JUST A CLICK AWAY

P R Venketrama Raja, vice-chairman, Ramco Group, talks to us about his hobbies—photography and chess, and how both help him unwind

AS TOLD TO POORNIMA KAVLEKAR

For P. R. Venketrama Raja (or PRV as he is popularly known), a normal working week stretches 24/7, with hectic globe-trotting schedules thrown in. Having steered the Ramco Group to its present position of a multi-million dollar industrial conglomerate, the 52-year-old continues to play a major role within the corporate setup of his highly diversified organisation, with interests spanning cotton and synthetic yarn manufacturing, cement production, software solutions, wind-energy production and bio-technology. So, what does he do to unwind? We intrude during his downtime to catch him at not what he does best, but what he likes best to do. And PRV loves photography and chess. His interest in chess started when Ramco Group sponsored a very young Viswanathan Anand early in the world champion’s career. While PRV’s love for photography dates back to the age of 10—since then, he has devoted much of his personal time perfecting the nuances of photography.

The convenient move – playing chess online

I go to The Internet Chess Club, the oldest chess club of the two to three online chess clubs. I usually play a 15-minute, standard game about three to four times a week. My rating is not high as I play the game for fun. I don’t play positional chess. I play tactics and attacking. I lose some and win some games, so the experience is very exciting.

I am also excited when I watch top-class games. All the top events in the world are transmitted on the Club’s website with commentary and I spend hours watching that. I always try to watch Anand’s games. And what’s more convenient is that the club is now available on mobile phones and tablets. Earlier, one had to be in front of the computer or laptop to catch the game. Now, I can catch it wherever I am.

How has this game helped you?

It has helped me relax. Playing chess also helps me find out when my mind is tired and when it’s sharp. The days my mind is clear and sharp, I end up winning my games with tough opponents. When it is tired, I am just playing to have fun. I lose even to the weakest player and make obvious mistakes.

When did you start playing chess?

I was always interested in the game. I got more interested in it when, very early in Anand’s career (when he became junior champ and got into the World Championship circuit), Ramco Group started sponsoring him.

Your experience as the president of Tamil Nadu Chess Association:

There are many competent officers, who run the association. I help whenever they have some tournaments or have to meet someone to raise funds. It is a group of intellectually motivated people, who like the game and the challenge.

What is the status of chess players in Tamil Nadu?

There are many strong players coming up in Tamil Nadu. The current under-12 World champion is from the state. The state will definitely never have a dearth of grandmasters (GMs), but we get super GMs once in 10 years. It’s a different talent and we do not know what it is. The knowledge is the same, but on the board, these people are consistent and innovative. They win games.

Chess has become the most analysed game with the advent of computers. While a GM can remember moves...
like a photograph, the super GMs find different moves to beat the opponent. When you get higher ratings, you have to be even more subtle and innovative. There is some good talent in the state among the 8 to 10 year olds. But a player needs something extra which takes him/her to the top 50 in the world and it's hard to place a finger on what it is.

Do you encourage family/colleagues to join you in this hobby?

My son used to play chess in the tournament circuit - under 10. Now, he finds it too much work. He had to work two to three hours a day to play a decent tournament. If one wants to be a chess player, it requires a minimum of five to six hours a day from the age of six and eight to 10 hours a day at the super GM level.

Behind the lens

When did you take up photography as a hobby?

From the age of 10. My cousins and I grew up taking black and white pictures, and developing them at home.

Your favourite clicks:

I love to take pictures of children, especially of my new-born grandson. I like to photograph safaris as well. Of late, I like to take pictures of birds.

How did you develop an interest in photography?

My uncle loved photography and that influenced me to a large extent. I found my father's camera, an old twin lens with film and clicked my first few pictures with it. Today, in the digital world, there are many options, but I don't get much time. I do take pictures when I go on a holiday.

How did you learn the nuances of photography?

I tied up with a local photographer in my hometown. And during my summer holidays, I used to learn from him. I learnt the technical basics of photography very early.

What inspires you to pick up a camera?

The sense of calm I feel when I take some good pictures. I just look for that little pleasure.

What is the type of camera you own?

Canon 5D Mark II. I also own the 7D. I use 5D for general pictures on subjects like people, sceneries and animals. I use the 7D for birds and distant photography since that has a smaller field of view and higher pixel density. I can artificially get longer distance.

Who's your favourite photographer?

Ansel Adams. He could bring black and white systems to life with all those zones.

P R Venktrama Raja, Vice-Chairman, Ramco Systems