

Does everyone in Bangalore know how to get to Premier Book Shop? Of course not. You have to get to M.G.Road and then find platform Nine and Three Fourths! Clearly, you have to be a wizard to actually shop at Premier. For ordinary shoppers in today's Bangalore, who are rightfully used to roomy shelf space, categorized buying and piped music, Premier would be a musty anachronism. There are no aisles in Premier, only elbow-room (with increasingly less space). There is no software in Premier, only the cerebrum of the proprietor. Books are stacked high enough to support the ceiling. If you want a book at the bottom of the pile, you are either an innocent or a pervert. Forget it. Piped music? They may have a book about it.

Yet, for exactly 30 years now, Premier has quietly served the needs of a magical world of litterateurs and book lovers in Bangalore.

At a very special lunch at the warm home of Ramchandra Guha and Sujata Keshavan, on Sunday, January 27th, many wizards spoke about their dependency on the little store on Church Street. Proprietor T.S. Shanbhag, normally rather cleverly disguised as an ordinary, balding, indifferent gentleman without credit card facilities, was seen to blush and preen. Speaker after speaker spoke in the most extreme language about their experiences at Premier.

Chiranjeev Singh, Secretary, Finance, Government of Karnataka, normally presented as the most affable of all Karnataka Sikhs, clearly belonged to the exclusive club of Premier wizards. He not only admitted to luring all visitors to the shop, he also declared that of all the people who make Bangalore what it is, Shanbhag is a Premier among them.

The host, Ram Guha, confessed that, on his first visit to Premier, he was only trying to buy a book on cricket but landed up buying a book on Karl Marx. Dr Saraswathy Ganapathy remonstrated that her marriage remained intact in spite of Premier Book Shop. She recalled how she dropped off husband Girish Karnad at the store with strict admonitions, duly acquiesced to, to NOT BUY BOOKS, yet when she returned, a dozen were already piled up at the cash counter. Unfortunately, when she went in to salvage the situation, she only managed to add her own half-dozen to the pile.

The Senguptas were there in strength. Abhijeet (IAS) admitted he was grateful that his wife, Poile, the playwright, could not use his credit card at

Premier, and daughter Anasuya sang a jolly poem she had composed called 'The Premier Anthem'.

Prem Chandavarkar gave a typically scholarly account of the lessons he had learnt at Premier. His mother had already confessed that she had used Premier as an unknowing babysitting service longer than she dared admit. Prem said he learnt that reading requires effort; it was not something one could just hand out to the kids. He also recounted the time when a group of his friends was trying to find him a birthday gift at Premier. 'Here, these are fifteen titles Prem may like and has not ordered yet,' said the Wizard.

Many more eminent wizards of Bangalore spoke. Myself, uneminently admitted I had not recognized Wizard Shanbagh on a flight to Goa. I had assumed, like the promise made by the real estate ads you see, that Shanbag came as

'Pleasant, erudite man, bookshop attached.'

Wizard Shanbagh himself, rather overcome, said it all in only one sentence. 'I have been here for thirty years on the strength of your support and I hope I will still be here thirty years later.'

Welcome, Muggles, to the magical world of Premier Book Shop, Church Street, Bangalore.

Rohini Nilekani

I am hereby Attaching Anasuya's Poem

The Premier Anthem

When I was young, my mother said
"Child, I have something to say"-
And what she told me I'll never forget
until my dying day.

She said, "Child, you are a Premier gal
And that's the way to stay
Child, you'll be a Premier gal
until your dying day."

When I was sixteen, I fell in love
With a book that was as high as can be
But I asked Mr. Shanbhag just in time
to get it down for me.

And he said, "Child, you are a Premier gal
And that's the way to stay
Child, you'll be a premier gal
Until your dying day."

As time goes by, I probably will
check out a bookstore or two
But Blackwell's and Borders don't hold up the roof
As the books in Premier do.

So sing with me, "We are all Premier pals
And that's the way to stay
Happy to be Premier pals
Until our dying day."

Thirty years down Museum Road
And thirty more, we pray
Happy to be Premier pals
And that's the way we'll stay.