

# Ode to ordinariness

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**T**he power of the ordinary is by no means an ordinary one. A mandate to run the country, the barometer of a celebrity's popularity, a parameter of an MNC's rise and fall at the stock market: the extraordinary power of the ordinary is often behind it. "Yet, at times, we ignore it", says Sumant Batra whose book, *The Indians*, re-establishes this often forgotten fact. He was in the city to release his book on Saturday.

"The common man of India has his little contribution in every big achievement, and it matters." Once the fact was realised, it was obvious for the author to overlook other important aspects of India, "The subject matter of this coffee-table book had to be reflective of India and its philosophy. There were options like the varied landscape, historical monuments, culture and traditions and thousand other similar things so peculiar to India. But nothing could compete with the spirit of being a common Indian, it defines us all, it defines India, so comprehensively," asserts Sumant.

For him, the heritage of India is a *dhobi* using coal iron in his neighbourhood, a *chaiwalla* making tea under a tree and serving it in *kulhars*, a coolie struggling to lift the luggage of others, a barber, a *jalebiwala*, a weaver, a vegetable vendor, a *paanwala* and so on. "Don't we have quite disassociated ourselves from the real India? A *dhobi* is no less a manager in an MNC, as he without even adding any name slip knows what in a set of 100 clothes belongs to whom. The glitzy, concrete metro India is a farce."

The book is a compilation of 400 pictures and his text, though the former are pre-

City-educated lawyer-cum-writer Sumant Batra's coffee-table book is dedicated to the 'average Indian'

dominant. "It wasn't possible to mirror the spirit of India and its characters through words. Also, I didn't want to bind the imagination of readers through text. It is the colourful true photographs that would aptly kick the thought process in them."

A lawyer by profession, it took many of his friends by surprise to see him pen a book on such an unconventional theme rather than an expected law book. His explanation for it isn't too long, "It's just an attempt to do something different and unexpected but by all means, I am ordinary at the end of the day." And he knows well how to substantiate it, "I too love to eat the same *dal roti*, enjoy sitting on the cool floor in summers. Am I not a very ordinary Indian?"

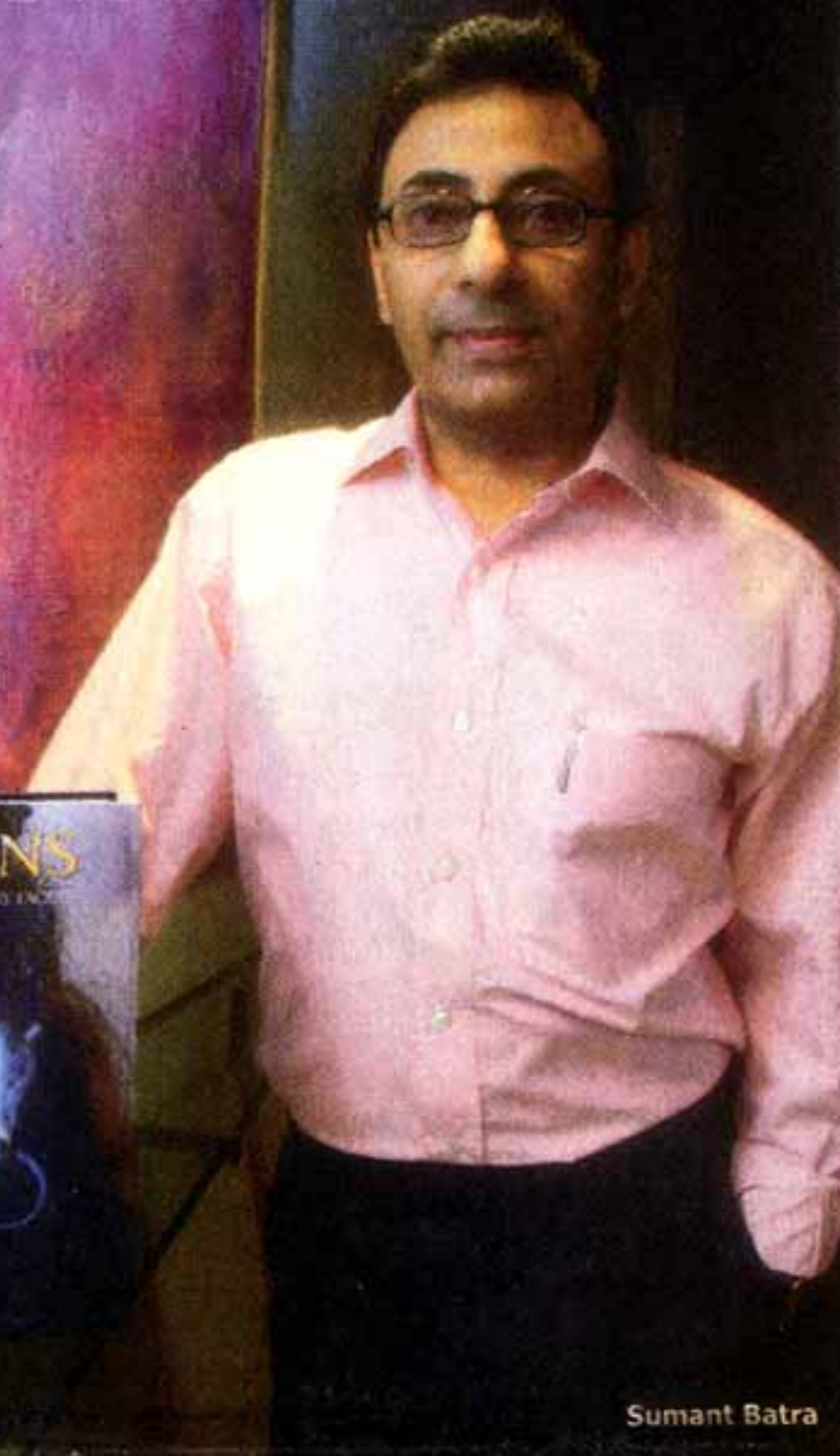
He credits the success of his book to the photographer and other team members. "The brain-storming sessions with the team worked wonders. It was then decided as to what could be perfectly juxtaposed with the spirit of India. In fact, I believe every photograph, each word, even the chronology of the text reflects the passion of a young team that rendered the book a



perfect look." The money collected from the sale of the book would go to the Lumba trust, a charity that works for the betterment of widows.

The book has a foreword from the Cherie Blair, which, he says, has helped his book get international attention.

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Sumant Batra

## Factfile

Sumant Batra has spent some 15 years in Chandigarh. His schooling was from Government Model-22 and graduation from DAV-10. He then pursued law from Panjab University and at present runs a law firm in Delhi.