

'Nothing is ever lasting' Maj Gen GG Dwivedi (ret'd)

I perched myself tactically on a vacant bench so that I could have a bird's eye view of the Harvard Square, as I waited for my wife to shop for souvenirs. She was to join me after a hectic day at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she was attending the Senior Educator's Programme. Enjoying the sunny June afternoon, I sat watching hordes of starry-eyed freshers on an orientation tour, all set to make their entry into the elite university; reminiscing my own experience as an 'exec-edu' participant at Kennedy School.



Suddenly, I was jolted from the semi-slumber state, when I saw a well-built elderly gentleman standing in front of me and gesturing for help to sit down. Promptly, I got up and lent my shoulder so that he could slip on to the bench. Moaning with grief, he cursed his knees, the most precious part of the body in younger days when he was a renowned footballer. Today, these very knees had become a handicap and source of unbearable pain. I empathised by complimenting him for taking life in his stride in the twilight years.

Soon, he seemed to have disengaged from me as I found him making efforts to strike a conversation with passersby. A bit intrigued, I tried to ignore him by digging into the book "48 Laws of Power" by Robert Greene that I was carrying. Through the corner of the eye, I observed that barely one in ten people he accosted cared to reciprocate.

Abruptly, he inched towards me and smilingly gestured, "You are apparently reading a book on power! Everyone wants it. Once I too possessed it, as a celebrity. It's a very heady stuff". Clenching my right arm tightly, he grinned and quizzed me: "If you are following the 2014 World Cup, then tell me 'who is Neymar?'"

"Brazilian star striker — and who doesn't know him?" I replied with an air of confidence. Promptly, he shot back his next question, "What tattoo does he support on his neck?" I was now stumped.

Loosening the grip on my wrist, he whispered the words "tudo passa" as if sharing a secret. Painstakingly, he explained to me that pair of Latin words meant that "nothing is ever lasting", particularly position and fame. Elaborating further, he went on to define how power corrupts by isolating individuals from the ground reality, forcing them to live virtual lives

and missing out on basic human relationships. Making a case in point, he mumbled, "Just saw, how hardly anyone cared to respond to my innocent gestures a little while ago! All these people are in trance, intoxicated with power".

Sensing a captive audience in me, he paused for a while. Then taking a deep breath, in a heavy emotional tone, teeth clenched and tears dripping down his bearded cheeks, he sighed: "Ironically, the very assets which catapult one to fame, later undergo mutation and manifest as the Achilles' heel. Look at my knees!"

With a little support from me, he stretched out on the bench with eyes closed. As I got up to leave, he forced a smile, reminding me that the ordinary people are blessed, as they have a heart, both for nature and humanity. They never suffer the pangs of loss of power. I was soon hot footing to catch up with my wife to share the joy of being just an ordinary mortal — but the blessed one!