, which baffled her even more. “How can you walk to your office, how far it is”? I said it is behind my house”. It was too difficult for her to appreciate our massive 200 acres campus with residential facilities and guest houses. But I realised it can be an attractive point for inviting visitors at low cost, offering our own boarding and lodging facilities and paying only journey expenses and nominal honorarium, something that I could use later at IMP for inviting faculty from abroad.

d) Luna Ride

Once my research partner invited me for Dinner. He was a professor and Chairman MDP, quite a high status in the institute. We were to meet to meet in the parking area at 5 pm. I went there on dot. But could not locate his car. After a while I heard his yelling only to find he was standing with a small moped (Luna in India), which did not have foot rest. I was shocked as I expected him to have a decent car, because even the typist and plumbers used to ride cars. He started and moved into lanes. Whenever he found traffic, he lifted his Luna and walked on pavement. We came to cross the main 6-lane road, which was jammed for long distance. But he lifted his Luna and we crossed the road comfortably. We reached his palatial house and had tea, before we started getting ready for dining out at around 8.30 p.m. We came down and he opened his garage and I saw an impressive Mercedes . I realised he could not go to office in his beautiful car, due to traffic jams and used car only outside office hours or weekend or for excursion.



I wondered what will be condition in India which had more than 20 times population of Spain and area which was just 6 times that country. Are not we going to face similar crisis due to development, I wondered, if we did not have alternate design and focussed more on cars and other motor vehicles for public transport?

It has finally come to be true and we are facing true crisis just 25 years later, with accompanying pollution related problems.

e) **Currency at Port**

During my December tour to U.K. I had planned to visit ESSEC, Erasmus and Manchester business schools. I had to cross Belgium also with overnight stay there. I therefore had five currencies, Spanish Pesetas, French Francs, Belgium Francs, Dutch Guiders and British Pounds, losing exchange charges everywhere. On my journey from Rotterdam to London by Bus on 19th December. As I reached Antwerpen port to cross English channel. It was around 10 p.m. and quite cold for me, with temperature around 25^o F (-5^oC). I thought of having a cup of coffee costing 40 BF. I had 50 BF with me and bought it. Since I had missed dinner and feeling hungry, I thought of having a bun and butter costing another 40 BF. Since I had only 10 BF left I asked whether I can pay in £. The vendor nodded and I gave a £100 note. In those days exchange rate was about 1 £ to 65 BF. Accordingly he converted it to some 6500-358 (exchange commission) BF, deducted 30 BF and returned the balance 6112 BF. I said what would I do with BF now that I was crossing over to UK. Could not I get balance in £s? “Sure,” he said, deducting 5.5% exchange commission and returned me £89. Thus for ½ £, I lost 10 £s in just few seconds. Losing like this at every exchange, I realised how fortunate we were in India to travel as large part of globe as whole of western Europe, without losing a penny in exchange.

The temperature ranging from 0 to -20⁰ C in winter along with rains and sun light available for just a few hours, made me wonder how much hardship people go through to develop the technology to survive. Can they afford to have power off situation? We in India have 12 hours sunlight during 10-12 month in most part of the country and temperature within range of 0-45⁰ C is moderate enough not to kill us inside the house throughout the year. What is comfort for us, necessity there. For us Air-conditioning means cooling, there it means heating, as much as what 12'O clock means here in India is just opposite to what it means in USA.

So was the problem in travelling from one country to another. I had to take Visa of Spain, France, Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg), Germany and U.K. to visit these countries. At every transit we had to pass through immigration. Losing passport and thus Visa could jeopardise your stay and could put you in jail, with no one to support. When I seamlessly travel 29 states (four states bigger than the biggest country in EU by population) and 7 union territories in India, covering a population 4 times that of present European union, I feel I have travelled the whole of European Union countries, without changing money in my wallet or passing through immigration, and without carrying any passport or Visa.

What pains however is the fact that despite being 4 times bigger than USA or EU in terms of physical headcount (god's gift of brains), the Indian economy is just 1/6th of their economy (13.4% of USA and 15.1% of EU), 1/24 of what is perhaps possible, through integrative synergies and human resource development.

The visit to Barcelona was an eye opening experience for me. I discovered how and in what way we live in paradise in India, how and in what way we can help each other for benefit of larger society through symbiotic relationship. I was convinced that international exchange collaboration could be a great boon and every faculty member of leading management schools should visit for a year to expand his horizon to start loving his own country and identify opportunities for improvement and create new things for the world.