

About the author

Ateesh Singh is an Indian civil servant who currently serves as Director, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance, Government of India. He is an Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS) officer of the 1994 batch who has worked in various positions over Northern Railway.

Having been brought up in the serenity and sinlessness of Shimla hills, and having a civil servant father, a man most well known for his compassion and uprightness, he acquired an unprompted proclivity towards justice, truthfulness and integrity. It is this very bedrock of righteousness which today allows him to steer himself onward in the muddled and turbulent waters of present day bureaucracy.

He presently lives in New Delhi with his wife, Anita, two children, Aaira and Arhaan.

The Book

'My Derailments With Truth' is a gut busting journey of Ravina Shekhar, a beauty-with-brains civil servant in the Department of Railway. Riding on a turbine charged truth traction, she rebuffs the hallowed but hollowed tracks of hierarchy and indefatigably runs her course full throttle in the high speed corridors of power. She attempts to apply her 'chopping logic' in train operations, but the shrieking superiors mock her intelligence simply because she could 'conceive' like men. She conscientiously works with her colleagues and juniors to ensure highest standards in public service, but the roughhouse rule keepers point fingers at her incorruptibility just because she could speak up despite being at the bottom of the pyramid. The recurring derailments on her professional front fail to put her down as she resurgently revitalizes her resolve to march on fearlessly by sobbing gushingly in the darkness of the night.

Karma precedes kismet is a philosophy she understands. It keeps her going. It keeps her thinking. But the turn of events on her personal living bring her to the junction where the derailment zone starts off. Till all such time she had constantly rubbished the phenomena of true love but when she lumpishly tries her hand at finding inner peace she is scandalised at herself. A fleeting fatuous peep into her internality throws up the image of an obtainable soul mate. She is excited at the prospect and hopes to convert it into a relationship. But the understated over-particular societal incitements irrationalize her progressive and polished parents, and she is impetuously married off. BFFs Aadhira and Radha Mam face similar derailments in their life paths, despite being partners in crime on the philosophy construct. Was kismet preloading karma?

Ravina Shekhar is left baffled and bemused.

Review

“My Derailments With Truth’ is, by all accounts, the funniest way to get an insight into the Railways. There have been several books and novels based on the Railway, but none as yet which provides a deep understanding into the working inside. In that sense the book is one of its kinds and deserves special mention.

The author starts off by introducing the protagonist, Ravina Shekhar, as one who loves adversity and its appendages. Her career in the railway starts off telephonically with Khari Boli Englis greetings from the GM Res when she enters into a Station Master’s office without line clear. She is bewildered at the fancy designations of the railway hierarchy just as much the reader. But once you have cleared the first block section, it may not sound so intimidating. Ravina Shekhar runs through her first block section using just one grapnel, chop-logic.

The Control Office is the principal battlefield where the protagonist encounters one derailment after another as she trudges along the learning curve of her first posting in Tejpur Division. It is here where the author goes on to reveal the myriad comical animations which impact Railway working. The narrative offers a fascinating ringside view of games going on inside. The Control Office is described as a place akin to a volcanic hotspot where one departmental plate squeezes another just to prevent its boiling magma from spilling over. It is the place of high action, 24X7, never a dull moment. In one such enthralling drama, the DOM (Distinct Operations Manager) curses a Controller by foredooming *his future generation to be born with twisted genitals having unsuspected hormonal dysfunction which produced constant and continuous non chromosomal sperm flow.*

There are two chapters on the serious matter of inspections. Written in wavy wry humour laced with anecdotal elocution, these chapters offer a delightful reading into the folkways of bureaucratic methods of monitoring. The Safety Directorate is shown as *the fault-finder and the defect-discoverer which constantly endeavours to invent ways and means to unscrew the unhappiness of officers.* In doing so it ends up pulling out an Inspection Schedule which could keep a punctilious officer occupied for twenty days in a month, leaving the remaining ten for all other functions of railway working, be it train operations or terminal development or crowd management or manpower planning. A forty paged giant chapter on GM Inspection will have you in splits as one gorges into the sub fuscous sarcastic amusements of the God of God of Railroads.

Excerpt

Srikapash was actually trying to shoo away the media and others as he reproached the DRC for such a rueful crowd management. All believers and non-believers were frantically trying to do their own thing with God. While the media went into frenzy with flashguns and byte-baiting, the others tried to strangulate him with garlanding till his nose and eyes got choked and blocked. Some merchants and traders flung themselves at his feet as he jumped out of his skin for cover. The Passenger Associations had already been sloganeering praises and feisty zindabads as they hoped to get new stoppages and new trains. At the same time the Trade Unions had been crying hoarse with shout-abuses and jeering murdabads as they demanded amnesty from all charge sheets and pressed for lesser working hours.

The PHODs got pushed and pressed as they attempted to approach the GM. It was hard but not difficult. Most made it with the help of their younger Branch Heads of the Division. The rest

reached after the Gerrymandering Rail Police (GRP) and the Real Police Fauj (RPF) brought some order in this lawlessness. DRC was constantly looking at the growing uneasy in the face of the GM. He was beginning to get the feeling of despair and disgust. As the reckless Rock Show volume increased, fear gripped Brownny and he got a little bit of sick in his mouth.

The storyline in the book runs in alignment with the theme of derailments wherein the protagonist faces challenges on the personal front. She continues to fight out all adversities and its appendages, but the societal pressures keep haunting her through the failures of her friends and loved ones. She wages a full frontal war on her friends' sufferings and shocks but things turn out much differently. Her philosophy of karma precedes kismet receives a jolt but she holds on, but not without making a sacrifice of her own obtainable true love.

It is a book which needs to be read from page to page so as to get the real feel. Also the reader needs to get used to the salty and snappy usage of words, notwithstanding the jargon.

Recommended strongly for one and all.