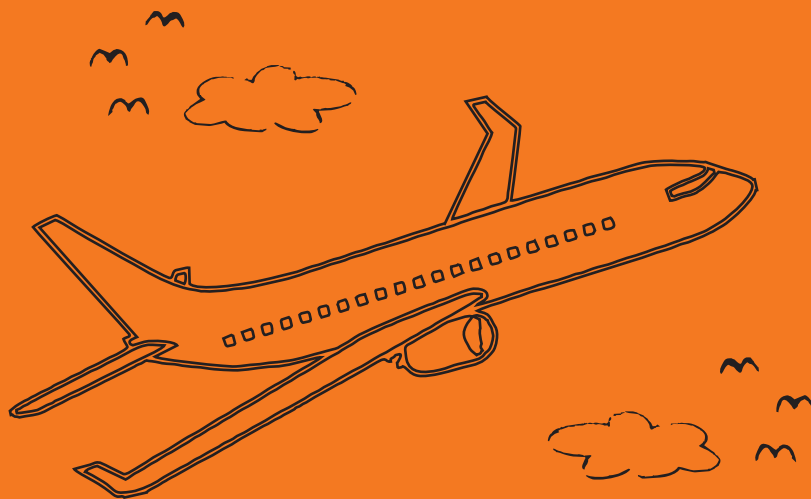


Being in the middle
class is a feeling
as well as an
income level.

- Margaret Halsey



Un-middle Classing India

Born in socialist times, a generation of Indians lived the ideas and values of middle class for a lifetime. Middle class was an aspirational place to be for this generation, they saw that a large majority of people still struggling to have a permanent roof over their heads and jobs that could assure them of some level of security. Many Indians took pride in belonging to this group and class. It provided stability, basic means of life and living and guaranteed return on hard work. Education as in, a doctor's, lawyer's or an engineer's degree or a government job were passports to entering this class and finding respect amongst the tribe here. Wealth was almost scorned in India. Looked at with suspicion, it was often assumed that it was gained through incorrect means or at the cost of the masses.

The middle class in India represented not just a socio- economic group, but it represented a mindset. A much celebrated mindset, where the present was lived in the memories of the past and with efforts to conserve for the future. Celebrating constraints and restraining aspirations marked the middle class of India. Hence consumption was largely centered on festivities and life stage occasions such as childbirth, marriage etc. Indian society celebrated this mindset; predictability and stability was rewarded. The middle class of India was an aspirational place to be both in mindset and as an economic force.

But gradually India changed. Liberalization opened the country and brought in a degree of ease and comfort in accessing goods and services. Economic policies, the opening up of the private sector provided better prospects to Indians. Mobiles revolutionized the country and its penetration perhaps can be understood as the beginning of un-middle classing in India. The nation got connected in an uninhibited way; the individual began to develop an identity

Celebrating constraints and restraining aspirations marked the middle class of India.

outside of the family and community. The idea of private space emerged! A democratic force, owning a mobile phone was aspirational, irrespective of class.

Modern retail created new consumption festivals, unveiled many new categories and created aspirations. Air travel became the new norm with multiple new airlines wooing travelers with fares often cheaper than the railway. Smaller towns and cities

emerged and India demographically became the youngest nations in the world. This young India possessed confidence and a fresh perspective to conquer the world. The romance of constraints no longer appealed to this generation.

An un-middle classing mindset is at the forefront of India today. Our aspirations have grown. Time

today is a valuable currency. Convenience and access are essential pillars of these times. Owning white goods, cars and homes on EMI, the mushrooming of beauty parlours and gyms in big and large towns, the dependence on household help in urban centers, the emergence of new categories – from diapers for the infants, to jeans for the women, from packaged rice to men's grooming – today guilt for consumption is replaced by aspirations. Overall attitudes towards saving and spending have much to suggest. The rate of savings in India today is below 30%, well below its peak of 38%.

The middle class of India has a new view of itself. We no longer struggle with life stages and roles, but we embrace it and shape it. Everyday lives are not engulfed in the chores of living, but life is imagined as a spectacle. With Indians taking selfies at every chance possible, pouting and posing at the camera, life is lived in the now. Adoption of new festivals and amplification of the existing makes life light and fun. Celebrating the small joys of life from birthdays to job anniversaries are creating a new rhythm of life for Indians.

Shifts are visible, suggesting an un-middle class India. Inter-caste marriages are more acceptable today; wearing high heels is an aspiration for women across socio-economic classes. We no longer scorn the wealthy, the Hindi speakers or business owners. English speaking, education or wealth is not seen as the only marker of success. Enough role models have proven that despite all odds success can be conquered.

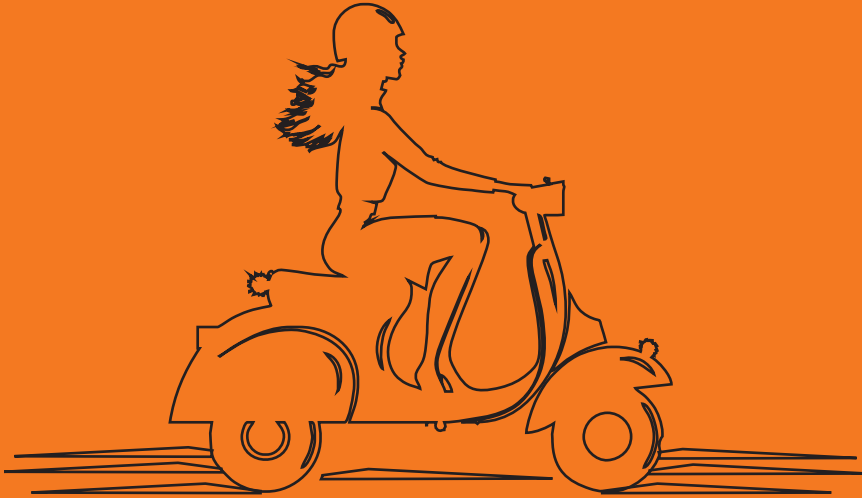
A country as old as India, would surely adopt the new but not at the cost of the old or the existing. The rise and fall of empires, Independence and partition, the many ups and downs in leadership have all made India what it is today. From once being the trade center and being known as the Sone ki Chidiya to

**A country
as old as India,
would surely adopt
the new but not
at the cost of the
old or the existing.**

being known as the slum-dog millionaire nation, India has seen it all. However India's at the point of inflection today, leaping ahead towards a new future as it embraces an un-middle class mindset!

SOME LEADERS ARE BORN WOMEN.

- GERALDINE FERRARO



Thank You Science!

Thank You Science!

Feminine energy in India has always been worshipped in the form of Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati. Despite the Goddess status endowed to them, women have to fight for their place in the world. In a patriarchal society like India, women have been role-bearers in the way biology and society prescribed. As wives and mothers, they contained themselves within the homes and kept patriarchal values and traditions afloat. The number and gender of offspring's she could bear and through her culinary prowess the worth of women was determined. Since a young age mothers trained their daughters to master techniques and manage various taste buds of family members. In fact a popular folk tales reveals how a girl is considered competent enough to be a bride, if she can demonstrate her ability to cook perfect papads. With food and the kitchen taking center-stage, in patriarchal Indian households the women toiled hard in the kitchen to nurture the family.

But soon came gas top burners, LPG connections, pressure cookers, mixer grinders, refrigerators, water purifiers and the more recent inventions of the food processors, microwaves, OTGs, changed the life of women forever. Modernizing Indian kitchens, these equipments and appliances reduced much of the negative labour from the women's life in the kitchen. With reduced time and effort, women found imagination for other roles that they could play.

A new journey in women's life is made, progress is force multiplied every time new technology touches her life. Within the kitchen and beyond, life for women is unleashed with every update in technology. With kitchen appliances women experienced some extra time, with the advent of Television and Cable TV- women found me time. Television, unleashed boundaries for them, it helped them hear other stories. Afternoons for Indian women were dedicated to learn new recipes or hear the stories of other women in similar/unique contexts. Women happily sat in front of the TV in the afternoon sorting, cutting and preparing for the evening meal. The scooty is another remarkable Indian innovation that gave wings and wheels to women. Providing self-sufficiency to women, the scooty offered mobility to Indian women at affordable costs.

In early 21st century, the mobile phone was democratized and reached every

With reduced time and effort, women found imagination for other roles that they could play.

One invention at a time, science has contributed knowingly and unknowingly in charting change in the status of women.

Indian. Women acquired private space and individuality through a number. The ten-digit number announced their independent identity and destroyed boundaries of the mind. A social revolution in its own right, the mobile phone moved India and its women to a new stage of experiencing modernity. Modernity that defied hierarchy and age old gender biases. Easy and unaware, it swept the nation and created new fundamental need, rich-poor, man-women, rural-urban all alike.

With biological control given back to the women, with the advent of condoms and contraceptives- women could control and take charge of nature. With freedom, flexibility and the power to decide when to conceive, science helped women take charge of her body. Condoms and contraceptives empowered women to take charge of their own reproductive and biological health. It brought them self- respect and dignity and to the nation a better human-development index. Advancements and the development of the low cost sanitary napkin and the law and science around abortion, furthered choice, self- determination and autonomy for women.

One invention at a time, science has contributed knowingly and unknowingly in charting change in the status of women. Within homes and beyond the leapfrogging that technology adoption provides emancipates lives and households in India.

It would be true to say that technology has played the most fundamental role in empowering women in India. Perhaps it has played a more important role than the family eco-system or the law and policy frameworks, because it has enabled change from within for women. The access and adoption of technological advancements have helped women battle their own selves and challenge what time, biology and society had in mind for them. While societal and the policy eco-system enabled the fight from the outside, scientific progress created imagination within oneself to emerge and evolve.

In times of tomorrow, more change will be embraced and perhaps more confidence will emerge. With adoption of the technologies like Botox, time can be frozen. With freezing of eggs women will perhaps extend marriageable age? A new era perhaps of women's emancipation awaits us as India adopts life sciences and codes human creation too. How society and the human race cope with these heady changes only women and time will unveil- but until then Thank You Science!

WE MUST THINK AND ACT LIKE A NATION
OF A BILLION PEOPLE AND NOT LIKE THAT OF
A MILLION PEOPLE. DREAM, DREAM, DREAM!

- DR. APJ. ABDUL KALAM



The Next Billion - by Satyam Viswanathan

The Next Billion
By Satyam Viswanathan

In a young, developing country of over 1.3 billion people, where the gap between a minority of haves and a majority of have-nots is wider than almost anywhere else in the world, the next billion can refer to a variety of under-served groups who are just entering the arena of consumption. You can quickly get to a billion people by adding up hundreds of millions of Indians without bank accounts, without access to the Internet, uncomfortable with spoken English, and unable to overcome still-feudal, caste-ridden structures. Some of these identity markers – comfort with English and the internet for instance – come from achievements through education and work, and are coveted. Other markers of caste and class are ascribed based on innate characteristics and serve to oppress. Meanwhile the most primal of markers - language and community – never stop being a source of pride and comfort. In this struggle between identity markers that are achieved, ascribed and anchors, lies the tale of India's next billion.

Ascribed identity is the basis of a collectivistic society, achieved identity is a more individualistic pursuit. Ascribed identity forces the individual to conform, whereas achieved identity allows the individual to transform. As a rapidly urbanizing, post liberalization Indian society embraces consumerism and the animal spirit of free markets, the lure of achieved identity is irresistible. The next billion Indian are predominantly young - below the age of 30. They recognize that the anonymity and opportunity that comes with an achieved identity is their ticket to a better future. They have grown up in one of the world's fastest growing economies, a vibrant democracy that is unrecognizable from the fatalistic, closed economy that defined India till the end of the 20th century. They've been raised in this optimistic context to believe that their lives and prospects will be materially superior to that of their parents.

Yet they live in a society where 99% cut-offs for college admissions are the new normal. They face impossible odds when it comes to the job market – net job growth in the economy is consistently far lower than the growth in the working age population not in school. How are they supposed to reconcile the promised abundance of post

In this struggle between identity markers that are achieved, ascribed and anchors, lies the tale of India's next billion.

The next billion are as a result, an uncertain combination of disenchantment and hope, insecurity and confidence.

liberalization India with the reality of hyper competition and limited opportunity for advancement?

The next billion sit on a potentially dangerous fault line. Despite having been told about the rewards of liberalisation for as long as they can remember, their prospects today rarely reflect those promises.

No developing country has

ever traversed this path before. This specific journey of social and economic growth in the context of a democratic nation-state with a billion plus people predominantly below the age of 30, living in a context of rampant consumerism, limited job opportunity, leapfrogging technology, all pervasive social-media, and rapid cultural transformation is ours alone. The next billion are as a result, an uncertain combination of disenchantment and hope, insecurity and confidence.

Sky rocketing exposure and a revolution of constantly rising expectations' are key consequences of these unique and complex circumstances.

These expectations mean that as new entrants in the arena of consumption, the next billion bring a ferociously demanding mind-set. They have come of age in the specific context of media-saturated 21st century India. This has exposed them to a new-normal in terms of experiential benchmarks during their most impressionable early years. The IPL for instance, with its dizzying pace, multiplicity of stimuli, world-class quality and slick production values is their idea of a 'normal' entertainment spectacle. Multiplexes, malls, low cost airlines, metro rails and renovated airports are the only India they have ever known. Online reservations and smart phone apps mean that they have learnt to expect a new level of service during their formative years. No queues to book railway or movie tickets, no smelly taxis that refuse to go to your destination, no question of delays in home deliveries of all kinds. These are their baseline expectations. To paraphrase sociologist Yogendra Singh, they may or may not be poor but their self-image is definitely not of being poor. Away from their typically cramped and cluttered homes, and away from the

chaos of India's streets, today's young, next billion experience a very different India in enclosed spaces outside their homes. The contrast is stark. But the relatively easy access they have to markers of achieved identity – as expressed in the way they dress, groom, and conduct themselves, and the locations in which they shop and spend time – is key to how they resolve the disparity between their inner and outer worlds. Contemporary public spaces and communal events - from modern format retail to stadiums to commercial spaces – have a crucial role to play in managing the misalignment between the sky-high expectations and still very much down-to-earth, grim lived reality of India's next billion.

Ensuring that modern retail spaces in particular are ever more accessible, world-class, and well-organized, without diluting any of the softer qualities that signal a comforting, warm Indian experience, sends an important message to the next billion. By speaking to both their achieved identities and the cultural anchors within their ascribed identities, they signal an empathy for the predicament that the next billion find themselves in. A retail experience that is top notch without being intimidating, an assortment that offers the best from across the globe without compromising on hyper-local cultural nuances, service that is genuinely caring, without being intrusive or aggressive. Modern format retail can serve as a deeply reassuring bridge across the gulf that separates the aspirations of India's next billion from their complex realities.



The writer is Senior Partner at The Third Eye, an occasional columnist, and part of the founding team at Junoon Theatre.

You can analyze the past but
you have to design the future

- Edward de Bono



Being Ageless

In Indian thought, life- stages guided roles. The four ashrams Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retired) and Sanyasa (renunciation) set a pace, rythm and design for life through ages. It distinctly suggested purpose and guided the role of the old and the young, in families, societies and in ruling empires. With the change of time, increase in life spans and the spiralling idea of time, we often clash with Age.

Today we aspire and continue to learn in fits and starts. Second careers define retirement, householders buy homes early and lead nuclear families. Senior living communities and new cities are attracting many young to move. We renounce while we consume- making important life and ideological choices. Some shun leather and turn vegeterain as they support PETA. Many accept and reject brands and products for ideological differences. With the spiral of life in action, in modern day and age India faces new opportunities and challenges.

While India gets younger, it is also getting older at the other end of the spectrum. In 2016, the number of Indians over the age of 60 hit an all-time high of 8.6% of the country's population. By 2021, 143 million senior citizens will cross the 10% mark of the country's overall population. The last census showed the population of senior citizens jump by 35.5%, almost the double rate of population growth. During this decade, the rate will be faster.

Better medical and health facilities and overall prosperity mean the human race is living longer, better and often more active in their professions. For many retired the second-innings is as impactful and meaningful as the first. While in the first they were working for fulfilling duties and responsibilities, the second innings is for giving back and pursuing passions. At the same time, over 2 million Indians are joining the work force every year. By 2021, one out of three Indians would be born in this century. At 464 million by 2021, India's young population will be far higher than the total popu-

*With the spiral
of life in action,
in modern day
and age, India
faces new
opportunities
and challenges.*

Change of guard in a country like India is not going to be easy.

lation of United States.

In the times of tomorrow, age perhaps will have no meaning. It will remain a number and challenge ideas of youth and wisdom. Born in an era of abundance, choice and entrepreneurship, the younger generation quite predictably has different aspirations, beliefs and behavior than the older generation born soon after Independence in an era of shortages, frugality and socialism. The elders of today see an extension of life. Born in a socialist India but matured in an opportune India, they too want to explore life beyond norms expected for people as they age. As new age citizens, grand parents, leaders they are yet to be defeated or sidelined. They rule with wisdom and experience and revive themselves from time to time.

The young tomorrow will become house owners at the early age of 30, they will attain the peak of success perhaps much earlier than their parents did, they aspire to travel the world and make money all simultaneously. Young CEOs are at the helm of large new age corporations and if times of today have anything to suggest- we can't help but note the role of Akhilesh Yadav, Kanhaiya Kumars and Hardik Patels. India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh – elected Akhilesh Yadav as its Chief Minister when he was 38 years of age- the youngest ever. One can wonder if it is sheer coincidence that the most potent political movements of 2016 were well outside the domains of conventional politicians. The Jat movement in Haryana and Rajasthan, the Patidar movement in Gujarat, the Kapus in Andhra Pradesh, and the Maratha movement in Maharashtra were entirely of the youth in these states and revolved around jobs and reservations for the youth of these communities. In fact, they were led by youngsters of ages unheard of in Indian politics.

Our largest stars and icons of these times, from Rajnikanth to Amitabh Bachchan to Narendra Modi and even Ratan Tata have demonstrated that they are a ripe lot nowhere close to quitting. They are fit, healthy and ready to compete with time and have a lot more to give yet. Change of guard in a country like India is not going to be easy.

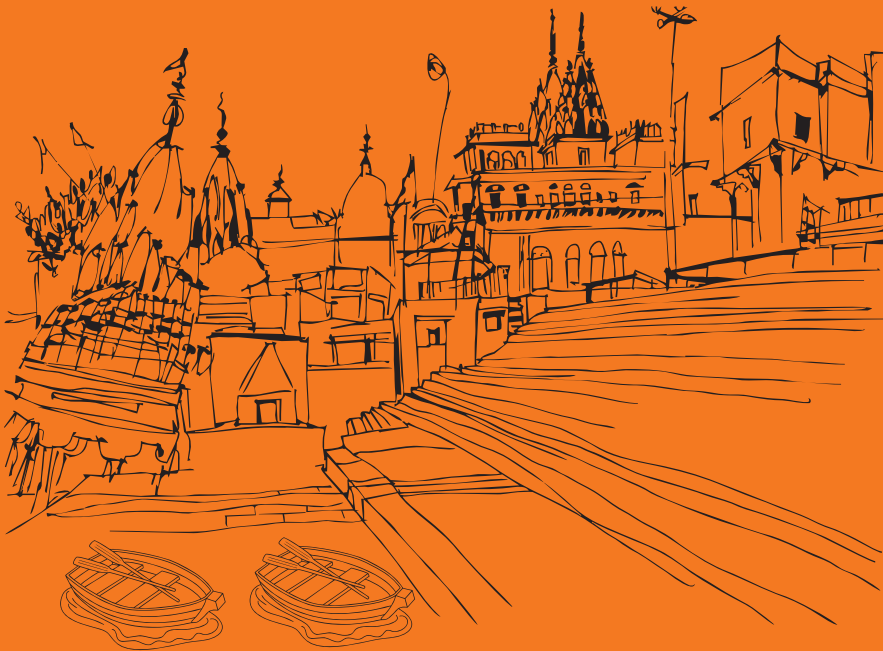
The relationship between the young and the old is varying. At some points they compete and a change of guard is desired as values clash. At other instances they beautifully compliment and share a reciprocal relationship. In

Indian homes we see a trend of reverse parenting, here the young teach and govern many family decisions. Whether it's a decision to buy a car, a mobile phone or the latest television, the voice of the young is often sought out for almost guaranteeing the families up to datedness.

India's demographic divide will continue to be a recurring feature in almost every facet of life for many years to come. The future is both unknown, but the wheel doesn't need to reinvent again and again. Wisdom and enthusiasm are required in equal measure to create the world of tomorrow. But it is beyond demographics now- mindsets and attitudes have changed over time. The young and the old often battle it out in the open, fight for their own beliefs and craft the story of a new India. An India where perhaps age does not win is it young or old- but the ability to stay relevant stay ahead and fight hard wins.

Religion is the opium of the masses.

- KARL MARX



Long live Religion! Long live God!

Long live Religion! Long live God!

On the Ghats of the Ganga in Varanasi, religion and its relationships with modern day Indians is well understood. A little girl dressed like Shiva is taking selfies with a young tourist boy, another group of people are reciting verses of the Ramayana on a loud speaker while checking out the tourist, a cow is being worshipped by a group of women, a sadhu is sitting peacefully meditating amidst the chaos, the river is being bathed in, offered milk and flowers while devotees take a holy dip to wash away their sins to start life afresh. And at a nearby ghat, the river is also offered ashes of those burnt on its banks in order to attain moksha. Sailing in the river, one also sees spectacular sights of an age-old civilization and as well as the contours of a mosque. Amidst these eighty-four ghats, we find mysticism and secularism. Age old rituals and practices from the journey of life till death.

God is everywhere in India. We worship the source- the cow, as it provides nourishment, the river, as it is the source of water, trees, and stones. We even have living human Gods showing us the path and a way to live. Religion, to us, in India, has been a tale told through mythology- embedded in stories, symbols and rituals and also through geography and history.

Embedded in everyday life, religion in India has not only anchored Indian society to live and stride through life but has built a framework for living well. Not only is it about human life, it is also about the entirety of a universal experience- of earth, stars, water, wind and fire. The calendars founded on the basis of these cosmic connections and their manifestations in day, night and seasons have defined and provided the total rhythm to India's day-to-day behaviours. To eat, to cook, to celebrate, to buy, to give, to marry; all the actions of one's life are driven by these calendars that are part of our philosophy, culture and ofcourse religion.

Most interestingly, these beliefs and practices have not ceased to exist as India has evolved and

***Religion in India
provided reasons
and justified
socialization,
consumption
and travel and it
continues to do
so even today.***

The amplification of jagrans, foot visits to famous pilgrims and temples, the renewed confidence and the desire for more religion is vividly visible.

adopted modern ways of life and living. Religion is enmeshed in urban life as much as it is in our smaller towns and villages. Large family run business houses build temples in their names, much of donations and charity in the country happens in the name of religion and temple trusts run as efficiently as businesses.

If at all religion is permissive and a more democratic force today than before. Sanskrit and Prakrit the language of interpretation created distinction amongst the masses and classes. Caste order also restricted access and created codes of behaviours.

But today's religious movements are more egalitarian, rooted in spirituality first and then rituals and one where relationship with God is not located in fear alone.

In the recent past Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Sri Aurobindo, J Krishnamurthy, Osho, reinterpreted religion for the elite. Today religion is being recast for the masses, with new cults, Babas, Gurus and television evangelists. Democratized by Baba Ramdev, Gurpreet Ram Raheem Singh (MSG), the deras, Nirmal Baba, Jagadguru Kripalu Maharaj, Sadguru, Art of Living new pilgrim points and sacred geographies are emerging. Not necessarily on the banks of rivers and in established temples and places of worship alone but in yoga camps, in ashram campuses and even in homes.

However, while we adopt the new we retain the old. Religion in India provided reasons and justified socialization, consumption and travel and it continues to do so even today. In fact, as we embrace the modern, the need to reconnect with the roots is emerging even more strongly. The young of India today are seen in temples and other sacred places. In jeans and in other modern attire, we collaborate with tradition. The amplification of jagrans, foot visits to

famous pilgrims and temples, the renewed confidence and the desire for more religion is vividly visible. Urban India also exhibits adoption of festivals and faith in new Gods. Bringing home of the Ganpati which was dominant in the Maharastrian community, has now become a Delhi and Bangalore phenomenon too, not restricted to the Maharasthrian community alone. Holi and Raksha Bandhan have emerged as India's most secular festivals.

India's self confidence in itself as a country has escalated- Yoga, Ayurveda, FMCG products, well being, tolerance, vegetarianism are all dimensions of India's religious-spiritual-philosophical living. The questioning of religion, the existence of God are still faint questions in Indian life. With revisiting of rituals and the open sourcing of religion, we Indians are adapting it with times, embracing it to create modern day rituals, occasions and festivals. For seekers, religion provides meaning and path, to the youth it provides occasions to enjoy, places to travel entertain and pass time. Most importantly religion creates belonging – belonging and belief that one is born into and rarely questioned. Long live Religion! Long live God!

CURE FOR AN OBSESSION:
GET ANOTHER ONE

- MASON COOLEY



The digital age and technology have brought many disruptions to everyday life in India. Many rules are being broken; many age-old habits are being challenged, while some are being preserved quite consciously. A consequence of these times is the surplus time at hand and the need to fill life up with new occupations, hobbies and pass times.

Everyone today is a brand, describing oneself in multifaceted ways on twitter profiles and Linkedin accounts.

In these times many old habits are replaced with the new. We demand much more from people, relationships, brands and organizations. With everything being a click away, new habits are being formed. Today's newspaper readers do not necessarily subscribe to the physical newspaper, they snack through the day and nibble on news from various applications and social media platforms.

Learning today also finds new meaning. With the ability to google and access any information, the learning ecosystem is re-inventing itself too. Every home will find a photographer and new-passion pursuers. While the doctors and engineers still rule the marriage market- CEOs and MBAs have made their own entry too. Never before have we as a race been more open to try, explore and discover the new.

With confidence in ourselves our ability to embrace, accept and own the new especially with food is visible in restaurants, homes and on streets. Not only have we embraced new cuisines, but have embraced new ways of seeing food. We eat with our eyes now not our taste buds alone. We bring home new techniques, ingredients and interests. Kitchens are no longer negative labour zones of the home where daily chores are performed. They are often becoming gender agnostic and seamlessly becoming part of living rooms and changing lives in homes.

The focus on the self is another thing in today's times. A self-aware generation, we curate the way we look, dress, speak and behave. Everyone today is a

brand, describing oneself in multifaceted ways on Twitter profiles and LinkedIn accounts. We groom our bodies in gyms and beauty parlours. Our homes represent a place that we aspire to be rather than where we come from.

Parenting is a modern day phenomenon. What once happened unconsciously and in flow is practiced as a science these days. As an action, lived as a verb new age Indian parents have workshops to attend; books and blogs to read, techniques to learn. Parents introspect on the types of parenting approaches possible in order to be the right and perfect parent. Important to note, in this new era of Indian parenting, is the role of the father. The millennial dads are active, eager participants not just on-lookers in child rearing, bringing about a fundamental shift in the way in which children grew up in India. With fewer children being born to couples, today parenting in India is aware and conscious vis-à-vis in the past when parents produced kids but the village or the collective raised them.

Practiced almost as if it were a profession or a job, parenting which naturally existed since as long as humans have existed is today a perfected art and science. In India too gradually the action oriented idea of child rearing seems to be emerging across socio-economic classes. Perhaps as families are getting smaller and as we move away from the natural safety nest of grand parents, uncles and aunts, new age parents find the need to model this and craft it into a spread sheet with clear goals and predictive outcomes.

In these digital times, the mind is also perhaps at work always. Being connected to micro and macro happenings around the world, nation or family constantly, is compelling the need to respond and almost react to every

happening big, small, consequential or not. The need to have an opinion on any and every subject has emerged. And we can't be stopped just opining, we also believe in asserting, expressing and voicing our opinions on every platform, group possible.

A self-aware generation, we curate the way we look, dress, speak and behave.

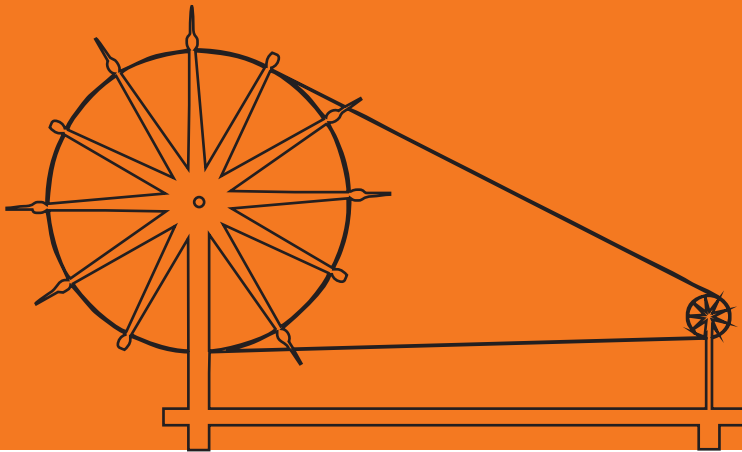
For Indians, this a new way of life! Living in herds, in tribes and as a part of the larger whole of the family an individual found few occasions to assert or even worry about their own views and opinions. The voice of the patriarch was the voice of the family. But

with new age media forces, things have changed. We are creators and consumers of the news. We are forced to think of what we like, dislike, share and perfect our opinions and stance. This obsession, is unique- earlier, we contained our staunch ideas and ideologies. They were shared with a trusted few. Rarely would we express our political leanings out loud. The secret ballot meant that individual political leanings were also meant to be a secret. Today everyone wears their political preference up their sleeve, opining, broadcasting and showcasing their own political inclinations. Opining is a national hobby and the nature of media today, makes us all believe that we have a voice, we must be heard and we must speak!

Many shifts are visible in new India. As Gen-C, the connected generation emerges, economic progress is made and as traditional gender roles evolve, Indian society finds new pre-occupations and fascinations. In the future of India, it will be interesting to see how these new habits influence our roles and the mental-model of age old habits and practices.

Civilization is the encouragement
of differences

- Mahatma Gandhi



Samaj, Sneh and Gandhi - by Rajni Bakshi

Samaj, Sneh and Gandhi
By Rajni Bakshi

Long after its dweller was assassinated, Bapu Kuti is alive. From sunrise to sundown, through the year, the Kuti and Sevagram Ashram welcomes all. Visitors from across the world file through M.K. Gandhi's mud hut with their wonder and scepticism, reverence and challenge.

In the mid-1980s when I first visited Sevagram, the afternoons were made more lively by Akhilbhai, a veteran of the Sarvodaya movement, who could be found on the porch of the Kuti warmly smiling, answering questions and giving spinning lessons on a charkha.

After one such lesson I asked Akhilbhai for tips on how to maintain the small charkha which came in a compact wooden box. Simply, Akhilbhai said, "jahan tanav hai wahan sneh lejao" – where there is tension apply affection.

Whether it is the 70th year of Independence or centuries later, India or any other part of the world, this will remain the essence of Gandhi's insight about what builds true civilization, or sudharo in Gujarati.

If this is an impractical value then society itself is doomed, in which case the question of democracy does not arise.

If this value can be practised – from the daily life of ordinary people to the highest levels of government – then focus on the requisite creativity is all important.

True, reality is not split in such sharp binaries. But it is vital never to forget that when friction is answered by friction, when the logic of 'an eye for an eye' takes over, societies do descend into hell – witness the partition of India and Pakistan and civil wars in Bosnia, Rwanda, Iraq, Syria.

By contrast, 'samaj' is a much broader and multi-layered process that is manifest through a variety of institutions and subtle practises.

That is, the inborn ability for sneh, while jostling with our prejudices, anxieties and anger, will still win out more often than lose out.

Gandhi confidently insisted that love and non-violence are as old as the hills because he knew that history only records the blood and gore. The long stretches of time between the wars and conquests are largely ignored.

A nuanced understanding of this truth may require us to look beyond the category of 'civil society' – a term coined by Western democracies which have been whittled down to the State, Market and Civil Society.

By contrast, 'samaj' is a much broader and multi-layered process that is manifested through a variety of institutions and subtle practises.

For instance, in communities along the banks of the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh, individuals traditionally planted one each of these three trees – banyan, pipal and neem. Nurturing the saplings to maturity gave meaning and purpose to the individual's life while also linking him or her to the collective – for the fully-grown trees benefited the commons.

It is at this level of creativity and social energy that the future of democracy will be determined. For democracy, in any meaningful sense, is not just about elections. It is about individuals and collectives experiencing a greater sense of command over their own fate – in ways that are respectful of differences and even opposition.

Of course the everyday life of samaj is a complicated contradictory affair. Often the same individual is capable of both sneh, expressed in random acts of kindness, as well as stress generating animosities or tanav.

In face-to-face real life the totality of these competing urges tends to balance out. Complete collapse of sneh, in an orgy of mass violence, is almost always orchestrated. This is the finding of both government appointed commissions

and scholarly investigations into riots in India.

Social media is quite another dimension of reality – where proliferation of hatred and abuse is competing furiously with voices of sneh. It is not clear what form of balance, if any, is possible in this realm.

I would like to believe that basic impulses of the face-to-face samaj will prevail. That is, the inborn ability for sneh, while jostling with our prejudices, anxieties and anger, will still win out more often than lose out.

Difficulties and obstacles down this path are indeed daunting. It is a human impulse to lash out at someone who abuses what you hold dear – be it the national anthem or human rights.

But it is in having command over our raw impulses that we become party to sudharo, civilization. A rather obvious truism that bears repetition – however unsophisticated and unoriginal it seems.

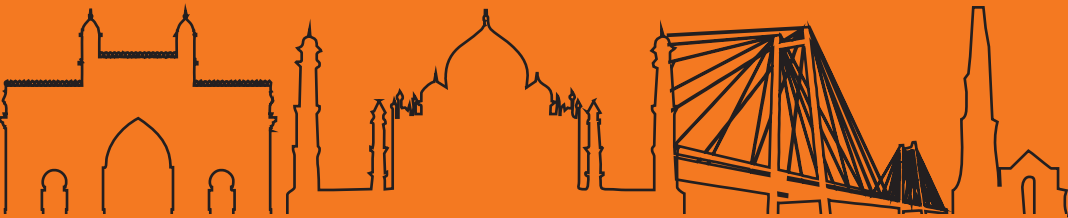
There is no harm done by keeping Gandhi's photo on currency notes and ritually garlanding him as Father of the Nation. But it is samaj, not the nation state, that his legacy energizes. Yes, there is ample evidence to the contrary. So what?



The writer is the Gandhi Peace Fellow at Gateway House, a foreign policy think-tank and a Mumbai based journalist and author.

yeh shehar nahi mehfil hai...

- Prasoona Joshi



Soul Making in Modern India

For years, we Indians have lived life in contained few places. Inside homes and religious places like temples, churches, in organic markets and trade mandis most of life were lived. It was within these spaces that we socially interacted and also resided. We ate, slept, lived, fought and earned our livelihoods here. These places were organically constructed and seamlessly became a part of everyday life in India.

The chowks, our quadrangular open spaces were characteristic to urban Indian life disperising and converging people and ways. Communities and the human desire to intermingle has lend itself to place making in India. However place making has come a long way in India. From the organic mohallas to British era's railway stations, mall roads in hill stations, maidans and parks to modern day airports and malls the new market places. We have jouneyed in aesthetics, comfort and acceptance. The British era introduced us to creating urban signatures through architecture, urban planning and enabling mobility and transportation. Before them the Mughals and other rulers built glorious forts, palaces, lakes and parks but for self-consumption. The average Indian was only privy to it in large state celebrations.

During the Queen's reign, the rail network was laid all across the country. Each city, town, district, village was the proud owner of the railway station. Often these stations became new hubs of activity, pouring people in and out of the city. They became gateways to experience a city or a town, often providing a distinct visual character too. Cities like Mumbai also saw unique architecture and place making through the design of important buildings and spaces in the city. Be it the Flora Fountain, the magnificent Victoria Terminus (now the Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus) or even the Gateway of India.

In the last decade, we have urbanised significantly, found new cities to call home and worked in environments far away from what our ascribed identities could afford to imagine. We have been building everything, new cities, towns, malls/ marketplaces,

The chowks, our quadrangular open spaces were characteristic to urban Indian life disperising and converging people and ways.

We have been building everything, new cities, towns, malls/ marketplaces, airports, highways, skywalks, sealinks, gated communities, IT parks, footpaths and new neighbourhoods and suburbia.

airports, highways, skywalks, sealinks, gated communities, IT parks, footpaths and new neighbourhoods and suburbia. The pace of change has been baffling. Today we fight third world challenges of providing electricity to every household and also woes of traffic congestion, air pollution like the first world countries. We aspire to have harmonious communal living and public spaces that facilitate a seamlessly intermingled life.

Public spaces are an important part of society. They live through times, enable a view of the past in the present, keep history alive and more impor-

tantly facilitate democracy and communal life and living. For modern India too, public space making remains a relevant conversation. For it is in public spaces that we acquire aspirations and life goals.

In the last ten years, Indians have experienced modernity through our public spaces. While we still need help navigating digital signage systems, climbing on escalators, coping with stark, clean and uncluttered modern spaces and accepting the cold glass and steel look we have nonetheless coped well. But very often its not only modernity that we are seeking from our public spaces and our cities we also yearn to find meaning. Infrastructure is one of the key essential constituents of modernity but we expect more from it. We hope to build memories not just selfie moments. We wish to transact in smart ways but not in ways devoid of belonging. Most importantly we need it to tell stories of today's times and showcase what makes us unique and distinct.

Our cities are getting smarter and digital highways will characterize our infrastructure uniquely. With virtuality creating an extension of space which is omnipresent, the role of physical spaces must be pondered on. Perhaps in the next age of public-space making in India, we will need to think of ways in

which we can induce soul, into our public spaces, ways in which we can facilitate collective social behaviours, find ways in which we can give our cityscapes a recognizable characteristic that makes it unique than other global cities. With architecture that is culturally dynamic, common spaces that allow for vivid imaginations and places with which citizens want to have relationships with.

Not everything that can
be counted counts...
and not everything that
counts can be counted.

- Albert Einstein



A Measured Life

The defining edifice of 21st century life is data. We live in a world where data is omnipresent, omnipotent and believed to be omniscient. The ability to collect and process data, at gradually faster and cheaper rate, allows us to measure almost everything. We choose our food based on the calories printed on the pack or the menu card, we step out of our homes for a short ride – only after we know the exact time it will take. A vacation isn't successful till we count the likes on the photo on social media, and food isn't prepared 'swaad anusaar' (sensing the taste), but according to the exact quantities mentioned in the recipe book.

The need to measure pervades every aspect of business, society and governance. The preponderance of data creates an illusion of control and predictability, in what is essentially an unpredictable world. It doesn't matter whether we are dealing with human emotions and behaviour, natural forces, social change or cultural progress – data seeks and delivers the one and only truth – the objective truth.

What happens when this search for objective truth meets India's fundamental belief in subjective truth?

A society built around objective truth has a singular definition of right and wrong. It believes in a singular system, a singular reality, a linear order to life.

India today aspires to move to the big league and aspires to be counted amongst the great nations of the world. And in this rush to acquire its greatness, we are in a rush to act and behave like a developed nation. Strangely enough for us, today being a developed nation means being like the Western nations that believe in objective truth. We have a relentless belief that technology has the potential to solve every problem. This now drives public

*The need to
measure
pervades every
aspect of business,
society and
governance.*

policy making. We are obsessed with rankings and ratings – to the point wherein the government itself is lobbying with rating agencies to improve India's standing in the global order. Our identities are in Aadhaar, our cities have to be smart, and our economy has to be cashless.

India today is in midst of immense change. But change isn't new to India. Our history is riddled with empires and regimes rising and falling – almost simultaneously in different parts of the country. And yet, we have a continuum of civilizational history of around 4000 years. That is because we were open to change. The outcome of this change is the immense diversity and dynamism in Indian life – wherein no single definition of what constitutes India exists.

In our belief systems, there has never been a single truth. We have many Gods, many sacred texts, and no single authority.

For us change was always gradual and inclusive – and always at our own terms. In India, change happens along the axis of expanding tradition. We negotiate, accommodate, and assimilate. And that is because we are a land of subjective truth - where difference between right or wrong is always contextual. In our belief systems, there has never been a single truth. We have many Gods, many sacred texts, and no single authority. A sacred text like Ramayana itself has hundreds of versions found across the country.

Similarly, life was never measured, but lived in multiple and often contrasting ways. Individual was secondary to the family. Perfection was valued less, brilliance and diversity were championed. Our society was structured on social rather than economic terms. And our modernity and progress was achieved through negotiating with tradition.

Amidst the impetus of change today, a Western mindset of measurement and absoluteness is meeting the Eastern perspectives. We are moving towards measurement and objective truth – whether we are the fastest growing economy in the world, what is the ease of doing business rank of the country, how digital are we – how do we compare with others? This discourse is now being championed in India!

Measurement and comparison creates an illusion of objectivity. But numbers don't have a life of itself. It is we humans who collect it, process it and interpret it. And the way we do it is grossly subjective, but when done and presented –

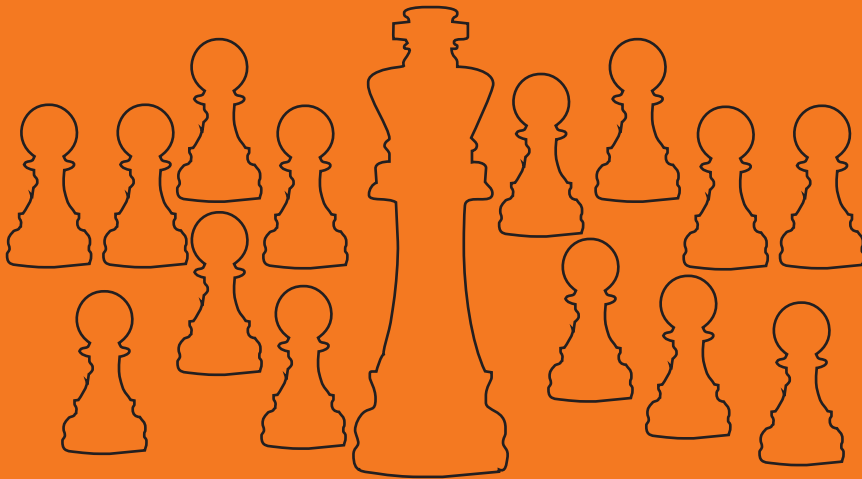
data seemingly turns objective. Measurement gives us a delusion of validity through our own biases. Above all, measurement leads us into the dangers of simplification. A billion subscribers of mobile SIM cards in the nation, automatically translates into an imagery of every Indian with a mobile phone in their hands. Data essentially captures what we know, even though our life and existence largely revolves around the unknown.

Measurement may help us compete with the world outside. Measurement may lead us to finding a point of perfection or create a path that we must walk and a place we must reach. But how does one measure value that is at the heart of society? How does one measure trust that is at the heart of commerce? How can we consider measuring well-being in addition to growth in GDP terms?

Perfection, homogeneity, absoluteness rarely bring joy. They do not exist in nature and neither in human society. It is in differences and diversity that human civilisation has progressed. A counter-clash against our pursuit of objective truth through measurement and data is imminent. Data is reductionist and restrictive. It reduces humans into a set of bits and bytes and then into a narrow pigeonhole where everyone needs to fit. Every human, by design, is different and therefore unpredictable – even from his or her own self a day or a moment back. That's what differentiates us from machines. And that's what the human civilisation will always strive for.

RECOGNIZE THAT UNCERTAINTY IS
AN INVITATION TO GO ON THE ATTACK

- RAM CHARAN



“He has the rare ability to distill meaningful from meaningless and transfer it to others in quiet, effective way,” said the former Chairman of GE, Jack Welch, describing noted guru and thought leader, Dr. Ram Charan. Dr. Ram Charan, the world-renowned business advisor, author and speaker has spent the past 35 years working with many top companies, CEOs, and boards of our time. In his work with companies including GE, MeadWestvaco, Bank of America, DuPont, Novartis, EMC, 3M, Verizon, Aditya Birla Group, Tata Group, GMR, Max Group, Yildiz Holdings, and Grupo RBS, he is known for cutting through the complexity of running a business in today’s fast changing environment to uncover the core business problem. His real-world solutions, shared with millions through his books and articles in top business publications, have been praised for being practical, relevant and highly actionable—the kind of advice you can use Monday morning.

The competition is no longer within companies, no longer within industries, is about the echo system.

Future Ideas caught up with Dr. Ram Charan to get a glimpse of the idea of leadership for the future.

Question: Since your first book, ‘Every business is a Growth Business’, published in 2000 and now, how has the idea of organization, growth and leadership changed?

Answer: I think growth is really determined by the leadership. Leaders make a difference. Today, what is different in the leadership is the ascend of new digital technology, the growth of the internet, the declining cost of servers and the increasing capacity of computers, which has resulted in a new landscape. New people have come in who are experts in technology, creating a new space and competition. Old legacy companies that are not in tune are getting disrupted. This is changing the industry. So, the leadership has changed. It is people who understand these new technologies, those who can apply it lead. And those who are legacy leaders of 2000’s and 1990’s are left in the old era because some of these businesses which don’t use digital technology are on the decline.

Question: All companies deal at different levels with consumers and aspects of human behaviour. Some of these aspects and emotions which build great organizations, great teams and connect brands with consumers remain the same. So, what has changed?

Answer: In the past, the entire process of product development was a push ball. Companies did some research on the consumer, took this back for product development and sold the product to the consumer. New technology has completely and clearly redefined the consumer end to end experience. This has forced the rethinking and redoing the internal functioning of companies. Now, data is the equity and is collected at every touch point. Algorithms do the sorting out. Products are tested on the internet. So there is a sea change in the consumer companies.

Question: Today, when age, education and experience are being challenged as key determinants of leaders, who would you call a leader of tomorrow?

Answer: We need to look at it a little differently. We have people at the age of 20 with no experience that are running multimillion dollar consumer companies. These individuals, are leaders because the technology that they have worked on have the real feel and understanding of the consumers. The old definition of leadership is no longer adequate. One has to imagine the new consumer experience, end to end, in terms of what is the convenient for the consumer, how to increase the consumer base by 10 or 20 or 100 times, how do you create a platform. It is no longer about giving speeches, one has to get their hands dirty.

Great leaders are able to construct a vision, a space, a need, a market and a future.

Question: Based on these markers, how are their challenges different from the challenges of the previous generation of leaders?

Answer: The challenge for them is to have to keep ahead of fellow digital companies, to keep innovating continuously and to scale up faster. Another challenge is to get the right talent keeping in mind the shortage of talent today.

Question: Do you also believe that in times to come, we will see organizations that have shorter life spans but have a larger fundamental impact?

Answers: The competition is no longer within companies, no longer within industries, it is about the echo system. Every company will need to have an echo system where partners are using the same platform. An example of this is Amazon.

Companies, also, have to be in tune to external changes. The word sustainable is obsolete today and companies have to be made sustainable every day.

Question: What is your view on India as a leader in the next 70 years? What will it take for us to succeed and become a global power in the next innings?

Answer: Everybody knows leadership is essential. If we have great leaders, we will succeed. If we do not, we will be left behind. It is that simple. Atal Bihari Vajpayee came and India progressed. The first four years of Congress, India progressed. It laid shallow under the next one. We now have a leader who is leading. Let us see who we will have next. America had leaders for 20 years who operated without the stimulus of the fiscal policy. The new president is going to change that.

In the leader lies all the answer. A great leader has to shape policies and shape the legislation. The leadership of a nation makes an essential difference.

Question: What is your sense on the new generation of leaders apart from the ability to cope with technology and time?

Answer: The use of technology to reconceive the market space.

Question: In the next year, do you see a leap frogging moment across the globe or in India?

Answer: I almost reckon that the American economy will be growing 3%+ or 4%, a change which will impact the whole world.

Question: Is that because you foresee strong leadership?

Answer: Yes, the leader is going to provide fiscal stimulus.

Question: Will this affect confidence and growth in the economy? And how will this relate to India?

Answer: It has already begun, we don't have to guess. The consumer is very positive. The fourth quarter results will show a 3-4% growth and this will affect India positively.

Question: In terms of leadership across domains such as the ability to lead a nation, to lead an organization etc., in which walk do you see an absence of context or leadership?

Answer: Every society, even uneducated, has leaders. They may not get a chance to rise. Trump was not expected by most people to win. He did. I have no doubt in my mind that every society has them. 25 years ago, I do not think anybody knew that Modi would be the Prime Minister. He rose against the opposition of some very powerful people in BJP, but chances permitted. Then, there was Manmohan Singh who was in a leadership job but was not a leader.

Question: In your book 'The Attacker's Advantage', you talk about the story of the perpetual equity. You also mentioned that sustainability has to be redefined daily, but while we were growing up, we looked up to companies that had survived a 100 years investing in people, in distribution, in brands and equally in technology. Today, GE again is in the state of transformation to a technology led industrial giant. But we see a new model emerging, such as that of Tesla and Apple, which focuses more on disruption than on sustainable growth. Do you think this will be the norm in the future? Do you see these becoming 200 year organizations?

Answers: It all depends on the leadership. You have to earn everyday your right to grow. The right to be able to adapt to change and create change. They is no guarantee for any company to succeed. It is leadership, adaption and seeing the world from outside in. The greatest companies with large market shares disappear and there is no reason to believe that large companies will not disappear.

Question: How can leaders build followership?

Answer: By addressing the needs of the people, taking care of the people, and demonstrating that they can take the people forward. Above all, by showing credibility. We will see in the first quarter what Trump does to build his credibility.

Question: We are also noticing women leadership emerging strongly. What looks like the world of tomorrow in terms of leadership?

Answer: There is no specific formula for leadership. How do you describe a leader of a Facebook or a Google? Nobody would be able to fit these people in the definition of leadership but they are running multibillion dollar businesses. We have to be very pragmatic. The CEO of Facebook and Google are much better than CEOs of old companies and they are destroying them. Age has nothing to do with it.

Question: What are the key things that leaders get inspired by?

Answer: There are two main things: one, a vision. Great leaders are able to construct a vision, a space, a need, a market and a future. Second, leaders learn and are inspired from people around.



Ram Charan is a world-renowned business advisor, author and speaker who has spent the past 35 years working with many top companies, CEOs, and boards of our time.

Every act of creation is
first an act of destruction

- Pablo Picasso



The Age of Kalki

In the last 70 years, Indian society and the world at large have progressed at a remarkable pace. During the earlier centuries, humans invented tools and technology that allowed us to expand the capacity of the human body – weapons to hunt, the wheel and later the steam engine and aeroplanes to move us faster, homes, buildings, clothes to protect us and such like.

In more recent times, with the consumerization of technology and the advent of the digital age, we are augmenting the capacity of the human mind. Technology is used to communicate, compute and imagine faster and better. Technology is used to overcome the limitations imposed by time and space. Media and the internet has converged to expand space, compress time and usher in new behaviours. Human powers have been multiplied with the power of computing accessible to almost everyone.

The human mind is on steroids and the past seventy years have unleashed the imagination of the next generation to shape the future of our civilization. The world today responds interestingly to bold human aspirations and imaginations. In the past, we humans used to harness nature to derive benefits from it. Today, an attempt to question every limitation that nature imposes on us is visible.

Some of the best minds in science and business are engaged on how we can build colonies in Mars and beyond. Perhaps we will consume more than what the Earth is capable of producing and hence we want to “print” food. Our horizons are broadening and so is time. We wish to live longer, challenge the biological clock and even achieve immortality! We humans want to be able to predict, control and measure every small and large aspect of our everyday life. We want to code or manufacture our offsprings as well – inputting in them everything we understand to be perfect. The attempt to take over from nature is visible in almost every facet of life. Everything that man prayed from God – whether it is to give us food, bless us with children, protect us from natural forces and give us a secure and predictable life – no longer requires divine intervention. We are in

*The world
today responds
interestingly to bold
human aspirations
and imaginations.*

Hindu philosophy states that destruction is necessary for creation and establishing a new world order.

control of our destiny. Humans are the new Gods.

In Indian mythology, when the flow is controlled, nature is defied and when man takes on the role of God, the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu is born. Kalki is known to banish existing systems, mark the end of time and create a new world order.

We have conquered a lot of diseases, flown outside the Earth and taken on the challenge to create artificial intelligence. Over the next

seventy years, as we conquer death, colonise outer space, code our offsprings, replace human labour with robots, design human interactions and create our own Galapagos, we will see the arrival of Kalki. We will usher in a new age wherein man overtakes the design of God and challenges principles of the nature. What next? The arrival of Kalki, as envisaged in Hindu mythology, also marks a time of disruption and destruction.

The Hindu trinity celebrates Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Shiva as the destructor. Hindu philosophy states that destruction is necessary for creation and establishing a new world order.

Yet, in India, change is resisted and stability is preferred. Change happens along the axis of expanding tradition. Unlike in most other parts of the world, we as a nation or as a civilization have rarely faced huge or sudden disruption. It is the reason why we are among the few places in the world with a continuous civilization of over 4000 years. There have been plenty of wars, famines and diseases, but these were largely localized and never pan-Indian. Even colonization was a gradual phenomenon. For good, or for worse, we have been able to negotiate with change and deal with it at our own terms. We are thus incremental thinkers, reactive to change rather than proactive towards it and believe that in due course, everything will achieve its own course.

However, the world is going far ahead at a rapid pace with new imagination and bold thought. The age of Kalki will bring with it tectonic shifts in society with immense disruption and destruction. But in India, we have barely been able to take cognizance of it.

The laws of nature endowed a liberalized India with a young demographic profile. A younger India could work harder, earn more and get richer quicker. Yet, we now stare at the possibility of missing this demographic dividend and remaining poorer as a nation as we grow older. We need fresh, original, disruptive thinking, rather than an incremental approach to address such opportunities and challenges that we will face.

Even when we have tried to be proactive in addressing changes and challenges like urbanization, social security, poverty alleviation – our policies and perspectives have borrowed Western thought and imagination. In our rush to become a developed nation, we are borrowing metrics, policies and prescriptions that have worked somewhere in the West – employment guarantee, demonetization, digitization. The Age of Kalki will bring forth far bigger challenges.

In the Age of Kalki, no rationale synthesis, extrapolations and algorithms can tell us what future has in store. Followership will not enable leadership. Only through imagination and original thought will India be able to succeed in the Age of Kalki.

In the next 70 years, India would be a different nation. The future will be mythical and spacious. The strange and the unfamiliar may be the new normal for us. Our systems, beliefs and ideas will be destroyed and be rebuilt. A new cycle, a new organization, a new society may be born. New values and new beginnings may be made and in the Age of Kalki a new Indian social order has to be born!

