Stacking them up

VR Ferose has had a lifelong affair...with books

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P atience and perseverance maketh a good book collector, says 37-year-old VR Ferose, Bengaluru-based managing director of SAP Labs India, adding, "The last thing a collector does is bargain." He has, however, had to strike a deal with his wife: "I buy one book, give one away." It's the only way they can make space for another book in their home, which already has three rare books stored in a bank locker.

The pursuit of happiness

At any given time, he is now reading five or six books — in his car, during flights and, he admits, even in office. He turned collector after reading an article by historian and columnist Ramachandra Guha back in the '90s. The subject: '50 great books on cricket'. The bibliophile in Ferose was stoked and he resolved to own them all. He doggedly chased that title of Nicholas Basbanes' non-fiction work of the same name to describe his love for books. In fact, Basbanes' book tops the list of his upcoming collection — books about books.

When a friend gifted him the 50th book, Grand hobbies have a way of sticking around and the end of that journey turned into the start of another. Soon after, Ferose began collecting books on Delhi, giving in to his fascination for history. Along the way, he turned to rare autographed books, particularly those by Nobel laureates. Over the years, his rare book collection not only grew in size and variety, but also into a treasure, with many of them in a bank locker. Ferose's signed collection includes Jawaharlal Nehru's The Discovery of India, Charlie Chaplin's My Autobiography, Edmund Hillary's Ascent to the Top, RK Narayan's The Mahabharata, and books by Nobel prize winners such as Amartya Sen, Mikhail Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama.

Thanks to Ferose, SAP Labs organises two book reading sessions with authors every month. Around 50 writers visited the SAP Lab office in 2011 and Ferose is now planning on writing a book on them. "Books are a great stress buster," he says, "and the knowledge helps me become a better professional."

On a recent trip to Stanford University for an executive leadership programme, Ferose was delighted to find that three of his professors were Nobel laureates — getting copies of their books was not too difficult!

Sometimes, though, books find him. An aged bookshop owner in Bengaluru gave Ferose a signed copy of Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali because he wanted "to find a good home for the book". J Krishnamurthy's signed copy of All the Port of the Master took a decade to come to him.

"A gentle madness," says Ferose, borrowing the title of Nicholas Basbanes' non-fiction work of the same name to describe his love for books. In fact, Basbanes' book tops the list of his upcoming collection — books about books.