

BY PUSHKALA VENKATRAMAN ('95)

## HEEDING HEART & RELENTLESS MIND

### CONVERSATIONS WITH LT GEN LM RAJGOPAL ('47), AVSM



**Name** – Lt Gen L M Rajagopal ('47)

**Awards** – Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, Government of India

**Education** – Bachelors in Mechanical Engineering, BITS Pilani

**Resident** – Secunderabad, India

**Associations** – Fellow of Institution of Plant Engineers, Member of British Institute of Management, Member of Institute of Engineers, Retired Lt General Corps of Engineering and Mechanical Engineers, Founding Committee BITSAA Hyderabad, Ex Member of National Cadet Corps

Lt Gen L.M.Rajgopal's story is one of a wide eyed South Indian boy who etched a place for himself in India by following his heart. Of course, he worked tirelessly to placate its incessant demands.

At 17, when the General had to make the regular academic decisions it was a different time. In South India in 1947 general anarchy pervaded the atmosphere. There weren't half as many engineering colleges back then. The General always had his heart set on joining the army and at the same time wanted to study Engineering. But with a lack of credible

choices at the time, he enrolled at Presidency College, Madras for a Science Degree. His uncle was on deputation to the Government of Rajasthan, however had different plans. He had heard about a new Engineering college at Pilani, built by the Birla group and asked his teenage nephew to apply there.

The General belonged to the second batch of boys to join Pilani. There were just two disciplines at the time - Mechanical and Electrical Engineering.

Getting off from the train in Delhi, the teenager was amazed by the hugeness of the city.

Pandemonium reigned everywhere. The station was full of Hindu refugees streaming in from the other side of the border and Muslims fleeing from India alike. With his 10-strong group of friends, General Rajgopal took the rickety bus to Loharu and then another, to finally land in Pilani.

Krishna Bhavan, Gandhi Bhavan, a couple of thatched sheds and buildings completed the set up of Birla Engineering College as it was then called. The sheds were apparently used by the British as camps for prisoners of war. The General lived in Gandhi and was very impressed with the fact, that each student was given a separate room! This was (and still is) highly uncommon in other colleges in India. The 1947 batch consisted of 75 boys. It was a cultural eye opener too – meeting people from different parts of India. The friendships grew strong, and many joyful evening were spent in Shiv Ganga talking

about the newly independent and fast changing India.

The Breakfast in the mess of puris, potatoes, laddoo and a tall glass of milk was culture shock for the South Indian lad used to Madras coffee and Idli - Sambar.

Professor Lakshminarayanan, the acting principal was a strict disciplinarian and Mr. Rajgopal still fondly remembers how the professor kept all the students in tight control. The General is reminded of another time, when while returning from a vacation at home, there were no buses and the students had to hitch a ride on a camel in Chirawa, to reach Pilani.

Two violent periods are still vivid in his mind. The political scene in India turned ugly and communal riots plagued every inch of the country and spilled into Pilani. Fearing for their safety, the two batches of 150 boys took turns at patrolling the campus in the night. Then Mahatma Gandhi was shot dead some time later. Again, communal violence spewed tensions and the Pilani boys took up patrolling duties to maintain calm.

The General graduated in Mechanical Engineering with a First Division. After graduating, Mr. Rajgopal followed his heart again into the Indian Army after a short stint as an apprentice in HAL, Bangalore. He served in various command and staff positions in the Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME) for 36 years. Starting his career as a Second Lt in 1952, he rose with distinction, to become a Lt General, serving as the Director General of the Corps of EME. When the President of India awarded him the Ati Vishishta Seva Medal for “distinguished service

