

INDIVIDUAL  
MILESTONEAPARNA  
SHARMA

best seller English book “Reality Bytes – The Role of HR in Today’s World”. Her life journey is truly Individual Milestone & inspiration for others

By Romesh Srivastava and Ruby Kumar

🎉 Congratulations to you on your success from Small Town Girl to HR Thought Leader. Please let us know something about your journey.

🗨️ The tagline on my website [www.aparnasharma.in](http://www.aparnasharma.in) which covers my personal & professional journey is very apt- “From Small Town Girl to HR Thought Leader”.

I was born in the holy city of Ujjain (Ujjayni- Avantikanagari), however have lived and studied across many states in our country given my father’s transferable job.

Today, Ujjain is a famous city for many reasons- Lord Mahakaleshwar Temple (One of the 12 Jyotirlingas in India), Simhastha Mela (Kumbh Mela) held there once every 12 years, and ofcourse for historical anecdotes of King Vikramaditya, Lord Krishna’s education in Sandipani Ashram etc...

When I first came to Mumbai to study, I was ridiculed and in some places despised as a “Small Town Girl”. Today, as I look back & reminisce my journey, it’s truly been a roller coaster ride. I am extremely proud of my roots, my upbringing and all the challenges that I have successfully dealt with to come this far...

However, I echo what Robert Frost has said-

“The woods are lovely, dark & deep;  
But I have promises to keep;  
And miles to go before I sleep...and miles to go before I sleep”.

In an exclusive interaction with SightsIn, we have with us Aparna Sharma, “Felicitated with several Woman Leadership Awards, Aparna’s rich career spans over 21 years across organisations such as Nocil, Monsanto, Novartis, Deutsche Bank, Lafarge. Currently, Aparna Sharma is an independent Director on the Board of T. S Alloys Ltd. (100 percent subsidiary of Tata Steel) and an author of a

My tryst with HR was more by default than by design. I was keen on Civil Services- chose subjects during graduation with this preparation. However, not wanting to get married early & the need to become financially independent right after graduation, I showed great zeal in trying to figure out what to do and ways to reach my goal. With time, civil services was no longer the preferred option. Mandal Commission had made it even more unfavourable.

In the early 1990's, students had limited access to information as there was no internet and the telecom revolution was yet to begin. I would go to the post office every week and get a copy of the Employment News paper while I was pursuing my graduation in Bhopal. Every page was scrutinized as if there was no tomorrow.

That's how I got to know about TISS, applied & got selected to the prestigious institute.

My **twenty (20)** plus year journey in HR began from that day on & since then, there's been no looking back & I am enjoying every moment of it ☺☺☺!

During campus placements, I was offered a job at then a sought after employer, NOCIL. During the interview, I told them that I would consider joining NOCIL only if they allowed me to begin on the shop floor. The men were shell shocked. Is this girl nuts? She wants to work in one of the most unionized environments of those times! But I was firm. They came back the next day and made an offer.

🗨️ **Please share about the initial years of your career – what were the challenges you faced, what were the areas you enjoyed the most, the lessons learnt.**

🗨️ My first full time job- the experience at NOCIL was very enlightening. It covered a wide gamut of issues — be it union issues due to the size of Batata Vadas ( called as Aloo Bondas in some places), routing of bus transportation & integration & change management focus when NOCIL ( National Organic Chemical Industries Limited) & PIL (Polyolefins Limited) were to merge.

After spending two (2) years in NOCIL, I joined Monsanto, a leading global Biotechnology organization. I was exposed to a manufacturing environment (Lonavala, Silvassa, Bellary, General Santos), R & D set up (Bangalore, St. Louis, Boston, General Santos) and Commercial Operations (All India & in the Philippines). I did pioneering work in setting up the Research & Development centre at Bangalore for Monsanto India. My efforts continue to be remembered by those who are still a part of the organization.

At Monsanto, I worked diligently & seamlessly with all parts of the organization be it in India or the Philippines. I worked hard to make a positive impact & contribution to each employee's career & life overall. Some of those efforts are reflected in the recommendations by my ex- colleagues (refer to [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)). My biggest satisfaction is that I am best remembered for

my exemplary work, simplicity & humility.

I moved as an expat to the Philippines based out of Manila in 2003. In a completely alien environment, I tried to endear myself to all through my simple, focused & straightforward nature, setting up of robust systems & processes and coaching people internally for bigger roles.

Clearly, I once again made a mark in Monsanto locally & globally.

My career @ Monsanto was extremely enriching & rewarding from where I truly transcended geographical & cultural boundaries! It truly helped me become an all rounded global professional.

I have of course, in each of my jobs been able to bring about key changes and also make a long term impact in the organization.

🗨️ **While doing really well in your professional career, what inspired you to be writer?**

🗨️ In my view, one's career & passion or other interests are not mutually exclusive.

I have been writing short stories, poetry since my childhood and later HR related articles.

However, writing a book was a dream that I wanted to fulfill "someday". Usually, one gets to it when one hangs his/her boots from active professional career. I am glad that I have shattered this myth.

As I take a trip down memory lane, I find Vishwakarma Publications (Pune based) approaching me to me to write book as the best moment in my HR career so far. They wanted me to pen down a simple, handy book which ignited my desire to reach out to

GEN Y, especially student community who are confused, not sure what HR is since there are so many preconceived notions.

It has given me the opportunity to share the "WHAT" & "WHY" in contemporary HR, real life challenges & over 20 years of rich global experience acquired across industry sectors. For these reasons, I titled the book "Reality Bytes-The Role of HR in Today's World".

The book is a best seller {1st Three (3) prints sold out already}, widely acclaimed by Business & HR leaders. The English version of the Book has been launched in over 50 cities across the country so far & also globally. The 5th print is underway (currently 4th print is available) . The book has also been translated into Hindi titled







“रियाल्टी बाइट्स वर्तमान समय में मानव संसाधन की भूमिका”. 20 launches of the Hindi Version have taken place so far.

I am extremely delighted that the book has been launched in my birthplace-Ujjain in my school-St.Mary's Convent & my HR Almamater-Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

Two very powerful lessons for me in the book writing & promotion journey so far - The first one is, “If you can DREAM it, you can DO it.” I had dreamt of writing a book someday to share my experiences & help as many aspiring seekers- that day came early on ☺.

Secondly, it's not always about number of years of experience in any profession or job; it's also about the depth and richness of experience you acquire which becomes distilled wisdom.

🕒 **Please share the gist of your interesting book, “Reality Bytes –The Role of HR in Today's World?”**

🗨️ Today and in the future too, the single-most competitive edge for an organization is its “people”. In today's dynamic times, managing turnover in terms of people is as critical as increasing business turnover. This is because, inspite of being the most valuable

resource, manpower is also the most difficult to manage, maintain & retain. Probably, the reason for this is that formal education in HR does not prepare the young, would-be HR manager or even a line manager to face and deal with the reality at the workplace. This book has been written to achieve this very purpose.

“Reality Bytes- The Role of HR in Today's World” has something for everyone- whether an HR student, a budding early career HR manager (1-3years), a line manager who needs to manage people or even a teacher or an entrepreneur trying to understand what HR is all about.

The new thought that this book tries to bring forth is that today, the employee is less of an employee and more of a customer for the organization. Needless to say, he/she is equal to no other business customer in importance. Finding and attracting this “talented customer” to the organization, developing his/her skills and keeping him/her interested and happy in order to achieve business results is what HR is all about today.

Beginning with the Employer and Employee Value Propositions (which is where the employee is introduced to the organization) and ending with the challenges faced by HR, it tries to cover all aspects of HR that are relevant today and tomorrow as well. It is meant to be a simple contemporary ready reckoner covering the entire employee life cycle in an organization (‘What’ & ‘Why’ aspects) and balancing them with practical caselets illustrating concepts that work in organizations in today's times. The caselets also aim at getting the reader to think and find his/her own solutions based on learning/s in each chapter. Key points (leads) which are thought-provoking and bring out the crux of the matter have been separately highlighted to give them prominence.

🕒 **Other than your career, you are also associated with various groups? How do you manage to handle so many things specially being a woman?**

🗨️ I often get asked this question. And I must admit that I am simply “Human”, not a “SuperWoman”☺.

Focus, determination, hard work, prioritizing commitments, feeding the mind, body & soul- This is my simple LIFE MANTRA!

I still remain the fun loving, simple person;

(some still call me “naïve”) who continues to have the eagerness to constantly learn & innocence of a child in my eyes. My energy, radiance, passion, commitment towards life, goodness have only grown manifold. I am happy that I found my true calling in HR early on in my career & I am able to make a difference for the better in the lives of budding professionals.

**My life's simple philosophy which holds true @work too is “I never lose. Either I win.. Or I learn.”**

**My QUEST for life, growth & professional excellence continues.....**

🕒 **What would be your advice for Women Leaders?**

🗨️ Based on my experience in the Corporate World in India & Overseas, here are some points to ponder for Women Leaders-

**DO'S-**

- ⇒ Be a professional first, woman later! Knock out the cobwebs or doubts in your mind.
- ⇒ Work hard. There is no shortcut to success for anybody- man or woman.
- ⇒ Stay abreast with the latest tools, techniques & knowledge in the field. Competence is the bedrock.
- ⇒ Network! It's a good skill to develop.
- ⇒ Learn to be politically savvy.
- ⇒ Ask! Ask for your due raise/promotion if you deserve it.

**DONT'S-**

- ⇒ Expect or pitch for concessions on grounds of gender. Do your bit to make it a level playing field.
- ⇒ Don't portray an image of being weak or vulnerable. You're gifted.
- ⇒ Don't make gender an alibi for incompetence.
- ⇒ Don't shy away from asking if what is due is not given....Assert yourself.
- ⇒ Don't be hard on yourself. It is okay to make mistakes. You were not born perfect.
- ⇒ Don't wallow in self pity. Each one of us is unique in more ways than one.

The world is far from perfect! There are bound to be challenges & injustice.

STAY STRONG, STAY SHINING....WISH YOU ALL SUCCESS!

*Thank you Aparna!*