

# Ideas to change the world

Ravi Nawal speaks about the inspiration for his first book, a collection of 21 short stories

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**R**avi Nawal's first book has already earned him high praise from names like Nandan Nilekani and Deepak Parekh. In *India Can* (Bloomsbury), Nawal, a managing consultant, presents a collection of short stories that readers can relate to and empathise with. From long-distance commutes to cyber security, from rural banking to education, Nawal puts forth 21 original, innovative solutions to problems the country faces today. Excerpts from an interview.

**Tell us about the reasons behind writing this book.**

We have been having a lot of conversations around the demographic dividend of India. The question that pops up often is: 'what is the next step that would absorb all these young people in the country, put them into meaningful employment, keep them out of harmful activities and meet their expectations?'

Then, there is also an increase in the number of conversations around how local businesses can deal with the onslaught of global companies, especially large tech-enabled players. These two things tie in together, because to provide meaningful employment to the youth, we will need to create an environment of enterprise and encourage entrepreneurship. These would naturally be smaller enterprises, and they'd have to be supported either through regulation or by creating some kind of eco system that could scale them up in size, so that they could compete with larger enterprises.

Both these things came together and led to the idea of writing the book.

**So essentially, the ideas came first, not the desire of writing a book?**

Definitely. I wondered, how could I make an immediate contribution, how could I



make these ideas I had immediately available, the ideas that I thought could be useful. One of the ways was writing them in a book.

**Instead of opting for a straightforward approach, where you'd present your thoughts, you've opted for fiction – short stories that contain the idea within them. Why?**

I wanted to advance 21 ideas in different areas, and when I first thought about it, it was to be a more straightforward, academic book. But when I discussed it with my family, especially my wife, she said, 'Ravi, this book

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would end up on a scholar's table alone. Couldn't you make it for the masses?' That's how we decided on selling each idea through a short story. If you look at them, each story creates empathy around the life of the characters in them.

The characters, the way they've been crafted, are empowered individuals, regardless of the strata of society they come from. They come up with solutions to their own problems. I did this to leave a positive note with the reader, that one can make a difference, change one's circumstances and deal with challenges.

**How was it to write fiction and find the right story for each idea?**

The idea was there; we tried to build it into a story, and given my management background, it was not very easy. I can handle word documents, presentations, excel sheets, but coming up with a short story, as any other writer will also vouch, is very difficult.

Essentially, what I did was find the milieu that this idea would particularly resonate

**that made it into the book?**

We tried to keep a balance between the ideas around the rural, urban and non-urban issues. Then, there was a skill-based balance. Some ideas, for example, around cyber security, I would put on one extreme, since it requires a fair level of competency and specific skill set. At the other end were ideas like motorcycle taxi, about a woman who has a commuting problem, which can be picked up by most people.

**What do you hope for this book?**

One, everyone should have access to the book, so that they can discuss the ideas, their merits and demerits. Hopefully, in some cases, they'd come up with better ideas to meet challenges. Second, the book should travel to the influencers and decision makers, both in the private and public domain, corporations and government. There are a couple of ideas in this book that I believe can go a long way if supported by these two entities.