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Kalle Bhai is a man of stories and mystery. He knows every nook and corner of Chanderi, a small town in Madhya Pradesh. He knows every single person who lives here, and he is great at documenting his experiences. He always carries a diary with him wherever he goes. In this diary, he jots down stories, experiences, information, his finances and anything that he finds exciting.



He has surveyed the entire village, and has a list of names of all the stone artisans, block printers and handicraft artisans. Not only does he have their names written down in Hindi, but also rewrites them in Bengali and Punjabi (Gurmukhi), simply to practice his knowledge of scripts that he knows. Besides these three languages, Kalle Bhai can also read and write in Urdu, Brahmi, Gujarati and English. Interestingly, Kalle Bhai dropped out of school after Class VI due to financial reasons and his teacher's insensitivity towards him when he promised to buy school books within a week. An ardent collector of currency and coins, in his diary, Kalle Bhai has listed down names (in Punjabi) of all the RBI Governors of India since 1935.



Recipes of traditional Chanderi dishes, names of herbs and medicines, relatives to be invited for any family wedding (he has nine children), travel plans and details, you name it and he has it all listed. His love for languages is evident in the diary, where he has written thoughts and interesting facts in different scripts. One of the most interesting lists is the one with the names of cities he has visited its mosque to read the namaaz. That list is two pages long! To gain access to this book is an invitation to be a part of his life, and everyone he meets is invited.



A Class VI dropout, Kalle Bhai has not had any formal education. And yet, he is one of the most learned people of the area. He says this is all because of his thirst to learn something new every day. After becoming a tourist guide, he realised he needed to learn English to be able to converse with national and international tourists who visited Chanderi. He learnt spoken English with the help of tourists and local youngsters, making notes and flash cards and vomiting out word to word. He now hosts guests from across the globe, and can even converse in broken French, besides his fluent English of course. His interest in languages pushed him further to learn Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Farsi, Brahmi, and Kharoshti, which he practices every day.



He has taught himself how to use the Internet and explore the World Wide Web, finding new and interesting things and increasing his knowledge. He is also a calligrapher and his adieu gift to every friend who visits Chanderi is a postcard with their name written on it in a beautiful handwriting. Another of his interests is collecting coins, and he researches on the history of each and every coin — the era they came from and about the dynasty of the period. Capitals of countries, names of famous cities and general knowledge, Kalle Bhai is up to date with everything!



Hailing from a financially weak family, Kalle Bhai studied in a government school in the village till Class V. During his summer vacations, he used to sell peanuts and chana at the local movie theatre to earn money to buy stationary required for school. He dropped out of school because his family did not have the money to buy his new academic year's stationary. He needed a few more days to arrange the same, but the teacher insulted him and Kalle Bhai never returned to the school again. In order to support his family, he has sold snacks at village fairs, worked at grocery stores for a mere salary of Rs 15 per month, which over the course of nine years increased to Rs 525.



Kalle Bhai got the opportunity to become a painter after learning the art from his uncle in Bhopal during one of his visits to the city. When he returned, Kalle Bhai took up the task to paint all the notices, sign boards and walls across the entire village. The temple near his house still has the writings he did painted 30 years ago. A simple man, he is also lovingly called *Kalle Painter* in the village. Fifty-three-year-old Kalle Bhai slowly understood the importance of having basic education as he saw his children grow up and study. Watching them learn, in 2007, he took the decision to take the Class X Board examination and then went on to finish Class XII in 2009. This year, Kalle Bhai has enrolled himself for a undergraduate degree from an open school. Gaining inspiration from his sons, he plans to pursue a PhD in near future. Interestingly, through many professors and students that he has assisted in their history and heritage projects, Kalle Bhai even has an honorary offer to do his PhD from the Yale University. But as of now, he's happy in Chanderi.



Kalle Bhai has spent his entire life in Chanderi. He knows every nook and corner of the place, and is a respected member of the community. His closest friend is Mohd Waris, a childhood friend who stays in the neighboring house. Their fondest memories are of studying together under a bulb on Waris' terrace and their daily walks to school. Swimming in the jungle lakes before sunrise, and a brush with ghosts! Kalle Bhai has also filled in copies and notebooks for his friends Tahir Mohd and Mukhtasar Ali, who were weak in studies, to save them from the teacher wrath for not completing their homework. But Kalle Bhai charged 25 paise for these assignments. While narrating about the time he and Mohd Abrar cycled to Lalitpur (40 kms away) to watch a movie, his eyes light up. *“Hum raat ke 11 baje ghar waapis aaye the thake hue. Kissi ko pata nahi tha hum kahaan gaye the, aur uss raat ko bohot maar padi thi hum dono ko!”* His love for his family and friends are what has made him such a popular figure amongst his guests!



His becoming a guide was a matter of chance. Years ago, a foreign delegation had come to Chanderi for research work, and a misunderstanding with the local community brought Kalle Bhai in contact with the group. Impressed with the knowledge Kalle Bhai had on the history and culture of the town, they motivated him to become a tour guide and help promote tourism in the area. Through the years, he has hosted people from across the world, and is a go-to person for the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Department. He typically offers a two-day guided tour of Chanderi, starting with the heritage walk around the community by foot, visiting all the monuments and sites. He then takes his guests on a tour to the rock paintings situated outside the town, as well as a couple of waterfalls and 5th century temples. The one thing which stands out in his tour is the dinner he hosts at his house. He likes to play a little game with the foreign tourists. He places name cards of his guests around the table, written in different Indian scripts. The guests then have to guess their name card, and take their seat. He believes this experience brings his guests closer to India, as languages are something they are not exposed to.



Everyone in the community knows Kalle Bhai either as Kalle Painter or as Kalle Guide. Having grown up in the community, people know his family and him very well. The grocery store he worked at for almost 10 years was at the main bus stand of the village, thereby giving him the chance to meet more people (local and visitors) with whom he liked to share his experiences and building relationships. He recalls that the first time he helped an international research team was actually the first time even he went around every corner of the town. As a part of their research, he had to document various aspects of the town, which led to him building bonds with more members of the community. Today, he is one of the most resourceful people in the village, and through his large contact base and eagerness to help, he is also the most trusted person. As a guide, he often has to visit nearby heritage villages. This has helped him build relations beyond Chanderi, the town. And even these village families treat him like family.



Kalle Bhai is an integral member of the community who has, from the start, helped Chanderiyaan be established in the town and become a brand. Right from finding labour to renovating the infrastructure to mobilising the community to allow digital interventions in their cluster; he has been with DEF through it all. Aside from his work as an official tourist guide, Kalle Bhai also helps run DEF's Chanderiyaan centre, and co-handles the managerial role. He has also played a crucial role in the expansion of Chanderiyaan, and in ideation for new opportunities. Chanderiyaan is a Digital Cluster Development Programme that is aimed at empowering the handloom weavers of Chanderi through digital interventions. On your next visit to Chanderi, don't forget to take your daily dose of knowledge from him.