

**Governance
&
Democracy in India**

Dr. R. Balasubramaniam



FORUM
OF FREE ENTERPRISE

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

- A. D. Shroff
Founder-President
Forum of Free Enterprise



SHAILESH KAPADIA

(24-12-1949 – 19-10-1988)

Late Mr. Shailesh Kapadia, FCA, was a Chartered Accountant by profession and was a partner of M/s G.M. Kapadia & Co. and M/s Kapadia Associates, Chartered Accountants, Mumbai.



Shailesh qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1974 after completing his Articles with M/s Dalal & Shah and M/s G.M. Kapadia & Co., Chartered Accountants, Mumbai. Shailesh had done his schooling at Scindia School, Gwalior and he graduated in Commerce from the Sydenham College of Commerce & Economics, Mumbai, in 1970.

Shailesh enjoyed the confidence of clients, colleagues and friends. He had a charming personality and was able to achieve almost every task allotted to him. In his short but dynamic professional career, spanning over fourteen years, Shailesh held important positions in various professional and public institutions.

Shailesh's leadership qualities came to the fore when he was the President of the Bombay Chartered Accountants' Society in the year 1982-83. During his tenure he successfully organized the Third Regional Conference at Mumbai.

Shailesh was member, Institute of Fiscal Studies, U.K.; member of the Law Committee and Vice-Chairman of the Direct Taxation Committee, Indian Merchants' Chamber. He was also a Director of several public companies in India and Trustee of various public Charitable Trusts.

He regularly contributed papers on diverse subjects of professional interest at refresher courses, seminars and conferences organised by professional bodies.



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Editorial Introduction

Around the world, there are widespread concerns – indeed, alarm bells – about democracy being on the retreat; and the challenges to it are for the real. The perception is that political rights and civil liberties are under serious threats; and there are ongoing attacks on the rule of law. Indeed, books and articles on this subject written by ardent political pundits, especially in the western world as well as in India, are galore. Many scholarly debates and discourses are often held in the precincts of several known Universities, and institutions engaged in public affairs and public policy making.

If democracy encounters serious threats, then authoritarianism does gather momentum simultaneously, and the system of governance inevitably suffers erosion. Responsive and vibrant democracy is surely the sine qua non of prudential and efficient governance system. The relationship between democracy and governance is, thus, intimate and inextricable.

Keeping this broad contextual framework, the FORUM is pleased to publish this very interesting and insightful article by Dr. R Balasubramaniam (popularly known as Balu). It essentially represents the text of his inaugural keynote address on

the subject of “Governance and Democracy in India” delivered at an event in Berlin, organized by the Tagore Center, Embassy of India, Berlin, in association with the Indian Center for Cultural Relations, New Delhi on 16th January, 2019. The author’s core focus is to highlight how Indian democracy has been shaping; and how the transformations are being experienced, especially over the last about five years, even in the midst of complexities and acute divergences in India’s political, social and cultural milieu.

This subject is certainly of enormous and enduring significance for all the stakeholders of democracy and of good governance. In his exposition, Dr. Balu has brought out his rich and varied experiences not just based on his own professional medical field, but as one who is acclaimed as “development activist”. His interface spans from those who are at bottom of the pyramid (or at the grassroots levels), and for whom he has consciously worked for several decades, to those who are in the top end academic world or in government administration and policy-making. Thus, there is distinctive authenticity and credibility about all the grounds that he has sought to cover in his article.

Through some of his anecdotal experiences, Dr. Balu talks with considerable conviction on how

several policy initiatives of good governance in the last about five years have manifested in conferring the desired benefits to the concerned deserving people.

But what is even more crucial and relevant are his incisive reflections on challenges of bringing about “enormous cultural shift” – and what is also described in his concluding observations as “the fundamental change in the DNA of a country” – from an “entitlement mindset” to an “empowerment mindset”. Earlier in his article he dwells on three-fold challenges, namely, those relating to the narrative of the political system per se; bureaucratic; and shifting the mindset of a 1.3 billion people. He also emphasizes the importance of three key aspects of governance and democracy, namely, (a) **the framing of rules** – their political acceptability, administrative feasibility and sustainability; (b) **creating democratic institutions** for delivering these rules; and (c) above all, the **political leadership**.

Yet another significant observation of the author in the earlier part of his article is his honest conviction that “what has happened in the last 4-5 years is a reflection of this growing maturation of democracy and governance in India” and he seeks to elaborate this point at some length. We believe that this is an

area wherein dispassionate keen observers and scholars of the Indian political scenario are likely to have sharp differences of views – and many are likely to be either skeptical or critical...

Be that as it may, we in FORUM thought it appropriate to present an honest independent perspective and assessment of the knowledgeable and practicing expert from the socio-economic developmental field, Dr. Balu. At the same time, we make it abundantly clear that the views and observations in this booklet are that of the author alone... We are sure this booklet would motivate some of our avid readers – especially the researchers and students – to undertake more analytical studies on the developmental impact of the policy initiatives of the Government in recent years, and also to explore the intricate and intimate relationship between democracy and governance!!

Sunil S. Bhandare
Editor

Governance & Democracy in India

Dr. R. Balasubramaniam*

The words 'Governance' and 'Democracy' have become fashionable and a discussion around them is timely considering what is happening around the world today. It is also something very close to my heart and getting an activist like me to speak at the beginning of the day on governance and democracy may turn out to be provocative and exciting. That being said and having lived and worked with people at the grass roots sufficiently long enough, I have come to believe that governance and democracy is what finally makes a difference

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This article is a transcript of the Inaugural keynote address given by Dr. R Balasubramaniam on the same topic at an event in Berlin, organized by the Tagore Center, Embassy of India, Berlin in association with the Indian Center for Cultural Relations, New Delhi on 16th January 2019.

to people's lives. What is articulated at the macro level as governance and democracy manifests in different ways at the grassroots.

What I want to share with you today is something that I have understood from having lived amongst some of the poorest of the poor in our country in India. Having had more than three decades of practitioner experience on how it plays out on the ground, I am still trying to make meaning out of it and will try and present it as best as I can. I believe that India today is undergoing enormous transformation. It is very difficult for us to compartmentalize those transformations and put them in words that are easily relatable and understandable into separate silos. We need to look at it as a comprehensive whole and that is what I hope to achieve in the next 15-20 minutes of sharing this with all of you.

'Governance', 'Democracy' and 'Citizen engagement' or 'Citizenry' or 'Citizenship' - It is extremely challenging to separate them out and speak of it as though they are all independent separate entities. It is easier for me to break it down in a classroom curriculum and say that 'I teach a class on governance' or 'I teach a class on democracy'. But the way it plays out in real life is they are so intricately connected, and they are so intertwined with each other, that you really can't

separate them out. What I am going to attempt to share is the fine enmeshing of these ideas which are going to happen as it plays out at the ground.

We also need to keep in mind the context of the current state of India. Wherever in the world that one travels today, the first thing that people talk about is the economy of India. Economic growth is easy to relate to. It is easy to say 7% growth, 8% growth and then sometimes what happens in this narrative of economic growth is that a lot of other innovations that I think are extremely critical and valuable; and possibly the reason why this economic growth is happening, is generally forgotten or not spoken about. India is a nation of 1.3 billion. And add on to it the complexity of governance and democracy. A nation with as many languages that one can pick. A nation of 29 states, 7 union territories. A nation of nations embedded with political and cultural complexities. I come from the state of Karnataka, where it is not just food or language or the intonation or the way we speak, but everything changes within a 100 km distance. When one adds up all the states with their own individual diversities and try to homogenize it as India, it would be more than challenging. For me, though I would like to use the word India, I do not think it adequately captures the enormity or the complexity of the situation. And

amidst this complexity, governance and democracy plays out differently for different people.

Several years ago, when I was writing my book, *'the citizen'*, I was talking to an elderly indigenous tribal woman. I wanted to understand from this woman who had never seen anything beyond her forest, why she thought the government had messed up her life. The State had brought in a very complex forest conservation law which meant that she had to leave her forest and come and settle down outside it. The struggle to understand the complexity of relocation left her believing that 'governance' was to simply be left alone. It was very fascinating for me to even decipher that out. Scratching the surface, I told her that 'you can't be left alone. It does not work that way in a system. What is it that you would require or actually desire that people do for you or that the state does for you?' Even to conceive the notion of a State was an impossibility for her. For her leadership just meant the local chieftain. Anything beyond that just did not exist for her. The only interaction with the state for her was her monthly pension that she got. There was this imprint of the state on her and I asked her what did it mean? To her good governance simply meant a very small thing – getting her monthly pension month after month on time, every time with no disturbance. She added that the local postman

who comes – those days it came by post – who comes to deliver it does not ask me for the monthly cut. Out of her princely pension of INR 500, she had to give INR 50 to the postman. Today the same old woman – I actually went and met her because I knew I was going to come here – and I asked her what she gets today. And this is a transformation we just can't relate to. Because for us digitization or JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhar, Mobile telephony) are just words that are spoken in a conference, but for that elderly tribal woman, it is having a bank account and getting her money month after month with no postman interfacing between her and the government, and on time on the day that the government has promised her.

To me, that is good governance in action. To me, that is possibly a manifestation of democracy which makes a difference for her life. These are things that are never spoken about or debated because in the larger construct of a nation, it gets buried somewhere. The last mile down the line, the last mile problem that all of us debate about, is actually transforming lives very quietly. Well, this is just not one example. I was talking to an urban woman entrepreneur and today that is a big thing. India is grappling with this challenge of women disappearing from the work scene. We are really challenged, and a lot of initiatives are being initiated. And sometimes

one wonders whether they will pay any results. And this woman entrepreneur that I was talking to, explained the way she relates to a governance intervention. She does not understand macro or micro-economics. She does not understand the complexity of policy making. She does not understand what her life would be as a result of policy that is introduced in the country. It is easy for me to teach predictive analysis in my policy class. But try telling it to a woman entrepreneur running a small theater complex in a small suburban city in Mysuru, a tier-2 city. What she told me was, 'I do not understand GST. I do not understand any of the complexities behind it. But what I do understand is that after it has been introduced my monthly profits have gone up'. It may need deeper investigation to say whether the causality of the monthly profits going up was because the GST came into force. We need high-end universities to come and run their complex RCTs and demonstrate that higher profits is connected to the GST. But that does not make a difference to her. What matters to her is that she sees it as a milestone, a watershed in her life. That got me curious and I wanted to figure out what the transformations truly are as you start putting these together, and sort of summing up all this and understanding it. For that, I would like to walk you down the journey of India itself.

The fascinating journey that we, as a country have gone through – and if you do not understand that, I do not think you can understand the transformation that is happening today.

Now look at India, with all of the complexities and the way we got our freedom That itself leaves a difficult footprint for us in our mindsets. The way we got our freedom is historic. The whole world celebrates the non-violence part of it. But look at what happened. We became a nation-state after 1947, after so-called political freedom that we got. What does this freedom mean to the toiling millions? What does it mean to the system of governance and to the mechanisms in which governance is delivered? And to the intent of the communities in their response to that delivery itself. I believe for a long time Indians had got used to being just subjects of a crown state. It is very nice being a mere 'subject'. After all the crown took care of its subjects; little bits thrown here and there, and the people were satisfied. But all of a sudden, to suddenly move from the context of being a subject to actually becoming a citizen is not easy. That transformation is not just political. It is something deeper. How do I even transact in an environment where I am supposed to be a citizen now engaging with the state and move away from the feeling of being a subject? And being a subject is convenient for the

instruments of governance. Because if you are a subject, you just do what the State says, you take what the State gives. But the moment you become a citizen, then you start challenging the very power of the state itself. And if the state's leadership is not mature enough to absorb this challenge, it can result in very conflicting situations. We are seeing this play out in many countries around the world today.

What emerged in India in the first 60 years after our independence is for people to be content with being subjects. The State also found it easy to deal with people who saw themselves as subjects dependent on the largesse of the state. It is very nice to just look up to the government to being provided with everything. It is nice to say the government will provide for us – and that is what our constitution promises us anyway. Food, nutrition, jobs; we have acts for everything. Food security we have an act, education security we have an act. So, It is very easy to be born and brought up in an entitlement state where your only relation with the state is you should be a recipient of goods and services. And It is also very easy for the government to interpret what the citizens need simply in terms of goods and services.

For 60-65 years of believing that the state exists only for it to provide for me and the state believing that it is a provider, the entire system evolved around fine-tuning the provision. It did not really evolve around anything much deeper. And the worst part of this was the political narrative of representative democracy that India had. India has had a fascinating evolution of democracy - from a very loud noisy democracy to getting more mature and mature with each passing day. Not that the decibel levels are coming down but at least maturity levels are going up. And this manifestation of democracy was dominated by one political party determining both governance and what democracy will mean for India in the first five decades of our post-independence history. But the evolution of citizenship, moving away from subject-hood to citizen-hood, also saw the emergence of smaller political parties; whether they are regional parties in the construct of the 29 states' regional aspirations, or national level parties. The political representation in the system enhanced over time but not very successfully.

The hegemony of one party and how the growing political spectrum responded to the challenge played out in different ways. Emergency in 1975 and the subsequent emergence of other parties played out in one way. Multiple parties coming together and forming a coalition government

several years later played out in yet another way. It was now, not just fine-tuning governance as being responsive to the emerging citizens but governance as a response to keeping a coalition together. It was about responding to multiple stakeholders who start putting pressure on the governance narrative itself. And that is the reality that played out in India in the late nineties when the statesman Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. I believe that it was the first great experiment in delivering to the stakeholder's coalition and at the same time not losing sight of the national narrative of providing governance to the citizens. Everybody talks about his extraordinary capacity to keep the coalition together. And I think that is an understatement. I think that is a wrong interpretation of his life and work itself. My view is that it was not about keeping those 23 partners alive and happy, but it was about delivering on governance despite the 23 partners pulling you in different directions. When you manage multi-party stakeholder coalitions, it is not going to be easy. But that is the evolution of Indian democracy itself.

To me, what has happened in the last 4-5 years is a reflection of this growing maturation of democracy and governance in India. Where one party emerged with a clear mandate of the citizens, where there is political stability determined by that mandate, and where you are able to actually communicate to your

people courageously that now 'I do not have to respond to multiple stakeholders but to one single stakeholder called the *citizen* of the country'. And what really inspired and impressed me was when I read the manifesto of the party that was elected to power in 2014 saying that the Indian constitution is going to be the Bible, and the people are going to be our masters. I thought this flipping of the entire narrative of people becoming the masters and public servants actually becoming *servants of the public*. The public part of it was nice. But then the servant part of it is not easily comprehensible, at least in the Indian administrative context. That is easier said than done. Try negotiating with the bureaucracy which for 65-67 years has gotten used to be the master, playing the master. Suddenly it was like 'Hey you no longer are the master. You are at my behest. I pay your salary. It is my taxation revenue which keeps you going'. And that is a manifestation of democracy that cannot be digested, accepted and internalized so easily.

Getting this enormous cultural shift into a system is challenging on three fronts for me. The first challenge as I understand is the narrative of the political system itself. The second is the bureaucratic challenge. And the third and the bigger challenge, and the more complex challenge, something which I have been trying to study and understand is trying

to shift the mindset of a 1.3 billion people who have got used to receiving and being provided for to suddenly start participating. And that change is not going to come easy, because I believe governance, democracy, and human development that piggy-backs on these two is a complex engagement of four major forces in any country.

If you look at history of countries and what the history of Governance teaches us, we can tease out four major forces operating in the eco-system. The first force that determines the expression of governance and democracy is the '**rules**' that get framed in a country and the way in which one frames rules and who frames them. One also needs to understand the challenges that go into the way one frames the rules. There needs to be political acceptability of the rules, one needs to keep in mind the administrative feasibility of the rules one frames, and finally the actual sustainability of the rules one makes, because the next Government elected may throw it all out of the door.

Rules are comparatively easy to make, but creating '**Institutions**', creating democratic institutions which deliver on these rules is something that is not as easy. I believe creating institutions or dismantling obsolete ones or useless ones is also equally challenging. India in the last 4 years has

done quite a good job at actually taking away irrelevant rules as well as irrelevant institutions which were not constitutionally permissible in our country. An example I would give is the Planning Commission itself. An extra-statal body which had no sanction legitimately in the constitution or by parliament, just created by an executive order of the Prime Minister, existed for a long time and sat in judgement of the money that it could distribute to states was simply unacceptable to people like me. Another para-statal body that was outside the elected executive and not being accountable to parliament was the National Advisory Council (NAC). NAC was framing rules and regulations and had simply usurped the responsibility of parliament and the policy making process and that was not something acceptable to someone like me.

It is not just the rules, not just the institutions, but I believe the '**political leadership**' that actually frames the rules, empowers or disempowers institutions is also critical in a country like India or any country. All these three are also understood by most political scientists. What I think is fascinating and that is a critical part of my journey, has been the fourth force and I think that it is extremely critical if you see India today. It is what I would call the '**authorizing environment of citizens**' which

permits the expression of these rules. Something which permits the institutions to either engage or disengage. Something that permits the political leadership to respond to the pressures that the authorizing environment of citizens puts on them. And it is Governance that emerges as the manifested expression of the tensions that exist at these forces constantly interact and intersect with each other.

Let us now try and understand India and the fascinating and young country that it is. A country with the lowest dependency ratio - being a country with a demographically young population is both a problem and a solution for the global problems. They can bring in a lot of youthful energy into the development narrative, but look at the kind of energy they can take away from the narrative if they are restless for too long. The power that they bring to the table. The kind of aspirations they carry today. The kind of global connect they have because of internet and everything that you can see. And if you do not respond to that challenge quick enough, you might be voted out fast enough. That is a pressure point all electorally engaged people have to look at.

Under all these circumstances to have a government that actually says it is not going to keep responding to the pressures of electoral cycles alone is

unthinkable. Fortunately, the current government not only understands the importance of elections and the political narrative to survive in a country like India but has also not lost sight of the larger strategic vision that they have created for this country. A larger vision of what an India should be or can be. I think It is not an easy game. To negotiate this in the noisy political environment of India, and deliver on governance, I think is possibly the single largest achievement in the last 4.5-5 years.

Democracy as we know it is sort of a westernized narrative. The interpretation of democracy is a very global north dominated interpretation, where I even find in several places around the world citizen engagement is just taken for granted. I was just looking at the SDGs of the United Nations and it is fascinating how one of the declared SDGs of the United Nations where all the member countries have signed on to the mandate is SDG 17 and it talks of partnership. It is a nice and fashionable word today. Partnership is another cliché that we use regularly. But somehow in all the debate on partnership, all the policy makers around the world, all the people who have signed, and all the people who give reports to the United Nations on the SDGs have forgotten that partnership is not just the public and private sector. They have forgotten the very purpose for which these countries exist – the

people. People have no space in the partnership that UN has decided in SDG 17. To me, a partnership devoid of people is no partnership at all. But how do you deal with people of 1.3 billion in strength, close to 75-78% less than 40 years, where the average age of the political class, the political leadership is 65 plus; how do you even understand and feel the pulse of the younger generation and respond to it? And I think that is the beauty of what is happening in India today.

What has begun happening is reframing the rules of the game, and that is an easy first step to do. Whether it is removing the 1200 odd obsolete rules out of the 1600-1700 rules identified or framing new ones that are contextually relevant and necessary. Obsolete rules made a 100 years ago but continued to be a part of the laws of the land and one had to repeal them. This has quietly happened with Parliament doing this over the last 4-5 years. Shaping the authorizing environment meant the state had to redefine itself - from being a provider to a provisioner and that does not come easy. For citizens, to evolve from being recipients of goods and services to actually emerge as engaged participants in determining what the goods and services are going to be adds to the complexity. For the state that always looked at itself as sort of a giver, a welfare provider, and to actually

go back to the citizen and say please engage in social accountability is something else. To empower citizens to ask questions and to integrate social audit into the government's schemes is unthinkable. To actually invest time in preparing people for that role is something fascinating for people like me. If an indigenous tribal who I work with, sitting in a corner part of India's forest actually could determine and negotiate with the state that a power plant will not be put up in his area because he thinks, it is something that is going to be bad for his environment, and win the game, negotiate with the system and deliver to his fellow people that that power plant never got built, I think that is a great manifestation of citizen centric governance.

There is possibly a very nice romantic part of any discussion one can have but one needs to be empirical too. For making things easier, let us take the World governance indicators (WGI) as a benchmark. If you can look at '*voice and accountability*', and the way voice and accountability manifests, whether it could be the mygov.in portal, or it could be the Pragati portal or it could be the portal where ordinary citizens could engage - one can notice the heightened participation of ordinary citizens. I have actually had this pleasant personal experience myself where it is unthinkable that any grievance or complaint regarding deficiency of

service would even be noticed by anybody. Reading newspaper accounts how the minister himself/herself, especially the external affairs minister or the railway minister or any minister today responds to the tweets that come up, I was encouraged to consider tweeting a complaint of poor service. I was served what I considered bad food in a Shatabdi Express train in which i was once traveling. Just out of curiosity and having grown up with the disbelief that anything in India would actually work, I took a photograph of the bad food, tweeted it and sent it to the minister himself. You would not believe what followed. As I was getting off the train, there was a person waiting to meet me, to take my complaint, and then promise me that action will be taken. Now that is the first level of disbelief. The second level of disbelief was when action got taken and I was informed about it. Three days later I got a message on the specific action taken and what was done to the contractor who delivers the food. I was also thanked for giving my feedback for the same. The consequence of that act has been that from thence on, when I book a ticket on the app of the railways, I get a phone call now asking, 'Are you satisfied with the journey?'

Now that is good governance and people like us have to support it. It is not just technology for technology's sake. It is technology where people can participate.

Another Governance indicator would be the levels of '*Regulations*' that countries impose on people. I remember something that affected the organization that I founded and headed for several years. It was regarding the issue of providing Employee Provident fund. It was around 25 years ago, and we had decided that our employees need provident fund and we need to subscribe for the same. I went to the concerned provident fund officer, not knowing the law, not knowing anything, asking him to help me decipher out this complexity of provident fund. I could not figure it out at all. All I knew was he issued a notice to me saying why have you not done it all these years. Compare those days to today wherein this woman entrepreneur (about whom I mentioned earlier) told me that the Central Government has come up with an announcement that if you have 20 or more employees and you are willing to voluntarily come on to the provident fund platform, the government of India would actually meet 50% of that provident fund that you need to pay to your employee for the first one or two years as an incentive. She said because of the earlier experience of the GST actually enhancing her profit, she was considering subscribing for the same. I told her, "listen my experience is not so good, and you can get a notice asking you to back pay the subscription amount with penalty. Be careful." Four

days later she comes back to me and says I actually have the money transferred by the government to my account. And that is the power of Aadhar, that can be the power of Jan Dhan Account, that could be the power of mobile technology in India today. This is governance in action for the common citizen who normally does not even recognize it as an act of intentional governance.

My son who is a product of the technology boom is my teacher when it comes to using the smart phone and the apps that run on them and he is now studying in Bengaluru. I had to transfer some money to him, and I just asked him if I could give him a cheque. I still belong to the cheque generation. He told me, 'come on dad, what is this? Do not be stupid.' He calls me stupid for even thinking of writing a cheque. Just imagine! And then this young man tells me, just transfer it on Google Pay. I did not know what Google Pay was. I honestly did not know at that point of time. I was wondering why Google will pay for my son. And then, I learnt about UPI and how this technology has been seamlessly integrated into the banking system as a governance initiative of the Government. And the story does not end there. I got back and talked to my tribal self-help group women who are actually today able to run a food processing unit thanks to Stand-Up India and Mudra and this is a real manifestation

of the benefits they get in governance. They told me that they pay the farmers from whom they buy their ragi through a UPI app. And if that 20-25-year-old tribal mother who can understand technology so well is actually encashing on it, you have got to live in that environment to understand the power of change.

I think It is not just an emerging maturity of the political leadership the country is having today. It is also the courage of the political leadership to shift the narrative of citizens. It is a very dangerous game. Empowered citizens mean more engaged citizens. More engaged citizens mean that the demand for accountability is going to go up. And if political parties do not want that, then they are not going to do that. That is what we saw for the last 6 decades. But now we are convincingly having evidence that there is a growing need for empowerment, for engagement, and that citizens' need to be engaged with and their voices heard.

To me the greatest attainment is that we are winning the battle against poverty. It has come down over the last 4-6 years from 20-21% to 13.4%. Though there is a lot of debate around numbers and statistics today, I think the biggest work that is not noticed, that is not described or spoken about are two things. I would like to complete my

inaugural address based on these two fascinating innovative processes which have got a lot of sub-innovations under it. It is a huge umbrella under which plenty of innovations are there. The first thing I think is a very subtle nuanced expression of the government through its various programs of engaging citizens in this narrative of development. This fascinating democratization of development could not have happened if the state's intent, the purity of purpose, or the real design was not evident in all that it spoke and did. Now whatever maybe the critics' argument, I believe just bringing that cultural shift itself is a huge takeaway for me. This may not be immediately evident and will take years to fully manifest. What could be seen are some expressions of this in economic terms and the growing GDP story. It is not fighting poverty in a sense of income poverty alone. What I believe another innovation that India has done very quietly; whether it is through technology as we saw earlier or in engaging ordinary citizens even in issues like civilian award is quite noteworthy. Like in any country and other major Global awards that we know of, India too has its share of lobbying for national level civilian awards that are given out each year on our Republic Day. India's prestigious award also had the same problem to the point where India's meritorious people were never

even noticed by the state because nobody could lobby their cause. Today we have a system in the country where if you have noticed somebody who has done extraordinary work in India, who needs India's Padmashri and other civilian awards; as an ordinary citizen one can actually nominate and that citizen would get recognized. The last 4 years we are actually seeing such ordinary, unseen, unsung heroes being brought to limelight because of citizens' engagement and the government's intent. So, whether it is something as small as noticing somebody for an award to as deep as a real policy shift in its thinking; I think what India has managed to demonstrate to the world is a fight against voice poverty. And fighting that is not easy. Citizens have to be prepared, the state has to be prepared, the mechanisms have to be prepared, the bureaucratic executives, the political executives, all have to transform, and the change has begun. And this could be a great lesson for the rest of the world.

The rest of the world is grappling with '*noise*' on the *Tweet* side, but not '*voice*'. But if we can renegotiate these discussions, if we can go beyond the voice that is crafted by powerful & elite forces and where the actual citizen is part of crafting that voice, I think political forces will have to fall in line and democratization will not be a distant dream. And in extension, governance will be the reality that

this world will have and that is what we all deserve. If we truly want to make the world a great place, I think we have to transcend boundaries, borders, national limitations and legacies that we all carry in our hearts. Look for cross-pollinating these kinds of ideas around the world. Look for examples which can actually show success stories and not mere criticism on what has worked or not worked. If we can learn from each other how to battle this voice poverty, how to democratize development, - that will be a great step forward in making this world a better place. India's success story in democratizing development over the last 4 years is the fascinating story of building human and social capital. It is not about looking at it narrowly as affirmative action or as quotas or giving different interpretations to what happens or the political benefits or the electoral benefits of such measures. But we need to scratch the surface and go deep down and there is a story to be heard. The story is a quiet revolution in India of enormous governance initiatives which are actually building human and social capital of people and that is going to result in very powerful economic consequences. About 7% GDP growth will be an understatement for India because the way this capital is getting built, 5 years, 10 years from now we are possibly going to be a real power which is going to shape the narrative of the world itself.

Whether it is renegotiating the climate protocols, or WTO or the expression of the soft power that we are emerging as - I think these cannot happen just by the political leader voicing it. It has to be backed by the 1.3 billion people living in India. And that voice is going to emerge as a very powerful voice. I am privileged and fortunate that I am living in an era where this is going to come true sooner than later. Many things that have been initiated is work in progress like anything else. Policy change cannot happen by pressing a button. I know we live in a world of Control+Alt+Delete. You want to reboot everything overnight. But it does not happen that way. Policy change is a decadal investment or sometimes longer. Bringing about the fundamental change in the DNA of a country where citizens feel energized, engaged, empowered, moving away from an '**entitlement mindset**' to an '**empowerment mindset**', is going to take time. Not looking at 'what will I get', but 'what will the nation get' is not an easy narrative to fashion. Getting people to participate like in the 'Swachh Bharat' campaign is an example. Getting millions of people to quietly go around the villages and cleaning them week after week for the last 200 weeks, sustainably without the Prime Minister coming on TV showing a broom every time, shows the collective working of the political leadership and citizen engagement.

That shows the cultural shift in mindset. So, there is hope. Hope that people will start believing that they are masters in a true democracy. And there is hope that a public servant will finally start understanding that they are accountable to the tax payers of the country. In that hope lies the future of our India itself and possibly conferences like these and the panels that will follow can deliberate a little deeper on the specifics. In conclusion, work in progress needs a long time to sustain to make it part of your DNA and I hope we will have the next 5, 10, 15 years to actually concretize all these changes and manifest as making India a true global power, not militarily, not economically, but in terms of thought leadership with this kind of innovation which others can take and replicate.

The views expressed in this booklet are not necessarily those 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
Former President,
World Bank

FORUM

OF FREE ENTERPRISE

The Forum of Free Enterprise is a non-political and non-partisan organisation started in 1956, to educate public opinion in India on free enterprise and its close relationship with the democratic way of life. The Forum seeks to stimulate public thinking on vital economic problems through booklets, meetings, and other means as befit a democratic society.

In recent years the Forum has also been focusing on the youth with a view to developing good and well-informed citizenship. A number of youth activities including elocution contests and leadership training camps are organised every year towards this goal.

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