



Changes That Will Change India

-Sarmad Wani

At the stroke of midnight hour August 15, 1947 India did not rise to life and freedom. When our leaders self-congratulated themselves to have achieved 'freedom', nothing significant had changed at grass roots, except that browns had replaced whites. The landless labour working in mines continued his deplorable life under dominant caste contractors, the life of peasant drenched in sweat under the scorching sun reeled in misery as land reform failed miserably, and the stig-ma of pollution still belonged to untouchables as Puranic literature ruled the hearts of 'Independent Indians'.

The only thing that had changed after independence was that we got a dream. A dream of an egalitarian society guaranteeing social justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity to all its citizens. With the goal well laid out, it was left for future generations to draft plans to achieve final aim of social, economic, and political transformations. Today, our generation is fortunate enough to pick up the baton and chart solutions for 21st century resurgent, powerful yet backward India.

Political Changes

Today, India is suffering from a multitude of problems on many fronts. In political realm, we witness a paradox. On one hand we have accepted democracy as the best form of governance rejecting monarchy, colonialism; on the other, we find democracy being hijacked by elite oligarchy, 'Avatar' worship, and dynasty rule.

We must bring in at least 20 year cooling off period before which close kin of a retired party leader cannot inherit party leadership. We should also amend the constitution prohibiting one candidate from getting elected more than twice to post of Prime Minister as is followed in mature democracies like the U.S.A. We should also make it mandatory for new entrants in politics to first contest local level elections before contesting for Assembly or Parliament as is applicable in any other profession where one has to start from bottom to gain skills and expertise enough to run a responsible position. In a representative democracy, political parties are meant to serve people not individuals.

Another crisis faced by our political setup is the rampant criminalization of politics . Association for Democratic Reforms(ADR) reports that 188 out of 543 16th Lok Sabha members (about 34%) have criminal cases against them, many of which are of serious nature like murder, rioting, etc. Representation of People Act, 1951 should be amended to disallow political parties from giving tickets to candidates who have serious criminal charges filed against them at least 6 months prior to elections and where court has accepted the chargesheet.

In addition to this, Political Parties should usher a merit based system like any other professionally run organization by adhering to tools like Right to Information Act (2005), (as also recommended by Chief Information Commissioner), internal elections, etc. This will not just attract young talent but also develop quality standards and future benchmarks of good governance which unfortunately are absent in present political setup.

Finally, no democracy prospers without an active citizenry. People get the leader they deserve. Contemporary falling political standards are simply a reflection of our social and moral degradation. Selling votes in exchange of bill payments, loan waivers, money or liquor reflects the path our democracy

has embarked to soon turn into 'mobocracy'. The spirit of stakeholder mentality needs to be rekindled in them. Although steps like NOTA (None Of The Above) were introduced to bring this change, they lacked substance and was seen more as waste of vote by people. Hence, NOTA should be given more powers like re-polling to take place in the constituency where NOTA has more votes than any of the candidates.

Administrative Changes

No political setup can be successful without an effective, efficient administrative machinery which is able to translate vision into reality. A socialistic ambition, as pure and well-intentioned it may be, is ineffective if it is not complemented with managerial efficiency i.e. the 'how' of governance.

Although various commissions have provided solutions to reform administrative machinery, they have not been implemented in spirit by different governments of the day. These reforms - structural, procedural, attitudinal, and psychological are as under.:

Procedural Reforms

Sensitivity training: For example: In Jan Maitri project, introduced by Kerala Police Department policemen are shown visuals of common man's desperation in their training period.

Lateral entries: For example. Appointing Sam Pitroda, Nandan Nilekani type, out of the box thinkers from private sector who can think globally and act locally.

Quantified Performance measurement benchmarks and Objective Appraisals: e.g. 360 degree appraisals which values consumer feedback and subordinate opinion as well. ACR be replaced with APAR which unlike ACR is non confidential and aims at hand holding subordinates rather than 'controlling' them.

Structural Reforms

One stop grievance redressal mechanism: For e.g. Aayakar Sewa Kendras bought in by Income Tax department.

Digitization of procedures: Implementing ERP(Enterprise Resource Planning like SAP). This Business Process Re Engineering will result in quick, holistic, informed decision making that too in real time. It can track business resources— cash, raw materials, production capacity and the status of service delivery

Citizen Participation in Governance: Regular Jan Sabhas, Social Audits, will bring in transparency, innovative and targeted solutions, stakeholder mentality where in people don't consider themselves as passive beneficiaries but as active contributors.

Legal Reforms

Amend Article 311 of the constitution that gives enormous discretion, immunity to civil servants.

Have a mid career examination and performance review. Poor performers should be allowed to leave. No officer has the right to hold an office of public importance indefinitely just because he cleared some examination many years ago.

Strengthen 'Prevention of Corruption Act'-1988, to include collusive corruption in it.

Streamline, rationalise conduct rules. Revoke provisions of over regulation. like requirement for attestation from a gazetted officer, etc. as was rightfully accomplished recently.

Code of ethics would go a long way in building a motivated work force in wake of an unpredictable, complex, changing environment.

All states should enact Lokayukta act in consonance with U.N. declaration against corruption of which India is a signatory.

Form a Civil Service Board as in Maharashtra to reduce political interference in official appointments, promotions which will reduce nepotism, sycophancy, corruption in government.

Reforms in Bureaucratic Mindset

Officials should think of themselves as servants and not masters. For example. Julious Robero, Kiran Bedi, Prakash Singh (all of them President award winners).

Build qualities of empathy, kindness, courage to stand up against powerful lobbies. For e.g. Kautilya's vision of an ideal Sachiv(officer).

Our final aim should be less government and more governance. In words of Mr. Narayana Murthy-"Indian Civil Service (ICS) was replaced by Indian Administrative Service (IAS) post independence. Now time has come when we replace Indian Administrative Service with Indian Management Service (IMS)".

Changes In Economy And Business

Apart from improving public service delivery, the above mentioned reforms will also improve our Ease of Doing Business ranking which presently stands poorly at 130/189 as per World Bank's Doing Business Report (2016). An informal discussion with an average Indian businessman will reveal difficulty of doing business in India. As many functions in a business that many regulators are in govt - labour inspections, emission watch by NGT, construction monitoring by municipalities, Forex regulations by RBI, equity market by SEBI, taxation by I.T, Sales tax dept, CBEC,etc, and so on. Furthermore, there are legal hurdles- delays in land acquisition, federal issues, fuel supply shortage, sluggish freight movement, poor infrastructure, no buyer's protection. In each of these sub sectors we need a change. Labour Reforms from Rajasthan, time bound, transparent land acquisition from Gujrat, reliable procurement of electricity as in Chattisgarh, robust credit supply as in Maharashtra, seamless mines to industry to market to consumer connectivity as in Gujarat west coast, one stop clearances as in Telangana's innovative Right to Clearance, effective dispute resolution mechanism and minimum labour unrest as in Punjab. Solutions are scattered. Centre should be a facilitator in integrating these dispersed solutions and fitting them as per local requirements. This will flourish Make in India campaign harnessing our demographic dividend and pushing us at par with China type economies.

Industrial reforms also mean venturing into new sunrise sectors, going beyond textiles, jewellery, I.T and finance,. Sectors like Food Processing hold an immense potential as they have a forward and backward linkage impact benefitting farmers, consumers and economy as a whole. Similarly, Tourism, being labour intensive, local, traditionally exposed, sector that too requiring minimum capital investment in a geographically gifted country like ours is a blessing we have not availed so far. Likewise, Education sector too holds a promise. India can create a cadre of 'Indian Education Service' which will export teachers to the world capturing the minds of people into local tunes and this will be real victory that no hard power can beat. India will restore its status of 'Jagat Guru' once again, in post Asokan era as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda.

Social And Lifestyle Changes

"A average Indian is dissatisfied today" says the 'World Happiness Report' (2016) published by Sustainable Development Solutions Network which ranks India at 118/158 countries. It lies below many war torn nations like Palestine(108), Pakistan(81). etc. In common life we observe students unhappy about his college administration (FTII, NIT)a tenant un-happy about landlord, citizens blaming politicians of corruption (IAC), and the chain is infinite. Post LPG, with permeation of television, DTH, etc to farthest corners, injection of consumerism in minds, etc. there has been rise in desires in people which has led to estrangement, jealousy, and self-centeredness. Happiness is lost in pursuit of overtaking one's neighbour e.g. buying a longer car than his', pressurising one's child to score more than his neighbours' child and similar demonstrative effects in other spheres of life. Common middle class Indian has turned into a money making robot lost somewhere between his office and home. Ironically, he still feels he is 'normal'. There can be no cure without a diagnosis.

The solution to this conundrum lies 'within' us. Reconnecting to one's internal self was the thought of this year's World Culture Festival in Delhi. Appreciating the smaller beauties of life- a child's smile, planting a

tree, telling one's parents that you love them and your children that you will always stand by them. We should be sincere and not serious in our pursuit of life.

In our pursuit to reconnect with our innate self, no other country in the world has done research greater than India. In a world fast breeding crime hatred, terrorism, restlessness, India is the peaceful future. But unfortunately our own GenX is turning away from it. Therefore, to be prepared for future we need to regularly consult our past. We should develop confidence through school syllabus, familial values, social media, etc .For example Yoga in school curriculum, World Culture Festival in Delhi, etc are cases in point. It also holds key to solving home-grown problems of Naxalism, terrorism, communalism, through peaceful means that would be sustainable and forge national unity.

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