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## A meek rebellion against my elevator pitch

“Welcome! Tell us a bit about yourself before we get started...” A question I am asked dozens of times a year, but a response that is still punctuated by several incoherent umms and uuhs. “I’m Malavika... I am a... I do many things...”

“Like?”

“Well...” I start off tentatively. “I’m a lawyer by training, but...”

Suddenly, no matter what else I may have to say, I don’t do so many things after all. Because a lawyer is a lawyer is a lawyer it would appear, at least in my universe. Sitting atop Maslow’s pyramid - known for making a not inconsiderable sum of money, hobnobbing with the who’s who of the commercial or political world - lawyering in India is somewhat respected (if not completely reviled for its knowledge of an unknowable legal and political system!)

But I’m not *that* kind of lawyer, I think to myself, vaguely aware of a slowly bubbling impulse to signal virtuousness - although veiled in a desire to share more authentically about “my calling”. I only practice constitutional law, you know, where people go to court against the State for hurting them... And not even for the most part. Mostly, I spend my time thinking about the gulf between the Constitution of India and the constitution of India, I persist, privately pleased with my little play on words. But really, only because I love human beings and I love the idea that we can all be co-creating our shared reality! With this, I conclude my inner monologue to an audience of one.

At this point, I’m forced against my own intuitions to admit that my work - and the story I have built around it - sadly make up my whole identity. Is constitutional law my calling? Sure, it makes me feel alive, but then so does hiking in the mountains, running, being with dogs and babies, teaching law, reading fiction, reading non-fiction, train travel, swims in cold water, gardening, playing with soil, play in general, creating, organizing ... Is there no way to introduce myself without invoking my supposed calling? Since when did who I *am* become entirely interchangeable with what I *do*, and that too, shackled to my painfully confined professional bio?

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Some years ago, a lot of good luck and a little personal strife put me on the path to learning that my mind and body were seldom on the same page. “Dissociative” was the technical term for what I knew only as voids in two decades of memories, and utter bewilderment at inscrutable questions like ‘what sensations’ a particular feeling evoked in my body. The more I tuned in to

my body, the more I realised I had no idea what it means to listen to my body, leave alone how to honour it.

Growing up too, I had little awareness (but plenty of consciousness) around my body. I barely ran, I never danced, I didn't experiment with fashion, and I cannot locate a memory of that cocktail of exhilaration and peace that follows from physical exertion. It didn't help that my schools hugely valorised the cerebral and the intellectual. The two class hours a week reserved for "P.E" ("physical education" is itself telling nomenclature) on our schedules were routinely taken over by physics, chemistry, and math teachers racing to "finish" the curriculum. And every authority figure in my (admittedly untrustworthy) memory was ever so slightly dismissive of my classmates who could not be bothered to hack the tests because they'd rather be on the race tracks or the basketball court. Such is the folly of being too much in our own heads - we tell ourselves any kind of story to make any kind of thing appear reasoned, and maybe even reasonable.

Of late, I even wonder if this mind-first approach to life is a peculiar pathology of a deeply caste-supremacist thinking in a somewhat survival and security driven society. *'Study hard, ace the tests, chase degrees in tech, finance or medicine, earn boatloads of money, and settle down; outsource all manual labour - from the cooking and cleaning to the washing and drying - to domestic workers. You do the knowledge work so someone else can do the corporal work. After all, India's poor also need jobs.'* A moment of silence would be too little for the number of athletes, artists, and artisanal bakers among my classmates whom we lost thanks to this writing on the wall.

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I want to tell a different story about myself, one where I am being in my body as much as I am in my head. I also want to *feel* this story when I tell it, not tell a story that I think *others* will feel when they hear it.

Who *am* I outside of my noisy elevator pitch?

I am Malavika, endlessly curious about life, the living, and what makes it all tick. I love human beings and their stories, and feel very lucky to get to share in the lives and stories of so many golden human beings. I've recently started giving more of my time to diffuse thinking, randomly letting my mind wander, doing *nothing* as it were. This new, free, blue space in my soul has birthed some of best learnings and insights, but also a sense of ease and lightness as I work through some dark and heavy life stuff.

In my day to day, I feel drawn to the possibilities of creation and co-creation of our realities, in gardening, but also lawyering, in relationships but also legal research, in runs and hikes but also in writing or coaching projects. I like to think of it as thinking, writing, doing, and being from the body. Channelling this energy feels new and mysterious to me, as I try to leave behind a past-self that was hell bent on *discovering* truths that were already settled by humanity's greats. I'll be ever grateful for this awe and wonder.