

Congratulations on celebrating 50 incredible years of architectural excellence, Gopakumar Sir.

As I look back, I feel deeply grateful that my professional journey began under Gopakumar Sir's guidance in 1982. I have a lot of memories there, as the first employment will always be special. Being an Architect at this firm was not just a designation; it was a privilege and a responsibility. I was stepping into new territory in many ways - a mostly male dominated arena with proven Senior Architects as Sir. I could have felt scared and lost. But that did not happen - proof of my 44 years as an Architect now.

I got married to Regie while working at the firm, it marked many "firsts" - not just for me personally, but for the office as well. I know that wedding leave policies, maternity leave considerations, and new workplace "*acharanga*" all began during that time. Sir embraced those changes with openness and dignity, and that made all the difference. I heard later that one of the office cabins even saw a "*pennukaana*" happen in there.

There was always space for growth, inclusion, and evolution for all of us Architects who practiced with Sir. He had been the strict yet compassionate boss always. I picked up a lot of best practices while working with Sir that still act as my greatest strengths as an architect. He used to be very adamant that every architect should go to the work site. He would ask us very pointed questions like "Where is it written that architects should not go to site?", "Shouldn't architects also have knowledge about the structural design?"

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Ar. Mariamma
Regie Paul

Chief Architect
Mayphil Architects &
Interior Consultants

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These subtle admonishments motivated us, and we began visiting the site. He would ask us to do some of the structural designs and tell us not to allow all structural details to be done by the structural engineer. His belief was that an architect should know the basics of structure, and from that only the design should come. We used to get a lot of opportunities to interact with the client ~ to talk directly and understand their requirements, their dreams, their views. That helped us design most residences and gave us a lot of confidence. I felt he always believed that giving his junior architects the freedom to think out of box and fly high with their ideas would help them grow.

I remember one good habit that Sir had. Each time he went for a site visit, he would come back with a piece of paper that he would take out of his pocket – mostly would be half sheet of an A4 paper, likely a paper torn from a notebook. And in that he would have drawn a vague site plan. During the discussion, he would have drawn some lines and put in some dimensions. The amazing part is that it would be exactly proportionate to the size of the room he’s planning. He had a great sense of dimensions. And he used to do this freehand without a ruler, measurement scale or graph paper.

I wouldn’t say he was the most patient boss. Because there were many instances where he would lose his cool and shout at us. But the best thing about him was that before going out from the office or before going home, he would come and console us in some way or the other. All the sadness and tension that would have built in our mind would vanish in that instant.

The memories of the design for the HDFC building are still fresh in my mind. The corner plot and cube design was a big challenge. Sir challenged me and said the competition was between us. It was a big task to adjust and put the tiles in place according to the measurements (very thankful for all the software now). Those days, we had to sit and put everything in place by drawing it out. Sir, even though you declared yourself as the winner and I still do not agree to this day.

And I have sweet memories about Shyamala Chechi too who would come and whisper to me to increase the size of the kitchen when we were doing residential projects. Those were practical and much needed guidance for a female architect, and I still try to incorporate those things into my designs. Anuj and Neethu were also a big part of my few years there. Those years remain some of my most cherished learning experiences. The designs, thinking, the exposure, and the confidence I gained under Sir's mentorship continue to shape me even today.

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My journey as an independent Architect was also lit up by Gopakumar Sir who inaugurated our office “Mayphil Architects & Interior Consultants” in 1990. My memories about my stint with Gopakumar Sir can never end. My life often leads to many touchpoints where I am ever grateful for the opportunity that I got early in my career to work and grow with Sir.

“Dear Sir, thank you for the opportunities, the trust, and the path you helped pave, not just for me, but for many who came after.”

I remember my training period, and my initial years working with KG. Work was hectic, buttersheets, blueprints, nightouts. The office was like an extension of my house in ravipuram. Just accross the street. Anuj used to drop in once in a while as a school kid.

Remember the first computer and cad system bought. Pioneers to adopt CAD among Architecture firms in Kochi. KG has been pioneers in many things. In design practice and out of it. They always experiment with new things. Thats been always their hallmark.

My passion for things out of Architecture blossomed there. Saw the struggle, engineers took with blue prints and setof scales, doing boq takeoffs, and the then allotting the sript to a typist who typed the whole thing on a typewriter.

I had no idea of rates, or specifications. All I did was design and drawil with mechanical pencils and rotrings. The emarassment I felt when queried on estimates rates, and rate analysis was the first trigger. But then, it was an engineers job to answer these questions, then not mine. My interest in management grew. Anyway 38 years down, the experience of that period, the inspiration of a very

Sreekumar KM

Founder

Prominare Info Solutions

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talented, versetile and masterful multitasker like GK Sir as their founder, I am today a Management professional and an IT entrepreneur.

Best wishes to KG on the Golden Jubilee year. And gratitude, from all of us whose lives were shaped during their formative years working there, and many who observed and learnt from the outside.

Ar. Thomas George

Principal Architect
Jibu & Thomas Architects

Gopakumar Sir or GK - I first heard the name from my cousin Mariamma Phillip. I was in my early teens and Chechi was holding a plum post at Kumar Group Total Designers. Her stories inspired me to pursue this profession.

First saw the man himself at her engagement ceremony - a dapper well rounded gentleman with his trade mark Bulgan and Ivy cap. After graduation I joined his firm in 94..and boy!! what a team I joined. The erudite and workaholic SreeKumar; stiff and friendly JK; cool dude KK(late Krishna Kumar;) and the ever inspiring Naina Kuriachan.We learned a lot.

The Office Systems were clearly in place. Architecture and Civil wings clearly segregated -mostly at logger heads. GK always an innovator, invseted in technology and one of the pioneers to install AutoCad and Staad.

Although a taskmaster - GK was always friendly. I remember distant site visits with him where the evenings dragged on a few stiff ones thrown in between. With his clients, he always invited me to join -an naive boy ready to take the plunge.. who tried to match him..but fell on the wayside. On the way back he had to stop the car so I could clear the cobwebs!!

This camaraderie inspired my attitude to my juniors and staff. Ajith Menon who interned with us can surely vouch for this. I remember Anuj the vivacious naughty..boy barging into dads cabin ..demanding something.

Sir you have been an inspiration to me.

Fifty years of dedication..innovation and excellence..indeed proud to be a part of your long and wonderful journey.

In late 2016, I first stepped into Kumargroup Architects, introduced by a family friend. I remember sitting with Anuj for what I thought would be a straightforward interview, but it quickly turned into a conversation about design. He asked me to develop a concept for a mall, and that exercise, more than anything else, became my entry into the firm.

Coming from a corporate setup in Dubai, where I often felt like a small cog in a much larger machine, this was a very different experience. Here, ideas were engaged with. There was space to think, to respond, and to take ownership.

Anuj brought me into the core design team, where I found myself working closely with him on conceptual projects. I still remember his instinctive sense of scale and his ability to sketch out plans with clarity and precision. It is something I continue to admire, and, if I am honest, quietly envy.

One of the defining moments during that time was when we were competing directly with a New York-based firm, CetraRuddy, on a housing scheme. I remember the long nights spent developing the proposal under Anuj's guidance. When we eventually won, it was a powerful realisation that strong ideas can stand their ground anywhere in the world.

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A few months into my time there, I had the opportunity to meet GK during a particularly intense monsoon season. There were repeated reports of people losing their lives after falling into open drains across Kochi. The stretch outside the Cochin Shipyard along MG Road was identified as a high-risk zone and taken up as a test bed for a solution.

Ar.Rahul Nair
Founder
Atelier Noir

GK's vision was to transform this dangerous edge into a continuous, walkable space. Along with site engineers and a quantity surveyor, we measured sections every five metres across nearly two kilometres. Back in the studio, this became hundreds of detailed sections.

The project was realised in phases, and what was once a high-risk edge is now an active walkway used by the public. For me, this was the first time I truly understood the impact architecture could have on a city.

I later became involved with GK through his role as President of the Better Kochi Response Group (BKRG). One of the key initiatives was the Klean public toilet project, which aimed to convert unused shipping containers into high-quality, inclusive sanitation facilities.

I approached GK and requested to be part of it, and he gave me the opportunity to come on board as an associate architect. This project required working across multiple agencies, including CREDAI, Cochin Shipyard, Bharat Petroleum, the Kerala Electricity Board, the Kerala Water Authority,

the Kochi Corporation and many more. It showed me how architects can operate beyond design, coordinating systems and stakeholders.

One of the key challenges was securing electricity, as containers did not qualify for a door number. GK questioned why illuminated signages could receive power, and that led to a solution. By integrating signage onto the container, we secured electricity and created a revenue stream to sustain operations.

“...GK’s response was clear and unwavering. He said you cannot hold an entire community responsible for the actions of a few individuals. For me, this was a human moment inside a systems project.”

The Klean toilets became some of the first inclusive public sanitation facilities in the city. However, the inclusion of the transgender community faced resistance. I remember sitting in a meeting where concerns

were raised. GK’s response was clear and unwavering. He said you cannot hold an entire community responsible for the actions of a few individuals. For me, this was a human moment inside a systems project.

Around this time, GK was awarded the Baburao Mhatre Gold Medal in 2020, a recognition that felt entirely fitting given the scale and intent of his work.

Soon after, I found myself at a pause. During an inter-architecture football session, I fractured my ankle, which pulled me away from work. That pause made me question whether I wanted to return to architecture at all.

I still remember the call from Anuj. He told me I had a gift and shouldn't let it go to waste. More importantly, he told me he didn't see me as an employee, but as one of his own. He suggested that I start something of my own.

After much thought, I set up a small office in Marine Drive. I remember GK coming to inaugurate it and speaking about responsibility and ethics. Anuj brought in my first project, came to my office with the clients, and sat beside me, guiding me through the process while ensuring I led it.

That first project became the foundation of my practice, Atelier Noir.

Today, my journey has taken me to the UK, where I work in energy and sustainability. At the same time, my practice in Kochi continues to operate with a focus on socially relevant and accessible architecture. I still

associate with KumarGroup every once in a while, whenever something fun comes up and Anuj shoots an invitation across.

In connecting these moments, I realised that I never really took the time to say this.

Thank you. - Not just for the opportunities, but for the trust, the guidance, and the way of thinking that has stayed with me. Not just for me, but for the many architects who have passed through Kumargroup.

Fifty years of practice is an achievement. But shaping people across generations is something far more lasting.

Congratulations to GK, Anuj, and the entire team on this milestone!