



There's Something in the Air

70 Life Stories from
India & Italy

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Italy, a Love for Life

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My impressions of the Italian way of life started thirty-nine years ago. My travels took me to cities like Rome – the ancient capital of the Roman Empire and seat of the Catholic Church, Florence – the birthplace of Renaissance, Milan – the hub of industry and fashion, Venice – a city built over a hundred small islands and canals, and also to tiny, little villages, each on top of a hill, where the entire population of two hundred people came from one family tree.

Different societies are born out of different philosophies, some for progress and perfection, others for wealth creation, some around religion and yet others for spiritual enlightenment and happiness. Italy is unique and, it seems, is born out of love for life. Everywhere you go, everything you touch, every business enterprise, every festival, every custom, every tradition is all around love for life.

On one side the grandeur of the Roman palaces, the baroque churches of Sicily and Palermo and on the other the antique tiny hamlets are actually an expression of a deep love for life. They coexist beautifully and people celebrate both these different aspects of life – one celebrating grandeur and the other accepting the simplicity of life presented by nature in its purest form. People have continued to live there for thousands of years as if nothing has changed and life is timeless.

In the Italian family system, where families continue to support each other and live happily together, is not about convenience but about emotion and love. It is not uncommon to see three generations living together as one single unit, living not just for oneself but for others as well. It is said that the stronger the bonds in a community, the healthier and more wholesome the life.

I feel the principal character of the Italian population is emotion. Food is a

celebration, the morning visit to the neighbourhood cafe is an occasion to meet and interact. Generations of families and communities live, eat and work together.

Two distinct industries drive the Italian economy – design, led by small and medium enterprises, and fashion.

The starting point of the fashion industry is emotion and not reason or logic. Italians have given the most number of fashion brands to the world. Made in Italy fashion products command a very high premium for the admiration they inspire in millions of consumers around the world. Very aspirational, in fact, they define fashion for the world. Compare the Italian automobile industry with that of Germany and Japan. The Ferraris and Lamborghinis are built to captivate and delight, compared to German cars for mechanical perfection and the Japanese for efficiency.

While large supermarkets drive other economies, the boutique stores selling artisan food products define Italy. The world over, innovation is the domain of large industrial enterprises. In Italy, every small family-run unit, whether in furniture, kitchens or home products, is constantly innovating for both aesthetic and functional beauty. For years I have been fascinated to see the simple innovation of a roll-back mesh for windows. I remember watching the unhindered beauty of the Piedmont landscape from the window of a friend's house. In the evening, a simple mesh was rolled out to save us from the mosquitoes. I had never seen something so simple but so effective before.

Is emotion the starting point of innovation or is it a necessity? While they say necessity is the mother of invention, emotion and design thinking, in my view, is definitely the starting point of all innovation and that defines the Italian way of life.

Over the last twenty years, the Bhartiya group of companies, both in fashion and real estate, have developed enduring partnerships with Italy, Italian companies and the people.

By creating a design studio in Milan, the fashion capital of the world, we have supported 150 global fashion brands for whom we manufacture products in India and China. It is a partnership where design, technology, workmanship and knowledge of raw material come together to create value for millions of customers all over the world.

In real estate, Bhartiya City, a 'smart' and an 'intelligent city', being built within greater metropolitan Bengaluru for 200,000 people to live and work in, has

collaborated with many Italian companies for providing smart solutions in building materials, furniture and home interiors. In this city, a street lamp, while lighting the street at night, also acts as a Wi-Fi and a security post; a desk in a study transforms into a bed at night; and in the smart kitchen an oven starts from a remote command. All very smart and intelligent, but at the same time designed for aesthetic beauty, elegance and appeal.

Experiencing Italy from the eyes of an Indian, I see strong elements of similarities. Both are greater than a nation, in fact they are civilizations. One is the birthplace of Western civilization and the other of the Indus Valley civilization, the cradle of the old world. And both based on strong foundations of love for life, family, community, arts, culture and religion.