

# What Ails India

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**"Free Enterprise was born with man  
and shall survive as long as man  
survives."**

**— A. D. Shroff  
1899-1965  
Founder-President  
Forum of Free Enterprise**

# What Ails India

by

Rüssi Mody \*

I do not remember any occasion when I have been asked to deliver a convocation address and, even if I have, it certainly could not have been before a gathering as distinguished as this. For I.I.T. students are the pick of the country's engineering talent. I must, however, warn you at the outset that my address may not live up to your expectations of a learned speech, because I feel inadequate for the task. Whatever little I have to say will be practical and down to earth and certainly not conform to the stratosphere of academia to which you are accustomed.

I feel it an absurdity that at my young age I should be seeking to give advice to people as old as yourselves.

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*The author is Chairman and Managing Director of the Tata Iron & Steel Company Limited. The text is based on the 26th Convocation Address delivered by him at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, on 8th August 1969 and is reproduced with the kind permission of the author.*

By virtue of your education and the important positions you will be occupying as you progress through life, you are going to be the privileged citizens of the country. You will, as such, bear the responsibility of facing up to the many challenges and problems besetting the country today. Formidable as they are, your reserves of energy - almost all the virtues you may possess - will be put to the severest test. You have, therefore, to set your priorities right and then develop the correct attitude to life as well as to work.

### **FORMS OF SUCCESS**

It is very important that you should set your sights correctly on what you are going to achieve. Whilst many of you may be very successful in life, some of you may find that fortune has not favoured you. Success in life can take several forms. You can be very rich, and yet miserable. You may occupy very responsible positions, and suffer from high blood pressure and ill health due to the stresses of such a life. Or, you can be reasonably well off, have a nice family to look after and pursue some activities which are of benefit to those less fortunate than yourselves. The last, in my opinion, is the true success in life.

## **FOREMOST TASK**

However, what I have said may or may not happen, but what must happen is that, when you leave the portals of this Institute, you must have certain visions about your contribution to your country. The first and foremost that I can place before you is that you should think, act, behave and feel an Indian. There has been a serious slippage in this regard since the time we achieved independence, when we stood united, shoulder to shoulder. Alas, today it is not the same! I feel greatly exercised over the question of national integration or the lack of it. It makes me infinitely sad to think that the same people, who not very long ago were burning with great patriotic zeal and fervour and who won freedom for the country, have today lost their sense of nationalism. Most of the people appear to have transferred their allegiance to the state or region where they belong, forgetting the nation or national interests altogether. I do not know why we look at ourselves or the others as Bengalis, Biharis, Maharashtrians, Oriyas, Punjabis or Tamilians. I wonder where our sense of pride in calling ourselves Indians has disappeared.

## **NATIONS'S PRIORITIES.**

There are, however, some problems which I will place before you today in what I think are the nation's priorities. It is to these problems that you must certainly address yourselves. Nothing disturbs me as much as the phenomenal rate at which our population is growing. Every year, we add to our population as many people as live in Australia. Which means that whatever wealth or goods or facilities we generate every year has to be shared by about 17 million more people which, in turn, lowers our growth rate. Our schools, colleges, hospitals, transport system, etc. even today are pitifully inadequate. I shudder to think of the situation 10 or 15 years hence. If we want to avoid the disaster which Malthus had forecast for a nation multiplying itself unchecked, some urgent steps have to be taken. This is a task which industry and voluntary agencies must share with the Government. Unfortunately, even today I find it difficult to believe that either the Government or industry or voluntary agencies are really serious about this problem. I strongly advocate an attractive scheme of incentives which limits the size of the Indian family. I am equally for disincentives for those who produce child after

child without ever realising what incalculable harm they are causing to the nation, to themselves and to their offspring.

## **CORRUPTION**

The second most important problem in our country today is the galloping incidence of corruption. It is commonly believed that those who are corrupt are the ones who receive. This is not so. The ones who give are as guilty as the ones who receive. In a poor country like ours, to some extent corruption is bound to be more than in affluent societies. But what depresses me most is the fact that when somebody is found to be corrupt, there is no stigma attached to that person. This, in effect, means that we accept corruption as something normal and nothing to be bothered about too much. This is really sad because if we do not change this attitude towards corruption, we may never be able to attack the problem itself. There is no doubt that this is a malaise gnawing at the entrails of our society. And our character is constantly getting more and more eroded.

## **ECOLOGY**

Ecology has come to play an important part in our lives and the destruction of wildlife and forests,

coupled with industrial pollution of all sorts, is fast making our world an unfit place for future generations to live in. You must apply your minds to these problems.

They may not directly impinge on your work, but we must take time off from our daily chores to think a little about problems that affect not only ourselves but will affect future generations. All these evils that I have mentioned can be controlled and can be overcome, but they must be transferred from the realm of discussion and writing into one of action.

Our attitude towards work leads to a lack of efficiency in whatever we do. We have undoubtedly made great progress economically and industrially — although sometimes I feel it could have been greater — and we have all the means at our disposal necessary for a civilised society. However, everything we do lacks efficiency. We have industries, but our productivity is low. We have a railway system that leaves much to be desired in passenger comfort. We have a post and telegraph system where it is sometimes difficult to decide which one to use for a speedy communication. We have roads, largely unkept. We have telephones



which work only internationally. And we have a domestic airline about which the less said, the better. After over 40 years of independence, we still do not have either adequate or proper medical facilities. By and large, our hospitals are in a deplorable state and, worst of all, more than 40% of our people live below what is regarded as the poverty line. In these circumstances, a total change of attitude towards work is imperative, and none of us should feel that we deserve to earn a living if we cannot contribute to improving this state of affairs. The worker should also not enjoy a sense of security unless he is prepared to put in a proper day's work for a proper wage. There is a plethora of legislation which protects his job irrespective of his contribution. There are, however, instances in our country where industrial units and services are run as efficiently as anywhere in the world, but these are the exceptions. Be that as it may, they do prove the fact that Indians are capable of doing things as well as anybody else in the world. We have demonstrated this over and over again whenever Indians have gone outside the country. In fact, it is often truly said that there is no Indian failure outside India.

## **CRISIS OF CHARACTER**

I attribute this sorry state of affairs to nothing but a crisis of character and efficiency. Almost nothing gets done without consideration. There is an utter lack of courtesy in most of the offices. Commitment to duty is missing almost everywhere. No wonder, then, that things have come to such a pass. As most of you will be occupying important positions sooner or later, you have to grasp the nettle and try to rid the nation of these evils. This is going to be perhaps your biggest challenge. What the nation needs most to develop, among other things, is a work culture. All the developed countries have attained spectacular successes by promoting a strong work culture and making it a part of their national character.

## **A RAY OF HOPE**

In all this gloom there is one light which is shining brighter and brighter, and, that is, our successes on the economic front. We are today one of the most respected nations insofar as our financial probity is concerned. The way we have tackled our food problems and have become a surplus nation in agricultural products, after being for many years a deficit one, has been acclaimed as a truly

magnificent achievement. Even a disastrous monsoon such as the one we had two years ago was tackled and overcome without much hardship to our people. On the industrial front, the growth rate has finally picked up and is becoming a respectable one, to a large extent because of the liberalised policies followed by our Prime Minister. Lowering of taxes and progressive reduction of controls have brought about this state of affairs. But in spite of these results, there appears to be some hesitancy on the part of the Government to proceed along these lines with greater speed. In India we undoubtedly enjoy political freedom, but as yet Indians have not been given the opportunity to show what they can do for the country if left unfettered from bureaucratic controls. It will be one of the challenges of your life to make the people of India realise that freedom is indivisible. You cannot enjoy economic freedom without political freedom, and you cannot enjoy political freedom without economic freedom.

## **MANAGEMENT**

Finally, I shall say a few words about management which perhaps is going to be the lot of each and every one of you. In whatever sphere you operate in future, you will need to give some thought to the

manner in which you will do your job, and this is what is known as 'management': Management is not in the realm of the abstract but is something that you practise every day-in the family, in business and even in inter-personal relations. Therefore, it can be described as a way of life. A good manager does not necessarily have to be clever, although this helps at times; he does not need to be a creative genius, nor does he need to have great financial or technical acumen. To be successful, however, he has to have a combination of all or several of common qualities such as common-sense, judgment, objectivity, courage, compassion, friendliness....the list is endless and you can make your choice. But whatever combinations you form, the ultimate aim should be credibility. I can say without hesitation that the greater your credibility the greater will be your chances of success.

The reason is very simple. When you are a manager or when you are managing things, the people whom you are managing must believe in what you are saying. Then, and then alone, will they follow your lead. If they have the slightest doubt or hesitation that you are saying something in which you do not believe yourself, or you are saying

something which you know to be untrue, your leadership becomes suspect and you render yourself incapable of delivering the goods.

In the latter part of the 19th century, there appeared on English political scene a person who exerted a great deal of influence on policy. He was the Duke of Devonshire, about whom it was said that he possessed all the most ordinary qualities to an extraordinary degree. I think a good manager falls in the same category. I am surprised how we have come to accept and take for granted certain axioms such as it is right to be truthful, generous, compassionate, etc. And yet, when we are faced with a situation in which any of these qualities is put to the test, we often flounder. It requires a conscious effort on our part to practise these virtues. Remember that an ounce of practise is worth a tonne of theory.

I am sure many of you will reach great heights in this world by virtue of your education and training and will be called upon to exercise your technical and managerial competence. However, you must guard against certain sins. Desist from putting on airs and taking yourselves too seriously. You will be surprised how much you will achieve in life through a smile.

**You can consider yourselves truly successful when you have lived up to the truth of the old Persian proverb: 'When you are born, you cry and the world laughs. So lead your life that, when you die, you laugh and the world cries'.**

**God bless you!**

*The views expressed in this booklet are not necessarily the views of the Forum of Free Enterprise.*

**"People must come to accept private enterprise not as a necessary evil, but as an affirmative good."**

**— Eugene Black**

## Have you joined the Forum?

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