

Interview with Harsh Bhagirat Buch

1. Tell us where you grew up and about your family.

I was born and brought up in the bustling city of Mumbai (then Bombay) in 1991 to a father, Capt. Bhagirath Buch, who at that relevant time was climbing the ranks in his career as a merchant sailor and a mother, Mrs. Deepti B. Buch, who had commenced a professorship in a college teaching Microbiology to undergraduate students. My family then consisted of my parents and my maternal grandparents who lived with us. My late maternal grandfather was a renowned General Physician who at the zenith of his career was a Medical Director of a leading Hospital and an honorary advisory member to several committees responsible for social development. My schooling was in a small setup school close to our residence to aid in convenience to my mother for times when my father was sailing for several months. However, since childhood, I have been inquisitive and curious and self-learning never stopped.

Right from the age of six months, I had the opportunity to sail as a supernumerary on board my father's ships. In hindsight, I feel that exposure has sculpted me to be the person I am today. Exposure to cultures of the world intrigued my anthropological and linguistic side and often I would try to learn languages and cultures and assimilate my learning into interactions with relevant people. To date, I am passionate about meeting people, conversing and understanding the intricacies of various cultures, more so relevant in today's times of crisis of faith.

On one of the occasions on board a vessel my father was commanding while awaiting disembarkation, a pilot from Singapore casually interacted with me about my plans for the future. An answer, unexpectedly and as a complete surprise to myself, happened to come out, "A Lawyer For Sailors", I said. The Pilot was naturally surprised to see a 12-13-year-old boy committing his thoughts to a profession. He then introduced me to the concept of Maritime Law, however, cautioned by saying that practising Maritime Law was luxury litigation and would not earn my daily bread. So I must take practicing law seriously. I had commenced doing my personal research on legal practice.

Years passed. However, this ambition remained undeterred. This worried my parents. As a first-generation lawyer, what if I don't make it and fall short and am unable to make a career? Parents' Paranoia knows no bounds. Therefore, succumbing to my parents' views, I undertook Computer Sciences as my primary graduation. Again, my aim to take up law did not waver. Upon graduating, I secured admission to a law school. This was also when I met my companion for life, my future bride, Ms. Nikhita Kidiyoor.

Through law school, I was consistently involved in various niche aspects of Indian Law and I continued my determination to make Maritime Law my expertise. Post Qualification, I have spent time and invested efforts in spreading legal awareness and education amongst the general society while practising litigation and serving the society and contributing to the judiciary's aim of dispensation of justice.

2. Why did you choose the education you did?

I chose to study law with the primary intention of serving society and making justice accessible to all. Personally, I feel that in society Academicians and Policemen need to be respected and remunerated top tier. In a society that does not follow this, civilians' rights will be abused. Alas! The world today is

not ready for this and therefore I have taken the banter to right one wrong at a time through my practice. Furthermore, I chose to study Maritime Law because I am extremely passionate about public international law, contractual laws and my proximity to maritime life since childhood. In Maritime Law, I feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, I have seen the life of seafarers, and I have first-hand witnessed the crucifixion of seafarers for commercial needs. To return to the world that provided a life of convenience, opportunities and comfort, I make it a method and pursue as many crew abandonment claims to their logical end, at times, pro bono. I wish to revive the notion, unfortunately, that is lost today, that advocacy is a noble profession.

3. Tell Us About Your Current Work and Position

I am an independent advocate practising Commercial, Maritime and General Litigation before various High Courts in India as well as before the Supreme Court of India. I am affiliated with the Merchant Navy Welfare Board, India as an advisory member and as an industry expert peer to several law schools giving in-depth practical knowledge to incumbent graduates. I have been practising for the past 8 years in India.

4. What made you decide to study at WMU.

Understandably to enhance a career in Maritime Law, I chose to take up Master of Law - International Maritime Law from WMU. Its interesting and somewhat destined that I was to graduate from WMU. Prior to the commencement of my practice, I was scheduled to take the same programme from the University of Southampton, UK. However, due to exigent circumstances that got indefinitely deferred. This loss of opportunity bothered me and weighed on my mind. Hearing about WMU from industry seniors and colleagues, its distance learning programme and its credentials of being instituted under the IMO charter, my fervour to fulfil my ambition reignited and without any further time being wasted I enrolled for the LLM Programme.

5. How did you react to receiving the Richard Charvet Scholarship?

Honestly, sitting there, having just graduated I was already elated and everything after walking down the stage and being awarded my Degree seemed to be a scene from a fairy tale. I was oblivious to my surroundings and was only cherishing the moment. When it was announced that there were certain additional prizes for the graduates that day, I wasn't even anticipating anything more as that would have been beyond my dreams. All along, I looked forward to throwing my graduation hat in the ceremonial celebration and I had achieved it. However, when my name was called as the recipient of the Scholarship, not only was I dumbfounded but also mesmerized. All of this suddenly seemed like an impossible dream that I would keep dreaming every night. Throughout my childhood, I have not been a very academically accoladed child and receiving this Scholarship, made me reach out to my past self and give a thumping pat on the back to simply smile and say, You did it, boy! Even today, at 32 years, the rush of schoolish triumph and childish gush of feelings of joy overcame all over and the poised and calm professional adult me took a back seat spectating the exuberance of a student me.

6. How should you use the prize sum?

Pardon my candour, but I will definitely make a pleasure purchase out of it, More like a memento to stay with me at all times. But on a more serious note, I wish to contribute to the future of maritime law. I already have plans to obtain a UK Solicitor's qualification by taking the SQE and also hope to submit research for doctoral assessment. Therefore, the sum received will be reinvested into further educational conquests.

7. What future ambitions and goals do you have?

My ambition is to be recognised as a leading practitioner for admiralty and shipping disputes worldwide. I understand this seems more like a fantasy rather than an ambition, however, I aim to achieve it. I am determined to achieve it. Realistically speaking, In the Indian infrastructure, litigators often have a very difficult start to their professional journey. Securing clients, accessibility to quality work and maintenance of regular workflow. Having experienced this myself, I want to take every opportunity I get to provide a platform, infrastructure and amenable conditions where meritorious and determined professionals do not have to leave everything on their luck for them to succeed. I want to be their change of luck and the knock of opportunity on the door of hope. This may be through setting up a firm, community or a trust, but for this, I will strive to my last able breath.