"Indian Illusions" Myths and Realities

I have been an ardent reader of Bruce Taylor's series on LITTLE LESSONS FROM HISTORY. I have enjoyed every bit of it and agreed to most of his thoughts, relished most of his accounts on many a failed attempts to replace TPF like most of us TPF fanatics. However his latest in the series titled "Indian Illusions" has made me revisit my opinions for sheer lack of credibility of the material presented.

Let me present this to you from my perspective, as much as possible trying to authenticate my claims. I'm certainly not trying to market the capabilities present in this part of the world, but merely wish to deprecate certain remarks and opinions coming from one of the biggest names in our small little world. Its no secret that India is the richest source for software talent and many a technology and many an organization have used this resource base to their benefit. I don't find the need to delve deeply into that aspect here anyway. Since, The Question is not if Indians are good enough (I Assume), but that of how well does TPF in India Work?

Lets run it through in the Order as listed in the article.

1. Early 1980's Sabre in SriLanka :

I didn't quite know how to authenticate this. So, I thought I would ask someone who knew best, Or better than most of us in this forum. This Gentleman is a Srilankan, A thoroughbred TPF'er and is a Sabre Veteran who has been around with Sabre for well over a decade now. Above all he has served the TPF user group in several Capacities inclusive of being on the board of the TUG and as sub-committee chair. This is what he had to Say.

" Well, I knew nothing about this Sabre venture if it was really true. I have been with Sabre over 12 years and to my knowledge there haven't been more than 3 or 4 other Sri Lankans here in IT and I know a couple of them. It is of course possible the ones I didn't know could have been involved but knowing Sabre I would be very surprised if this were true since you imply this venture ran for about a year."

2. Late 1980's SAM in Kualalumpur :

I don't quite know whether it was indeed how it has been made to sound, May be a Malaysian out there knows what it really is. I'll let you know when I do find that out.

3. 1995-1997 SIA in Chennai

Now, This happens to be home turf to me and I don't have to ask around. I know this pretty well. I've been there and have seen it. Firstly, lets get some facts and numbers right. Between 1995-1997 there was no TPF shop in Chennai (At least not the one being described here). I wonder if Mr. Taylor is referring to SIA's first JV with an Indian Company in Bombay (It still was Bombay then !) . And the dates again are off by a couple of years. The Bombay Venture started in 1993 and went through to 1995. The JV was a great success in terms of productive work done and for the quality of people SIA could find. The training was done by Amdahl. However for want of a good Indian partner this venture had to close down. But most of this enterprising bunch of folks went to SIA and today are part of the core team of TPF Business Analysts, Some have even managed to grow higher up in the SIA ladder. The rest of them you can find in major CRS's and TPF Shops — Working with great Acumen. In my Opinion, the very fact that shops like EDS/SABRE/AMADEUS/UNITED and the rest of the TPF Shops around the world, can employ or Contract Indian TPF professionals by itself stands testimony for the capabilities from this part of the world.

4. 1997-1998 Galileo in Delhi -> ALIVE

The Company is still providing TPF Services to another CRS though it isn't Galileo. Galileo however will take another shot at it and this time it's a better deal (10 below)

5. 1997 to Present : UAL in Calcutta -> DECEASED

There seems to be some good work that has gone in here. Kudos to the source of the Information. At least it isn't miles away from reality. This JV company between the New York based Chatterjee Group and UAL has stopped TPF work from Calcutta (KOLKATA now ☺). Developments are to be seen.

6. 1998-Present: ASDC in Chennai (SIA No.2) -> ALIVE and KICKING

Oh Boy Oh Boy, I had a good sustained laugh at this. This was no different from reading Richard Eastman's comments on TPF Systems (TPF Scoop www.blackbeard.com/tpf/tpfscoop.htm).
Firstly (As usual ☺) lets get the facts correct, ASDC was incorporated in 1996 and not 1998 and its been around for over 6 years now, and thanks for the compliment I didn't know our name sounded that Impressive. The Tata Airline theory sounds kind of credible, but is really quite a distance away from the truth. Infact the majority stakeholders at ASDC are Singapore Airlines and not the TATA's. And, on the SIA E-ticketing Implementation, This is the biggest misinformation that I have read for ages now. Factually, ASDC, has Implemented several TPF projects for Singapore Airlines, Some of them have been major turnkey projects Implemented totally offshore involving Passenger reservations, Cargo, Departure control systems and some TPF Interface Applications. An accumulated total of over 200 person years of projects have been delivered to Singapore Airlines (Incidentally, Including E-ticketing ☺).
More recently ASDC has been awarded the Application Maintenance Services for Commercial Applications on a Contract (Through a published RFP), With this ASDC can safely claim to be servicing close to 80% of all TPF projects and TPF Application and TPF Systems Maintenance work for Singapore Airlines. More than the TPF Applications programming Services, ASDC has also established a systems programming group which provides complete Database Administration Services to SIA from the offshore center and also provides PUT Upgrade services. The Last 5 Major PUT Upgrades of SIA in TPF and TPFDF has been Implemented by ASDC, that too from our offshore delivery center in Chennai (or Madras if you will, But does that really make a difference, What's in a name?). Today we employ close to 125 TPF/ALCS professionals and are servicing our global clients to their fullest satisfaction. Add to it, also for a fact that we are a company operating at CMM Level — 3 (We are getting to 5 soon), one of few TPF consultancy companies which adhere to the benchmark quality standard. We have also established a training program, which we believe, is of global standards. We have offered these courses in TPF/ALCS, TPFDF to clients in the Middle East, China, SouthEast Asia and the United States. They seem to agree with us on our training capabilities as well. So at least we aren't the company, which gives you the so-called "Indian Illusion".

Now, On American Express and KLM who were supposedly persuaded to use our services (By the way, I thought this process is what people around the world, call as MARKETING). I incidentally happen to be privy to some of the happenings here. Having done the TPF capabilities presentation to AMEX Senior Management and KLM Group Heads and subsequent discussions with Development leads at AMEX and Team leads at the KLM TPF Groups. One fact I can say with confidence, These were definitely not the young, ambitious and Ignorant Managers going in for Indian Illusions. On the contrary they had seen decades of TPF development and knew what they wanted, and they had the sense to evaluate and choose what's best for their enterprises. At AMEX we hit peak with around 16 TPF staff at phoenix and at Amsterdam for KLM close to 10 folks. In fact, A Sizeable offshore TPF-ISOC project was also implemented for KLM from Chennai. Then came 9/11 and consequentially the temporary impasse with our prestigious clients. We are hoping to continue with our clients with the raise of the airline Industry and also provide them with the planned offshore services. To that extent no doubt, the Indians came and went but so did the Dutch, the English and the Americans. In fact this article (Indian Illusions) was also sent around at KLM TPF groups in late 2000, with an intention to scare KLM of ASDC, which unfortunately for our competitors did not quite get the desired results. To sum up, it wouldn't be wrong to admit that the Chinese are indeed persistent, but are also sensible people with appreciable foresight. The Success of ASDC only meant that more TPF enterprises where to look at offshore TPF Development from India with optimism, and the result is for every one to see. The enviable list of TPF customers performing offshore development from India Include, VISA, UAL, EDS, GALILEO, KLM, AMEX, AIR CANADA, WORLDSPAN. (Psst ... and last heard also some big names from Dallas and Atlanta).

7.   1998-Present VISA in Calcutta

VISA was never serious about TPF development in India, It's just a small team which works with some production support work solving dumps etc. RS Software (A CMM Level 4 Company) however is a company which services several other Industries and Technologies.

8.   1998-2001 Speedwing in Mumbai — DECEASED

This is only obvious that Speedwing in Mumbai will wind up once the Amadeus takeover of BA was completed. This shop produced some real good quality professionals. Since the wind up most of these folks found themselves with Amadeus in London and the rest of them signed up with other TPF Shops in India (We have some of them with us) and around the world.

9.   1998-2001 Hexaware in Chennai — DECEASED (Well Not Really .. Read on)

This was the Air Canada's (ISM) Offshore center in Chennai, Again never intended to grow beyond 15-20 TPF folks. The shop was anchored by 2 of my X-colleagues and they said, it went on reasonably well to keep all of the 15 folks engaged with TPF projects. The Chennai center has wound up, BUT some X-Speedwing TPF Professionals have taken the venture to Hexaware's Bombay (Mumbai) facility and is pretty much ALIVE and KICKING with 10-15 staff starting of early this year.

10. 2000-2000 Galileo in Delhi - ALIVE

As far as I know, From the handful of blokes that we employ from this company called IGT Solutions, and one of the project managers who was from the venture no.3 above. I hear that this place is working and ALIVE. Cendant takeover and IBM-Cendant agreement has put some breaks here, But this shop is also hitting some customers from the TPF Industry. They are about 50 strong. They also have a website you can check to verify.

11. 2000-Present: EDS in Chennai — ALIVE

It's the most obvious thing for EDS to do, They had no reason or necessity (or call it wisdom) to choose an Indian Partner company, while EDS India Ltd. (An Incorporated Company in India) has been operating in India since 1994 with several offices in India including Chennai. They recruited for a start about 10 TPF staff from ASDC, A few from Hexaware and a handful from Speedwing. They Live next door and they are doing OK, With EDS acquisition of Atraxis and Stakes at Sabre, Its to be seen if they have more plans for India.

12. 2000-2001: Atraxis in Trivandrum — DECEASED

Again, Much the same way as the Speedwing Story, It was only natural that after EDS takeover of Atraxis IBS TPF operations would come down to a halt. Again IBS was only starting small with TPF and Atraxis. They had recruited 3 TPF professionals from ASDC and were beginning to consolidate before Swissair stopped flying. We have some of them back with us here at ASDC.

In all Instead of calling Indian Ventures a folly, One should look at it with wisdom. Like Bruce him self has admitted, its possible that Offshore development can be done at India and can be done with success. What he has probably not noticed is that it works and is working very well practically too. No doubt, there have been failed attempts but that need not necessarily rule out TPF in India completely. One will do well to take a trip down to India and see for your self, how one can achieve the same amount of productivity as in the west for 30-40% of the International TPF rates. What's key though is to find the right Indian Partners (If you have to) and handle it patiently. The benefits come over a period of time. But in the end, it would be well worth the Investment. Indian Programmers have done well in all the available technologies, legacy as well as emerging. They have established proven methodologies and models for successful offshore development as has been discovered by several Fortune 500 companies. I don't see a reason why TPF

should be any different. At a point in time where the likes of Compaq, Oracle, MTS are challenging TPF for factors such as expensive Development and Maintenance costs, Low skill availability and High time to market. I think we TPF aficionados should only welcome the emergence of India as a TPF Competence center instead of spreading pessimism for personal benefits.

Mohan Chandar — Chennai (Madras), April 2002