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As a professional quizmaster and CEO of Asia's second largest quizzing and knowledge services company, Gini 'Pickbrain' Balasubramaniam sees some of India's best minds at work, writes Shrabonti Bagchi

Gini 'Pickbrain' Balasubramaniam is one of a rare breed of Indian quizmasters who decided to make a living out of something that often remains an amateur hobby and turned entrepreneur. With Greycaps India, Asia's second largest quizzing and knowledge services company, Balasubramaniam has made professional quizzing exciting and more about applying the mind than remembering obscure facts.

In Balasubramaniam's brand of quizzing, the answer is always 'workoutable'; the questions are such that a smart quizzer can arrive at the final answer even if he or she didn't guess it to begin with. "With the advent of the Internet, access to information became easier and everything was there at the click of a mouse," says Balasubramaniam. "We recognised this and moved away from 'pure recall of facts'-based quiz shows to 'application of the mind' ones. This made quizzing more of a

sport," he adds.

Balasubramaniam should know a thing or two about quizzing. Not only was he an avid quizzer in school and college, but he once used to write a quizzing column for a leading daily. Since he was not part of the editorial team of the newspaper, his byline couldn't be carried; instead his father chose a moniker for him—'Pickbrain'—because according to him, a quizmaster picks on contestants' brains. It's a tag that stuck—most of his colleagues at Greycaps refer to him as Pickbrain, as do the people who attend his quizzes.

Currently travelling across Karnataka hosting the tenth Annual Rural IT Quiz organised by the department of IT & BT and TCS, Balasubramaniam says that hosting rural quiz shows is a fantastic experience. In fact, he feels India has one of the most vibrant quizzing cultures in the world. "Even when I host shows abroad, we in-

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variably find people of Indian origin taking part in large numbers and winning," says Balasubramaniam.

The surprises it throws up is one of the reasons he loves quizzing so much. He also feels it is one of the cleanest forms of entertainment where, at the end of the day, you learn something new and go back wiser. "I think quizzing is nothing but an alternative tool for education—here you can teach so many things through a fantastic engaging platform," says Balasubramaniam. Having worked long years at a corporate career spanning companies from me-

dia houses to the Walt Disney Group, this Baldwin Boys' alumnus made the shift from amateur quizzer to professional quizmaster in 1999. While he thanks his stint at Walt Disney for showing him the way to present everything in a smart, engaging manner, he acknowledges that giving up a cushy corporate career for a jump into the choppy seas of entrepreneurship was a tough decision.

And while it was a challenge to garner the funds required to kick off a venture like this in 1999, when awareness about alternative learning was not very high, Balasubramaniam feels human capital remains his biggest challenge. "To be able to question the best, you need a research team that can think ahead of the best," he says. He believes that a quiz is a hit or a letdown depending upon the kind of research that has gone into it, revealing that for large quizzes hosted by him, such as the annual Tata Crucible quiz that has turned into India's biggest business quiz and which he has been hosting since 2004, his team prepares two sets of questions. Depending on the kind of responses received in the prelims, they take a call on whether the tougher or the easier set will be used.

As he puts it, quizzing is the only profession in which you get paid to clear your doubts.