

An Advocate – A Chef, not a Waiter

By Saranjit Singh

“Live like a hermit and work like a horse”.

This is the route to success at the Bar. These were the haunting words of advice to new advocates by the first Attorney General of India, Motilal Setalvad.

Too extreme, the Gen Y or Z may say, but there were little options to success in the early 1900s. In fact, Article 12 of the Constitution of the USSR declares that *“who does not work, neither shall he eat”*. To the farmer, if he had napped through the sowing seasons, he should not expect rewards.

The golden thread that ran through the ethos of advocates of those times was discipline - the discipline to be industrious and attaining a high level of preparedness. However, with the advent of technology and the ever-growing information age, there is a common belief that the old ethos has withered somewhat and the buttons on the keyboard is the only way forward. Never have they been more mistaken.

The general landscape today is clear; technology is the driver, and liberalisation is the pathway which serves the client who wants *more for a lesser price*. It is accepted that law is an instrument of social engineering and social change and that it marches with dynamism of human habits, attitudes, values, needs and aspirations and that technology today improves the clients’ experience and speed in the delivery of the service being the call of the day.

However, technology and automation cannot be at the expense of innovation, liberalisation cannot be without regulation, and speed cannot supplant the demand for accuracy. Advocates have a higher duty. His service to his client cannot be consumed by the client. He serves the wider society. He is involved in the development of the dynamism in law. As an advocate he seeks the law. There are no shortcuts. The age-old pre-requisite of discipline is still the bedrock of an advocate’s vocation.

Besides that, there is no substitute of being a voracious reader, expanding the acquisition of knowledge and experience in economics, social sciences, history, culture, human nature. To be well versed with the legal lore, an advocate is required to seek and plough through legal literature and this cannot be achieved only by clicking buttons on a keyboard. Although technology is a massive aid and an invaluable companion it is never a substitute to the discipline of the labour of industry in seeking the law.

Hence today’s advocate has to find the right balance between tradition and technology; screen and print; industry and efficiency; speed and accuracy. Technology supplements but will not supplant the essence of an advocate’s discipline at the Bar.

Therefore an advocate will continue his quest to be a Michelin chef, not a waiter with an iPad!