



*Ayaz S. Peerbhoy*

Cut out half tone. What else could be the title of the half written memoirs of a man who loved advertising?

It was a mature love. He had already experimented with life on many levels. . . . . journalist and freedom fighter, playwright and art critic, antique collector and industrialist, even Chef Supreme at the Chetana Restaurant. He hadn't yet found his métier.

In advertising he found it.

The man who joined J. Walter Thompson as a Management Trainee in 1938 went on to become one of the few Indians of the day who helped write, not only JWT, but advertising history in India.

In 1950 he was sent as Development Attachment to JWT-UK and JWT-USA. He came back with very definite notions of how Indian advertising must develop a truly Indian ethnic flavour if it was to motivate the Indian buyer.

His eighteen years at JWT enabled him to handle some of the world's most famous accounts. A short stint as Managing Director of Everest gave him the experience of running an agency. In 1960 he started his own Marketing Advertising Associates with a billing of Rs 60 lakhs, hand-picked accounts and a highly motivated team.

Marketing Advertising Associates did not narrow his horizons down to the getting and keeping of business. It provided him with a base from which to fight all advertising crusades, organise professional bodies, throw himself into a dozen activities.

What advertising gave Ayaz Peerbhoy was a lifelong cause. What Ayaz gave advertising was a little more. He gave himself.

He brought to it tremendous confidence and belief in its efficacy. Boundless enthusiasm. By the very standards of professionalism he set himself, he gave to it the dignity of a profession.

Long before it went into jargon he saw the need to give it firm roots in research. In the absence of training facilities he turned MAA into an academy for a whole generation of advertising men and women.

In 1962 as President of Advertising Agencies Association of India he helped formulate a code of ethics for agencies. In 1964 he wrote and published the first book on Indian advertising. 'Advertising & Research' is still used as a textbook for specialised studies. In 1969 he was President of Bombay Management Association. In 1970 as Chairman of the 7th Asian Advertising Congress he acted as its 'chief strategist, map plotter and traffic policeman' to make it the event it was. In 1972 he was awarded the ISA Khatau Gold Medal for his contribution to the profession. In 1979 he was elected President of the Audit Bureau of Circulation. An active Rotarian and Freemason he served on innumerable Government and professional bodies.

His own professionalism is now advertising legend. In 1953 armed with a camera and a sheaf of papers he climbed one third of the way up the Everest to get testimonials for Rolex watches from Hilary and Tenzing on their way down. Advertising diehards still remember the shock of coming upon Ayaz in his impeccable three piece Savile Row suit, bow tie and the correct Dunhill pipe in the dirtiest of printing presses at all hours of the night.

What was it about the man that made small pen dealers from Flora Fountain close up shop to bring him a rare Mont Blanc he'd like? Or shopkeepers from Chor Bazar put aside the rarest antiques for him to see first? A warm man. A generous man. He related to each one on a different level.

An ambitious, disciplined man who thought and planned big, because "small plans have no magic to stir a man's soul."

A taciturn, introverted man who led without leading. And motivated without words.

He cooked to relax. And turning out a perfect biryani was of as much moment as a perfectly tuned campaign.

It was his expert eye that saw strokes of greatness in the paintings of M.F. Hussain long before the world did. His was the art gallery—the Asper—that promoted Hussain in his days of struggle. His own collection of paintings is one of the finest.

He loved all things beautiful. A crystal ashtray. A bohemian snifter, an enamel lighter... everything about him had a singular touch of class. A flair and a style. They called him a big man. And didn't mean it in inches.

In 1980 he died with one pet project still haunting him. The setting up of an advertising academy to make professionals out of aspirants.