

Who says... we are not punctual

Too busy is a myth, people make time for things that are really important to them

- Mandy Hale

When we talk about work culture in different metros of the country a much generalized feeling comes in the mind that Kolkata is having very poor work culture. A person coming from Bombay and Delhi never gets tired in saying about fast life, more money and so on and so forth. Criticizing Kolkata working has become a fashion. Who is to be blamed for all this? The most common cause for naming poor work culture is the problem relating with the time management. You really feel sick finding markets closed at 1 O' clock till evening. You feel more irritated finding the shopkeeper sleeping and not entertaining a genuine buyer. The matter does not ends here. The shops are closed even if a customer is approaching. Come to the offices, you will find different timings for arrival and departure for the employees working in the same organization. There is no feeling of guilt on the face of the employee who is coming late.

Having worked in Delhi for over seven years and around 15 years in two spells at Bombay and now after completing three years in the City of Joy, I have mixed feelings. Well, initially I never liked this metro, which is always living in the past. A very slow moving life with no enthusiasm among the people to grow. I could feel as if the place is having a long sleep after hard work. Nobody knows when it will wake up. However in these three years, somehow developed a feeling of love and attraction towards this place. I don't know why, especially when the calculation of pluses and minuses makes a long row of dashes, which can be read as minuses.

I could recall a very interesting incident soon after landing here. Punctuality somehow became a part of life with the long span of working in Delhi and Bombay. So it was difficult for me to go away from it. Taking care of the office timing of 9:30 am, as usual I used to reach 5 minutes before but the closed office doors with locks used to greet me daily. There was nothing for me except to wander around here and there seeing the people cleaning the place.

Around 10 O'clock my office attendant used to come and clean up the office and put on the AC and invite me with a smile. One day, I got surprised when he approached me with a very sad mood binding both hands with low eyes, looking downwards in whispering, he said, "*Saab humko bahut bura lagta hai, aap etna bada officer hai aur idhar garmi mein kada hota hai.*" I could not understand what he meant. So I told him, "*so what, what do you want to say.*" He could guess the meaning of my words and in a very confident manner gave me one set of keys of the office quite humbly with a murmur which I heard "*Saab yeh office ka chabi hai kum se kum aap office khol kar AC on karke baith to sakte hai. Humko aap ka khade rehna achha nahi lagta.*" I was shocked looking at him.

There was no trace of guilt on his face. What to say about the realization that he is coming late. I could not utter a word and was in a dilemma, unable to decide

what to do. Whether to fire him, give him orders to come in time or to come late myself. The whole day, I debated on this issue within self. By the evening I came to the conclusion to have the duplicate keys. At least, I was comfortable in the morning with AC as he rightly said.

The above incident is not the isolated one. I came across countless number of such episodes. Another interesting one is, meaningful to understand the pulse of the people here. To print my poetry book, I needed to purchase the paper from the wholesale market. The papers were going to cost around Rs.5, 000/- and by the time I reached the best shop it was just one minute to 8pm, the shopkeeper was closing shutters. I just showed my hand and my friend requested in Bangla to kindly hold on since we are going to purchase the papers worth Rs.5, 000/- in cash. But our repeated requests made no effect on the shopkeeper. He bluntly responded, "Come tomorrow." It was really quite unusual for a person like me who had seen in Delhi and Bombay people crying for customers feeling happy to sit late and believe me I had to come back all the way and went again there next day to the same shop and purchased the papers. The reminding of yesterday's happening to him was of no use, as the shopkeeper had no time to listen.

Talking to the people and making friends from different walks of life is very easy here. The most satisfying experience had been as a writer and poet. I remember my first visit to my publisher in his branch office here when he had garlanded me and a reception committee was arranged for me with kind words of honour, welcoming me as an author and feeling obliged that an author is visiting their office. I returned with a number of complimentary books, which were chosen by me.

Money, I don't think is having a very great place in the minds of the people here. Their value system is different. Priorities in life are their own domain. The contentment level is very high beyond imagination. A poor man is not unhappy because he is poor as long as he can meet two ends. A full plate of boiled rice with macher jhol is a complete food. Look at the satisfaction on the face with a full tummy. The cost of tea remained Re.1/- for the last 3 years though the size of the mudden pot is getting smaller and smaller. Again forget about the timings, because time is not money.

Kolkata lives with its glorious past keeping all the reminiscences alive. Once it was a capital of India for Britishers, now while talking about Bombay as commercial capital, without any hesitation we accept Kolkata as cultural capital of the country. It is no denying fact that art and culture prospered here and all noble laureates were connected with Bengal one way or the other. You can never find the satisfaction of making friends elsewhere because here a person is valued by his own virtues. Not like Delhi where people make friends with motives of short-term gain.

You should not be surprised to see Member of Parliament, film directors and theatre personalities enjoying the Re.1/- tea with samosa, which is called singara here at the small tea stalls situated at the corners of lanes. I don't know what made me to divert from the topic of this article. Maybe, it is the influence of the city of joy, which makes me to talk more about it. Anyway I am coming to the crux of the thing.

It is common knowledge that traffic condition is very bad here like any other city. You cannot be sure to reach the destination as far as time is concerned. If you ask me how much time it takes to reach to the airport from Victoria Memorial, I can't tell you in certain terms. It may be 45 minutes or 2 hours, it all depends, but you will find that nobody is in a hurry even the air traveller. The taxi driver is comfortable in the traffic jam because the meter is running. He can always have the fresh air outside though the humidity level is over 90%. As a matter of fact, the meaning of fresh air for him is the smoke what he inhales from the beedi.

Sorry, I again drifted from the issue of punctuality because I aimed to write this article for justifying this concept on the basis of my experience. There is no point in repeating about the office, the markets and the general impression people have about lazy and lethargic attitude for which the sole factor is, too much contentment and satisfaction among the people here. Whatever a person is earning he is satisfied with it. You go to a shoe shop it is to view the shoes only in the showcase because the shopkeeper is not going to take the pains of taking out the shoes from his store, trying them on your foot. When you argue, there is no result, except that you are out from the shop. Look at his reasoning; This is quite logical. You know the size of your foot and all the models are available in the showcase then why should he labour to run around that to for many customers because he is also looking for comfort. Why should he get tired! Anyway, it is going to be endless if I continue relating these kinds of matters. Because the matter will not end be it a rickshawala, hotelier, fruit seller or paanwala this problem prevails everywhere.

As I said earlier Kolkata definitely had its golden era when people from all over the country used to come here to try their luck may it be for job, films, plays, etc. The first International Airport of the country here was busiest in whole South Asia having operation of around fifty foreign airlines, which reduced to just nine today. I am not going to debate for the reasons the only thing which comes to my mind is a guess that what was the attitude of the people those days towards time management is it the same way as today because the industrialization was also at its peak here. The history says that Bombay was nowhere before Kolkata many people came here made their fortunes and then left finding weak moments here. Again, the word punctuality reminds me to come back to the topic. The people are intelligent; they are knowledgeable, too much conscious about their rights, talkative, having enormous strengths and courage to argue and giving utmost time for the cause of others. When it comes to the question of implementation of any rule especially in the case of road accidents, they may not give time for their workplace but it is definitely available for others.

The underneath meaning is also there in the form of satisfying the hunger of establishing oneself as a leader. The sentiments and the emotional level is a copyright of the people of Bengal. This cannot be given to the people coming from outside. Well it is great that they don't differentiate the people on the basis of caste, creed and religion. Like in Maharashtra and southern states. You will never feel yourself like a non-Bengali. They don't compel you to learn Bengali because they respect the legacy of Britishers in maintaining the names and monuments and also

the English language. The state government lived with English as official language for over 55 years after independence.

I don't know what is making me in not coming to the basic issue of punctuality. Now I assure you, I will talk on this only. People are punctual that to at highest level but the question is what they really want. Why I am saying it because I have the reasons to get convinced about it. Have you ever gone to see a Bangla play in Sisir Manch, Nandan or Rabindra Sadan or a Hindi drama in Kala Mandir. You can't afford to be late there because it is Kolkata, which represents art and culture. We mean business here. Houses are full. The cost of the ticket is minimal. The punctuality cannot only be observed but can be confirmed here. 6 pm means dot 6 pm. keep a watch on the correctness of your watch. Better tally it with television or radio otherwise you are liable to miss the beginning of the play. Or you may not be allowed to enter the hall. The curtain will open at sharp 6 pm. Discipline.. is there. Pindrop silence. No arguments, no talks, no disturbances allowed. Commitment to observe, timings and discipline is not ending here. At 7 pm there is a break for smoking, toilet and tea. Though it is a 5 minutes break with the ring of the bell. You will find that soon after a little over 4 minutes before the curtains are open all people are in, well seated in their respective seats. Some of them have come leaving their half cup tea and a burning cigarette which otherwise was too dear to finish. Curtain opens, play continues. Coming to the end at 9 pm. Play is enjoyed. Now where are we? There is no hurry, worry. Punctuality has been observed where it was required. Look at the devotion, dedication added with motivation without any financial incentive among the artists in the play. No management book will teach you because it is coming from the heart.

One day after seeing the play, I interacted with a gentleman who was the best actor according to me giving his utmost to justify the character he was playing. I wanted to appreciate his performance and to advise him for going to Bombay to act in TV serials, which will give him name, fame and a lot of money. To my utter surprise, he made me speechless, when he told me that he is holding a senior position in the Reserve Bank with handsome salary and perks. Acting is his hobby and as if somebody play games or go for swimming for enjoyment, it is the same for him when he is acting. I was amazed. I think I am right by saying that we in Kolkata are punctual where we want because our priority levels are different. A person is doing the job for his own satisfaction. Definitely not for money.

Today, I have a big circle of friends. Very heterogeneous. The people from all walks of life, judiciary, police, beaucrats, politicians, writers, painters, poets, photographers and many more . I asked a journalist friend why she has chosen this career when she was a brilliant student having done post graduation in English literature and journalism with flying colours. There were plenty of opportunities to appear for the competitions for holding the position and to rise up in the ladder of hierarchy. The answer came very simple. *"Why for what, I don't want to settle with a 10 to 5 job. Having a boss all the time. I love to interview people, to report the matters of public interest and above all to have a satisfaction of doing work for a cause, which concern the society and the public largely. I don't bother about the odd working hours because I am fortunate enough to have a job, which is my hobby. I am getting sufficient money and I don't aspire for too much money and perks."* I could just hear what she said and it was a good thought which was too close to reality where we can find such people... nowhere in today's materialistic worlds. It is

unique of Kolkata. Splendid, Superb, terrific very rare feeling to adopt and practice heads to her.

Don't get surprised if I say that the punctuality level, which I observed here, is quite rare. Without any hesitation I can commit that you cannot find the kind of commitment that people have towards punctuality when it comes to the field of their interest. Look at the art exhibitions, young boys and girls form groups to exhibit their paintings and if the requirement is to give the paintings by 9 O'clock in the morning the artists will be there half an hour before the time with exact number of paintings and it may be there that they have made the same by spending sleepless nights.

The journalists are having exemplary sense of punctuality when it comes to reach the places where the incidences have occurred and they are required to cover for reporting. There are no timings for them to compose their own reporting on the computer giving it to the copy editor so as to ensure that it is prominently printed in the next days' newspaper. The same situation is there for the film artist especially the actors and actresses. It is not like Bombay where these people never observe punctuality. Kolkata artists are having remarkable sense of responsibility towards work and you will never find them compromising with punctuality. It is my own imagination that the reason behind it is emotional because the hobby has become the job and they feel sentimentally attached to it. Here no order prevails; it is the game where heart and mind work together. Probably you may not find this phenomena, say the combination anywhere else. It is mental built-up or the value system people adopt since early childhood. The quality circles are created based on their own interests and likings so it is needless to say that any emphasis is required for maintaining punctuality or time-management since it comes automatically. It is really great to talk about this on the face of so much criticism about poor work culture in the otherwise, job oriented work life.

What to say, I need to end with simple words that it is a wonderful place really a city of joy in true sense where you can have your identity as a human being strictly on the strength of your virtues much away from the designation you are holding. Today, it never bothers me as far as time is concerned because I can comfortably say that we are punctual where we want. That is why it is said who says we are not punctual. I feel proud to be a part of this city and do not miss Bombay, my own house, my friends, and the success story as a poet and writer left behind...
