Deflate balloons of extra smartness

There is no dearth of people who would like to put you down. Don't frown, just use quick-wit to outdo them. ■ by Wg Cdr DP Sabharwal

Birbal was one of the *nauratnas* (nine jewels) in King Akbar's court. He is generally referred to as the 'court jester' meant to entertain the king. However, he was much more than that. Each one of us has been exposed to many of his stories and anecdotes. Most of these relate to his wisdom and out-of-the-box solutions to the perplexed and seemingly difficult situations put forward to him by the king. However, many times, when he was made the target, he came out with most appropriate answer through his so-called Hazir-Zawabi (quick-wit). Let us savour just two of such anecdotes.

Akbar, his son Prince Salim and Birbal were hunting. As the day warmed up. Akbar and Salim took-off their heavy coats and gave them to Birbal to carry. Then Akbar said to Birbal in jest, 'It looks like an ass' load.' Instantaneously Birbal replied, 'No, your Majesty, more likely of two asses.'

Birbal introduced Akbar to the taste of mangoes and that too eating it the way Indians do, trying to suck out the juice from the whole mango. Akbar wanted to acknowledge his gratitude to Birbal, so invited him to enjoy the fruit in his company in the court. After eating the pulp of the mango, Akbar started throwing the



seed and skin of the mangoes to the pile in front of Birbal.

Having his fill, the king addressed the court and said, 'Look at the huge heap in front of Birbal. He is a real glutton.' The Birbal in his un-ruffled tone said, 'You are right Majesty. But while I have discarded the seed and the skin, you seem to have relished that as well.'

The politicians

Tough the art is dying, yet many politicians have the 'knack' of delivering the punch at the right time. Their quick-wit makes them loveable and almost infallible against their adversaries. Two of the all-time greats were British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American President Calvin Coolidge.



Lady Astor and Winston Churchill were once locked in a battle of wits.



Prussian King Fredrick II and French philosopher Voltaire.

Dorothy Parker the American writer, best known for her wit and wisecracks once said. 'Mr Coolidge, I have made a bet against a fellow who said it was impossible to get more then two words out of you.' The President coolly replied, 'You lose.'

Lady Astor, the first woman to sit as a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons in Britain, told Churchill, 'If I were your wife Sir, I would poison your coffee.' The ever cool and unruffled Churchill replied, 'If I were your husband, I would happily drink it.'

The writers

There have been writers of all hues and shades. Many of them are pretty serious in their writings as well as in life while there are many who are serious with their work, but pretty lively in their normal interactions. They are not commonly known to take digs at others but there have been many notable writers who have been pretty good at delivering punches.

William Faulkner, Nobel Prize winning American writer once, referring to his contemporary, another Nobel laureate Earnest Hemingway, said, 'He has never been known to use a word that might lead a reader to the dictionary.' Hemingway retorted, 'Poor Faulkner, does he really think big emotions come from big words!'

The King Fredrick II of Prussia once invited the French Philosopher Voltaire, known for his wit, to a boat trip. Voltaire was very pleased but soon noticed that there was a hole in the boat and it started to sink. He

requested the King to let him get down. The king laughed and said, 'I see that you are very afraid of your life, but I am not.' Without losing a moment Voltaire replied, 'That is understandable. There are lots of kings in the world but only one Voltaire.'

Husband-wife

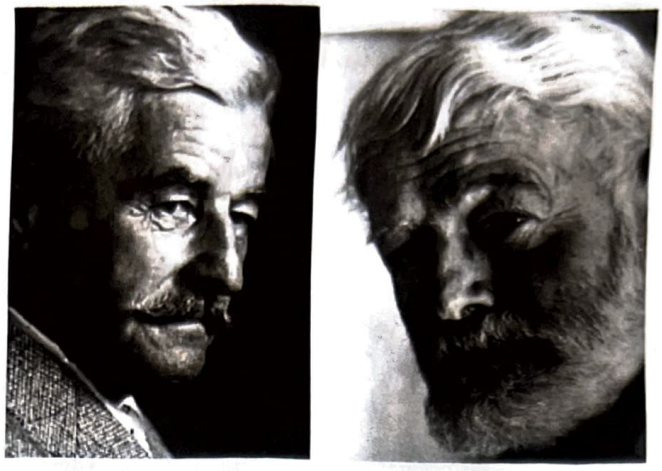
The team has often been described as the two sides of the same coin, which cannot see each other, yet have to remain united forever. In another description, they are like the two banks of a river that can neither meet, not can get separated. Whatever the case may be, the fact is there have been numerous instances when one has pricked the other at the right spot.

After a quarrel, a wife said to her husband. 'You know, I was a fool when I married you.' The husband did not blink an eyelid and in a very cool voice replied, 'You are right dear, but I was in love and didn't notice.'

A white couple got a black child. The husband was obviously perplexed and in an angry voice asked, 'both you and I are white. How come the baby is black?' The wife with a grin replied, 'It is pretty simple: You hot, me hot and the result is burnt baby!'

Corporate world

Most of us have the deepest love and affection for the computers because of the way it has enhanced and created a value-addition in our lives. This fact is known to the bigwigs in the industry and hence, in a moment of inflated self-praise, a giant company compared the computer industry with the auto industry and came out with the statement: 'If Ford had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would all be driving $25 cars that got 1,000 miles to the gallon.'



William Faulkner and Earnest Hemingway.

In no time, the Ford Foundation supposedly issued a press release stating that 'if Ford had developed technology like Microsoft, we would all be driving cars with the following characteristics:

- For no reason whatsoever, your car would crash: twice a day.
- Occasionally your car would die on the freeway for no reason. You would have to pull to the side of the road, close all the windows, shut off the car, restart it, and reopen the windows before you could continue.
- The oil, water temperature, and alternator warning lights would all be replaced by a single 'this car has performed an illegal operation' warning light.
- The airbag system before deploying, would ask, 'Are you sure?'
- Every time a new car was introduced, car buyers would have to learn how to drive all over again because none of the controls would operate in the same manner as the old car.
- Above all, you would have to press the 'Start' button to turn the engine off.

In day to day life, one is bound to meet many people, who would try to show-off as to how smart they are. No problem in that; just let them be alone. But there are few who try to be over-smart and would try to take a dig at you and try to put you down. These are the people whose balloon of over-smartness needs to be deflated. It is pretty simple. Just use a little wit and the job would be done.

Once Oscar Wilde, the famous Irish writer, known for his biting wit was asked, 'do you know you hurt other's feelings, are you a gentleman?' The simple reply was: A gentleman is one who never hurts anyone's feelings unintentionally, so you decide. ■

CHILD IS A CHILD IS A CHILD

Friends come first

Children are so fickle that often it results in bickering among them. In the recent past, it came to my knowledge that my little daughter in class three had had some bitter moments in her class. She came with the complaint that some of her classmates were making fun of her and even beating her in the school bus. I noticed that she was reluctant to go near those annoying kids.

The incident made me realise that it was nothing but the childish pranks of the innocent children. But I had to console my disappointed daughter. So, I told her whimsically that she should beat the mischievous kids to teach them a lesson. As soon as my daughter listened to my remarks she quipped — "Papa, as they are my friends I have to think of and change my nature before I beat them." I had never expected such a reply and so I was ashamed of it. Really a child has his/her own perception.

— *Durbadal Ghibela*

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