

# BEYOND MY BLINKERS

SUBIR ADHICARY

## Preface

I realised that I had the potential to write about the mundane matters of life which we miss and mess – in my own style – at the age of 65. The canvas to write regularly was provided by a dynamic couple, Mukesh Sinha and Sudha Sinha, who publish a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 40,000 called ‘Dwarka City’. The paper has been around since 2002. It was a fortnightly until last year and has become synonymous with the bristling sub-city. I was given space to write in it and the independence to write whatever I wanted. The feedback through the last four years from Dwarka’s erudite denizens of all age groups was very satisfying, and it emboldened me to write regularly except for periods when I suffered from writer’s block.

Dwarka, New Delhi’s largest sub-city has a population of about one million plus. Readers will find it mentioned in this book. It is my ‘Malgudi’.

A typical Indian City to have developed in the recent times. As ill-conceived as they come. The planning lacks foresight and is bereft of common sense. The residents suffer in nonchalant silence. The place offers enough food for thought. For vultures like me.

I am an unabashed fan of RK Narayan, Sardar Khushwant Singh and the living legend Ruskin Bond. Their styles enabled a reader to meander through their stories without stumbling. The pace and the innate humour never leave the lines of their works.

I have attempted to do the same subconsciously. I have not read Wren & Martin. My attempt is simple – to make people smile and identify themselves with the protagonists in the stories. I would, therefore, request my readers to overlook ‘how it has been written’ and read ‘what has been written’. A flicker of a smile on the tired face of a reader would be my greatest reward.

The smell and feel of a printed book are still rare feelings. More so, if the book is your own creation. I, therefore, thought of publishing all my articles in the form of a book. The idea was encouraged by some of my permanent readers, among others.

## THE PROTEST TECHNOLOGIST

I love the pungent smell of roasted coffee which wafts out of Barista, CCD and similar outlets. It is ethereal. The cost is, however, jolting, triggered by merciless taxation.

The taxes are nearly as much as the base cost. A case of the seed being bigger than the fruit. So, while hanging out aimlessly, I open the glass doors of the outlets, pretend to look for a prime seat and inhale the fragrance which opens up the clogged avenues of my mind. I know it is unethical. Our texts say – *Ghrahnen ardha bhojanam* which means – to smell food is partly eating it. Given that logic, I should pay at least half the price.

During one such aimless walk, I stood near the doorway of a CCD outlet, fiddling with the door handle and fighting with my conscience, when I felt a gentle tap on my shoulders. Turning around, I saw Batraji, who was my neighbour in a previous locality. He was a modern day Robert Bruce.

There is no business that he has not tried albeit with repeated failure. That never deterred him from embarking on to new ventures. Failures are the pillars of success he believed, although his old father, who was unfortunately the ATM for such ventures, did not share his son's view, for his financial pillars were being shaken badly by his enterprising son.

My reverie was broken by a nudge from Batraji. 'Aur Sir, coffee-shoffee ho jaye', he said, and literally shoved me into the shop. With great elan he crossed over to a twin seater and beckoned me to join him. He exuded an unlikely radiance and a confident gait. I was impressed and surmised that he must have succeeded at last. I felt happy for his father.

'Aur Sir, kaisa chal raha?' he asked, after ordering two of the most expensive coffees available. 'Bacchhe-shacche kaise hain?' He had this habit of creating rhyming word pairs so common to north India 'chai-shai, khana-peena, ghoomna-shoomna'.

'Passing the days somehow. Bhai, a retired person has all the time at his disposal sans money.'

'Now! Now! Dada do not tell me that. You have no liability now. Bacchon ki shaadi-waadi kar di ki nahin?' I could understand shaadi but not waadi. And how I hate the word 'Dada' used for all Bengalis irrespective of age. So, we have an aged Bappida, Mithunda, Kishorda being addressed as if they had all passed their childhood playing gilli-danda in the alleys with the 'name-callers'.

'Oh yes, that is over,' I said. 'Now, my health is the only liability. But tell me about you. You seem to have got into a profitable business, I see.'

Batra gave me a munificent smile, shrugged, coughed and called the waiter over to order two pastries. Then, he lowered his face and

said, 'You are bang on right, Sir. Now, I have a business that is in demand, and I am deeply involved in it.'

'Well, what is it?' I enquired.

'Protest Technology,' he said.

I looked in wonder. Never heard of it. What sort of business was it? The cup of coffee stayed where it was – midway to my lips. Looking at my perplexed expression, Batra proceeded to explain.

'It is like this, Sir. With the law and order problems, intolerance issues, blame games, questions of who is right and who is wrong, the Indo-Pak jhamela-shamela, You know what I mean...Woh wahan ke gaane-shaane wale ka chakkar, the frequency and style of protests have increased manifold. The media is also highlighting this a lot. The country has big potential for new and cutting-edge protest styles and material'.

'But', I tried to intervene, stuffing a delicious pastry into my mouth.

'Now, there's heavy demand for candles of all sizes and colours. I am trying to import non-flammable, simulated candles for NGOs specialising in protest marches. It is a new concept, from Turkey. Another thing that is in vogue nowadays is throwing ink at people to blacken their face. The victims then stay with blackened faces, until the media calls it a day. Therefore, you need a chemical that lasts at least a day or two and is camera friendly. I mean, it should shine. I am importing such an ink from a South American country famous for such smear protests. Research-wisearch karna parta hai, Sir.'

'What else?', I asked, in disbelief.

‘No one wants to lose slippers and shoes just to protest. So, we supply dummy shoes and slippers for throwing or beating. You can order shoe garlands, as well. The latest trend is wearing masks during protests so that one does not get caught later via CCTVs. Ku Klux Klan style, you see. Direct from the USA’. Batraji thumped the table in glee. Robert Bruce Batra had hit the jackpot.

‘And, who are the buyers?’ I asked.

‘Oh! There are many. NGOs whom I call ‘Noise Generating Organisations’, political parties, fledgling politicians from universities, school students – ab kaun kaun bataun, Sir. I am also tying up with an online selling firm to supply this in retail while I will concentrate on corporate sales. Moreover, we have a legal cell to help people get bail at a nominal cost with full media coverage.’ Batraji’s mobile rang and he abruptly stood up and walked to the door without even a perfunctory adieu and vanished the way he came.

I sat stupefied, calculating the amount of the bill for the expensive coffee and black forest pastries which I had devoured believing that Mr Protest Technologist would pay for them. How stupid of me! Batra made me pay for my earlier indiscretions of smelling the flavour for free.

I am now thinking of a cutting-edge protest.