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Sachin Bansal : An Impact Making Pragmatic Entrepreneur

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Research has always focused on defining problems and solving them within a theoretical framework. Practitioner community are nevertheless bothered about these explicit leads, unless the discussions dive deep into the actionable outcomes within existing situations. The impact of research always depends on the 'concurrent pathway research' involving practitioners. This case study focuses around the pace, positivity, power and perseverance of a protagonist, Sachin Bansal, who impacted the heritage tourism industry of India with his pragmatic views. This narrative case study links the pragmatic views of the protagonist to actionable impact. Researchers have adopted a partial Design Science Research (DSR) approach to undertake the field study spread over a period of five years, fused with a series of personal interviews, skype and WhatsApp calls, and over hundred e-mail exchanges. The outcome of the research will be published at several stages over the research timeline.

Keywords: Entrepreneur; Explorer; Heritage tourism, India City Walks™, Delhi Walks®, India Heritage Walks™ Sachin Bansal

Introduction

Sachin Bansal's mind floated through the clouds that passed by the window glass of his flight in 2010, reading, observing and analysing the way life has taken him. Last time when he visited the place his suit was designed as Director - Games Services & CGA Relations with Commonwealth Games 2010. The transition from a corporate head to a self-employed experiential tourism enabler, his mind travelled long into the days where it all started. It was driven by the passion to do something different coupled with his hobby to explore the places he travelled in India and abroad to explore the story behind those places. This exploration made him take the journey to be part of tourism trade and in 2012 he created an enterprise that created experiences for their clients as they explored destinations of their choices. To bring a niche, he passionately initiated Delhi Walks®, which later became a lead towards creating India City Walks™ with many other ancillary sub brands, as a benchmark in the heritage tourism sector. The passion to narrate stories and share legacies is seen in the success of India City Walks™

As Sachin glances through his journey so far, he is pondering over what took him to the road to entrepreneurship. Was he destined to take it, or did it just happened by chance? The principal investigator was slowly cutting it out, but the message from the pilot interrupted. The two-hour long conversation came to an end promising to continue on a later date, leaving behind a pile of queries.

What is it that made Sachin an explorer cum entrepreneur?

In the month of September 2013 Sachin Bansal along with his wife, Nidhi initiated an entrepreneurship project named as India City Walks™ (ICW). The ideation was inspired by the experiential learning they had absorbed and understood at various cities in India. Business vision was to get clients immerse in the cultural identity and social traditions of every city in India. Operations were based on an integrated model with the locals of the concerned city engaged in this solely for India City Walks™ and as full-time employees. The purpose was to create experiential products that is shaped by people's cultural values and social practices.

Until this moment the various firms in operation were sole proprietor firms owned by Sachin. The entrepreneurial ecosystem was booming in India and Sachin consolidated all his operations to create a private limited firm, "City Explorers Private Limited" in 2015. The vision of this firm was to deliver and not being an aggregator for tangible and intangible memorable experiences created in the form of immersive journey of a city for its clients. The experiences involve knowing the built legacy

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through walking tours at the monuments, and offering themes of heritage, food, culture, social customs leading to life changing experiences. The services offered by City Explorers Private Limited were narrative participatory experiences drawing upon history, archaeology, art history, food history, urban planning, and environmental science. creating experiential immersion for diverse India Exploration many sub brands and flagship brands were created and are known as Storytellers of India®, Delhi Walks®, , Photo Walking®, Gandhi Walks™, India City Walks™, India Heritage Walks™, India Food Trails™, Border Walks®, Spirited Tales®, Cuisine Taxi®, Heritage Fiesta®, Water Heritage™ etc. Sachin's entrepreneurial mindset targeted disruption as customer's adoption.

A long walk with Sachin and Nidhi on 4th May 2019, across the heritage streets of the Indian capital city, Delhi opened an air of fresh discussions. The couple unwound the story of their long journey from corporate bosses to self-made employees. Taken note of the briefings, while returning, the authors quest tumbled over a couple of questions: Had his journey been worth the risk he took? What lies ahead for his venture in terms of growth? This case study explores further!

Background of the entrepreneur

Sachin, the eldest child was born in a middle-class family and lived happily with his parents and two younger brothers in Karol Bagh in the region of west Delhi. His father worked with a reputed publishing house while Sachin was in school. Later Sachin's father opened his own literary agency representing various foreign publishers in India. As a literary agent in Delhi, he enabled foreign titles to be published as Indian editions with necessary permission and copyrights. The family environment was very close knit and bond with love. There was always enough for everyone and the house accommodated all with love.

Sachin always saw his father doing his best to give all that was necessary to the three boys, while Sachin's mother was a homemaker. Sachin had very cordial relations with his younger siblings and parents never made comparisons between the children. Sachin was always bonded to his family and wanted to do the best he can for them. The neighbourhood community where Sachin lived was amazingly connected and helped Sachin in understanding the cultural nuances of society and its issues. In no manner Sachin made efforts to form impressions about people who lived based on their possessions and this somewhere inspired Sachin to appreciate the best in his life at his level. Sachin had always been hardworking and sincere in all that he did. He put his heart and soul into whatever he took up as a task and completed it to perfection.

Sachin was an average student in school and maths was not his strength. This made him realize early in life to drop the idea of becoming a pilot, which was a glamourous profession. However, Sachin had a quest for knowledge and travel. Sachin was shy in school days and it took time for him to start a conversation. His eye for detail was his asset, which still paves the way ahead. He also wanted to attract attention of his teachers and classmates for what he was good at. He had a hobby to appreciate good things both materialistic and emotive. He was inquisitive about learning and the foreign books at his father's literary agency gave him an opportunity to look into a multi-disciplinary world of knowledge. He still reiterates that the title of the book says it all and by reading the preface one can extract the essence.

Sachin joined college in 1996 and took the evening timings for the BA course in History and economics to spent time with his father's office in the morning. The choice of history was nothing in particular but that the Delhi University course had this combination to take. Two days a week in morning he attended classes for a diploma course in business and finance from a UK based university offering this diploma in India. In the morning hours before college, Sachin went to his father's office to coordinate tasks along with gathering intellectual capital. Being at his father's office eased him to get away with his shyness. The tenure at his father's office taught him various lessons about management and also inspired him. The literary agency business had to do well to serve family needs and also make profit. Each action had to be focused towards that goal. After finishing college, Sachin joined his father's firm as an employee and worked there for two and a half years starting from 1999. The decision to join his father's firm arose as he wanted to learn and be employed and always on a lookout for opportunity. He was an optimist, but idleness nearly choked his breathe. Joining his father's office made him not just an employee but an engaged stakeholder and he immersed himself in work. He was happy then to join his father's firm and takes it a route to being confident of handling things at a tender age, reflecting signs of an early entrepreneurial behaviour. Foundations of managing business started as a hands-on experience for him, without even a realization that this would help him as an entrepreneur later.

Entrepreneurial imaginativeness

Sachin had been quite imaginative in his ideas and thinking of new ways that could enhance his visibility among his school mates and colleagues later. He has been very inquisitive in his life and that is what had made him explore new vistas. He always likes to explore wherever he travelled and never gets tired. He liked walking and walking fast, often took sightseeing as an opportunity to know a city. He took planned tours with an agenda to learn about new things. Back in his home country, India, he had never found such a service that could make a traveller know the city, culture and its heritage. He has been known to generate ideas out of nowhere or rather see an opportunity that no one saw and formulate a whole plan on it.

When asked about his imagination behind innovating the current enterprise, Sachin remarked, "I recognise that the shift in young Indian mindset and adaptability towards tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for Indian tourism, but the results of making this shift can be significant. My vision for the collaborative nature of experience development ensures that the economic benefits that accrue, not only benefit the individual businesses involved but also to a much wider community. The key distinction we focussed on is that our company is in the business of creating, delivering experiences and not managing projects."

The social imaginativeness skill of this entrepreneur had created a new venture that materialised the needs and wants of the customer, which remained displeased over centuries together. Every crisis underwent by customers gave him opportunities to progress.

Path unfolding

Sachin worked in his father's firm until 2002 and then joined a company named Vertex as a Brand Communication manager. His job involved handling the internal communications and coordinating external communications for the organization. Five years into this organization, Sachin moved to work as a corporate communication manager at HSBC in 2007 for a short span of nine months after which he served as Senior Manager Virgin Mobile for one year. The rise in his career was a reward of his hard work and skills. At Vertex Sachin, was given the charge to handle important delegates and clients. Planning social engagements for them was also assigned to him by his supervisor, considering his knowledge about places. This made Sachin feel the power of having made his mark and a sense of achievement that came along. This was the time he was picked by the organizing team of the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India in 2010. He worked as a Director of the Games Services & CGA relations until 2010, as the bureaucratic process was uncomfortable for him to cope with. His inability to compromise on work and take short cuts to work did not bother him to take a hard decision to quit Commonwealth Games team. He joined as the head for Strategy & Brand Marketing for a Travel agency where he worked until January 2012. In February 2012, Sachin started a company based on his competency as he says often 'Creating Demand®', which had expertise in maximizing brand visibility for firms for their products and services. Travel, health, services, retail were different verticals at 'Creating Demand®'. This firm was built on the thinking that demand is created by letting customers know their need. In a way he looked at designing the identification of needs for customer and created solutions for firms that got him business. The experience of working with earlier firms had given him an exposure to various work styles of top 'honchos' and also taught him about various cultures. Throughout his work career, Sachin showed perseverance and pursued the task till completion while meeting all deadlines. Every task was seen by Sachin as an opportunity to learn something new and travelling a breather to his soul. The travel, exploration opportunity and love for food while commuting during work gave him the chance to reflect on what to do ahead. Nothing was finalized as a concrete decision, as Sachin gives a flashback, he feels this travel was where it all emerged from. He has affinity for Europe and connects very well with regional historic traces of human settlements.

All this while Sachin was grappling multiple roles and responsibilities in communications, important delegates to the organization he worked with and responsible for enabling them to have an experience of the city while they were in that place. Multitasking was seen as his ability by his superiors and quite often different tasks were assigned to him for implementation. He completed them all to his delight, and not just satisfaction of his superior. This enabled ignition of a spark somewhere, which fuelled his own hobby to explore. He had travelled extensively as a part of his official visit to various cities in India and abroad. He found the concept of exploration of cities in India totally missing in an organized manner. The free-lancing individuals and certified professionals called 'guides' made people to explore the city. This exploration had no sensible connect to the vast diversity of India's past and often resulted in digressed information of the historical relevance of the place.

Sachin firmly believed that his purpose was to create and deliver experiential products that was shaped by people's cultural values and social practices. The idea started with the theme 'See Delhi from an Eye of a Delhiite™". This analogy translated that local immersion is a key to know a city. He pursued to forge a new and more complete way to design and produce brands and branded ecosystems and enhance entrepreneurship and not franchisee. Over the years he had built an extensive amount of experience across international corporate identity development, innovation strategies and culture transformation. His frame of mind was based on art, culture, heritage and technology fused to bring the experiential aspect for people to discover past.

The Enterprise is born

Thinking out of the box and being spontaneous to get noticed at school had been a child's prank Sachin played in school. Sachin believes in the message of Bhagavat Gita, reiterating that the path of Karma where one puts in his best, results shall surely follow. This unique thought to do something different made Sachin started his own firm, "YEXPLORE®" in August 2012 with the passion to organise luxury tours leading to one of its kind moments. The YEXPLORE underlying theme was 'Why explore? - all is within'. The vision to look within once needs to be in a happy space and what's better than a holiday to be in a happy space. This firm catered to luxury travel across United Kingdom, Germany and America both for business and leisure. Having the success of Outbound tourism from India and take a lead of exploring India, Sachin with his creative distinctiveness, introduced walking tour brand. In September 2013, Sachin started a brand called India City Walks™ (ICW) aimed at serving client needs for exploring the city on foot and initiated heritage walks & trails. They organized individual and group city walking tours for various destinations in Indian cities.

The business rationale has been formulated on the following concepts:

- Appreciation of human past – starting a new movement for heritage appreciation with ideology of one city at a time.
- Creating experiential immersion for diverse India exploration.
- Fulfil the customer expectations appreciating their behaviour.
- Making luxury accessible - heritage being prime differentiator
- Create civic consciousness about the worthiness of the treasures we possess.
- Nurture entrepreneurship in tourism space.

India City Walks™ has won three national tourism awards and received appreciation for the immersive experiences of knowing a city with engagement and enhanced experiences. History was being created by this unique firm as a first entrant in the travel and tourism sector as an organized player offering heritage specific city exploration. The destiny to study history while in graduation connected now. Economics had to be achieved for the firm to be known for its work and the balance sheet numbers to reflect so in due course of time. The initiatives are passionately driven to build an eco-system, which fosters great connections for the locals to flourish. The heritage walks curated by India City Walks™ (ICW) are seen as an ideal way of developing heritage tourism and have transformed an informal recreational pastime into a real tourist product with potential for generating local economic benefits. Highlighting India's rich heritage tapestry of artistic, theatrical and cultural activities through heritage walks is crucial for the tourism trade, which team at India City Walks™ (ICW) is proud to deliver.

Delhi Walks® which was a passion brand was created on a vision of being a Delhiite. He intended to offer city experiences, which made a positive impact on the lives of every Indian. Passion and respect for culture and heritage was an integral way in which India City Walks™ (ICW) conducted business.

Sachin expressed his passion through the quotes, "Celebrating India's diverse heritage is all about making the country's plural legacy accessible and relevant to everyone, without losing integrity. The hustling, bustling alleyways of our cities are forever alive with colourful bazaars and lively people. A montage of faiths, cultures, customs and languages that blend harmoniously into one landscape, every city is an enchanting repository of art and syncretic architectural traditions".

Family embeddedness

Nidhi, Sachin's wife, is a graduate in Hospitality and has served premier organizations. She continued to work in her professional career even after marriage. Her hard work and diligence in managing tasks and relationships has always won her appreciation at her workplace and promotions too.

Sachin and Nidhi make a good couple. Life had always been good and challenging at home and in

profession. They had been doing well in their careers and enjoyed both work and family. Initially as a wife, Nidhi had her own fears when Sachin quit a well-paid job to pursue his dream and started a company, which had no benchmark in the industry. After some disagreements she accepted the fact that Sachin must pursue his dream. Nidhi continued in her professional career meanwhile. She helped Sachin by giving him the needed support as a comrade and wife. She listened to his vision and also gave her view on things he asked for. The click between them is the competency multiplier effect than being partners. "They both are like a remote control in which the batteries are reversed and that is what channelize the work". The established enterprise needed more than just a visionary of crafting ideas. She someone had to very closely handle and monitor operations and sales. She managed the change and created touchpoints with clients. Nidhi pitched in leaving her corporate high-flying career into the firm as a co-founder formally. Sachin not only welcomed her support but was also happy to have her on board to share the dream. As a life partner, Nidhi was initially sceptical about the risk of failure. Sachin ensured that despite the risk, it was worth exploring. It was like taking a leap of faith as for business to grow, one needed people. Nidhi supported him in his ideas.

Entrepreneurial actions during uncertainties

Sachin is very particular about the quality of the experiences gained by the clients. He ensures this with meticulous training of his 'city explorers' (guides) that enable the client to render such experiences. Values of the firm include honesty in offering and delivering up to the promise.

When asked about the worthiness of the risk he took, Sachin spontaneously replied,

"India City Walks™ (ICW) had successfully filled the gaps in the heritage consumption of India and in the continuum became a transformational company. We have created a benchmark in tourism by bringing research, experience management, employment generation in one boat. We are examining the eco-tourism practices, which also are generating a trend towards solitude and radical dysconnectivity. Alongside our impact creation is in elevating responsible tourism and the green economy through heritage and cultural product offerings".

Uncertainties and complexities are a part and parcel of every enterprise. The volatility they face due to cut throat competition and the ambiguity rising from changing policies and trends remain a challenge. Sachin and Nidhi were able to tackle this VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) situation at their best. As a human centred brand creator, he had considered culture and heritage as a context of design. The brand is defined and expressed in ways that achieved much greater meaning rather than imposing a push product onto the market. Hence, they were able to create demand, fill gaps and seize opportunities.

Sachin reverted on the query of a possible risk of entrepreneurship failure in an optimistic way. He stated, "For me there is no such thing as failure. To handle situations, I get myself exposed through literary works to some of the most forward-thinking innovators, scientists and pioneers on the planet, absorbing knowledge of the progressive thinking that is shaping the future or as I see as shared future".

Conclusion

Sachin Bansal had emerged as a great idea generator and a demand creator in the Indian start-up ecosystem. With his candid skills on analysing and contextualizing ideas, his creative skills assisted him in refining most. What worked for him is ground-up capability and mind-set to develop a product and offer services, as a delight for clients. Brought up in an age which took digital leaps in subsequent years, he recognises the shifts in the society and behaviours that is speedily transforming. His strength was based on information and it has emerged as a central power house. Armed with an attitude to trust others, he skilfully managed human beings, their behaviour as encountered in business and moved ahead, without looking back.

On an observation about his straight forward attitude, he commented, "It is better to be straight on the face than circumvent around, wasting everyone's time.Be blunt and play honest".

Multi-tasking was the core strength required innately for any entrepreneur, considering that the incumbent has to initiate everything while building an enterprise. This is where Sachin has a master stroke over time, though it is stressing, as he stated, "but passion over rules it". Such individuals are highly aspirational and sensitive, result and outcome based. Their listening ability, in words of Sachin mentions his selective listening skills is a key strength and Sachin possessed these qualities. Such creative individuals have a higher sense of purpose and may be termed or categorized into a different set of species, termed as "entrepreneur".