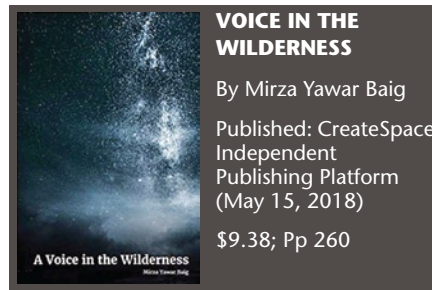


Live and learn

There is much to observing



Mirza Yawar Baig is an observer, indeed, a keen observer. There is much to observe around us and it is doubtless that he does observe, and revels in it – which then makes him an engaging raconteur as well. It is just as well then that he has distilled his life experiences into two books that he has published almost simultaneously, one titled *The world as we don't see it* and the other, *A Voice in the wilderness*.

Baig, whose personal details point to his being an 'international speaker, author and a life coach', who founded Yawar Baig & Associates, a consultancy 'specialising in helping organisations achieve their goals by aligning their structures and business processes with their core ideology', makes it clear up front in his preface to *The world as we don't see it*: "Looking and seeing are as different as hearing and listening. One is a function of the organ; the other, a matter of the mind and heart. It indicates interest, awakening and joy. You may say that doesn't apply to every case. I will say that nothing applies to every case but, on an average, listening beats hearing and seeing beats looking every single time, joy or not.

"This book is about seeing," adds Baig – "seeing with the heart because it's not the eyes that go blind, but our hearts that can no longer see."

To achieve this, it is at times better to be by one's own self, so as to observe better, he believes. To ensure that his heart can see, the author wanders off periodically into the wilderness to spend time in forests, places where there is no telephone and obviously no internet. "The joy of disconnecting from these enslavers can't be expressed," he writes. "It

must be experienced. To the seriously intoxicated, it is painful to begin with. But stay away from them long enough, wake up to bird calls every morning, listen to the forest day and night and you'll feel the cares of the world fall away." He strongly recommends that the reader too gets away to go into a forest, sit quietly under a tree, and listen and see.

Talking of his years in a South Indian tea plantation industry, Baig built up a team that managed to maximise the yield per hectare, apart from reclaiming swamps for planting cardamom and setting up bee hives that led to the production of cardamom-flavoured honey. Reclamation of illegally cultivated land bordering the tea plantations added over 50 hectares of land to the estate, helping augment production, while vanilla was successfully pollinated and harvested possibly for the first time in South India.

Technology cannot override us Mentioning that 1983-86 were boom years for tea in South India and that 'anything that was produced would sell', the writer says the Russians were the biggest buyers, purchasing on the bilateral rupee trade agreements. "Sadly, quality went out the window," he recalls. Eventually, the inevitable happened, because since people were making money, nobody was interested in listening to anything that meant more work or investment in brand building and in maintaining quality standards. Russia collapsed and so did their buying trend and that almost took the South Indian tea industry down with it, remembers Baig.

Baig ruminates through *A voice in the wilderness*, remarking that the book bears witness to what has been happening in the world in the past few years. "This is a book of hope; my hope that change will be wrought by those who understand the implications of not changing," he notes. "It is not okay to be comfortable with the social and economic disparities, the injustice and oppression, the double standards and simply the total absence of compassion within ourselves and around us."

He is confident that technology will not insulate us from ourselves and our human nature, and that the world is still real and will always remain real, no matter how much artificial intelligence (AI) infiltrates it.

In the Indian context, he attributes the Bharatiya Janata Party's 2014 electoral triumph to its brilliant campaigning and the fact that Narendra Modi was "decisive, communicated incessantly, used the media with aplomb, took every advantage that came his way including the six-week staggered voting mechanism, capitalised on a cadre of dedicated people who did him proud and stuck exclusively to a development agenda which resonated with the common man". According to him, India's Muslims were divided only 'fragmentally' so that the famous 'Muslim vote' that everyone respected and feared was rendered completely ineffective.

Baig, however, laments that Muslims have lived through high brutality in post-Independence India and blames the Muslim leadership in large measure for this predicament the community finds itself in. "No vision, strategy, unity or discipline," he maintains. "Just bravado, loud-mouthed speeches; our leaders are true to type with the kind of mercenary, corrupt leadership that we have been plagued with in India - our leaders are as corrupt and mercenary as anyone else, with absolutely nothing to distinguish them as Muslims." He observes that Islam is for these leaders not a differentiator, but a convenient tool to whip up emotions to serve their own short-sighted political agendas. "Our leaders are politicians in the worst sense of the term and not the statesmen that we need," he notes.

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