



BOOK REVIEW

“ A BETTER INDIA, A BETTER WORLD”

by N.R. Narayana Murthy

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Preamble :

NRN's 'Introduction' itself gives one, the glimpses of what is there inside the book , so absorbing , one gets drawn to each speech, like a bee to the honey flower.

NRN's speeches at varied forums are presented in ten parts:

Address to Students, Values, Important National Issues, Education, Leadership Challenges, Corporate and Public Governance, Corporate Social Responsibility, Entrepreneurship, Globalization & Infosys.

After reading each part, I pause, try to digest and reflect whether I could present a succinct digest, which is the function of book review. I really feel whether I could do justice to this monumental collection of NRN's speeches on almost all aspects of human behaviour, how one can make India better, what kind of mental frame work every citizen should cultivate, his concern for the teeming poor, his vision of happiness to every Indian through basic needs, ethics in living, politics, corporates, responsibility to every citizen, India to be part of Globalization. I am amazed at the depth of experienced knowledge of this Icon, the Role Model in the words of Dr. Manmohan Singh, on diverse fields. Many know NRN as the founder of and father of Infosys, a model of corporate ethics and social responsibility. Look at the humility of this Icon. He writes "It is not easy to talk about a colossus like Jawaharlal Nehru" I feel I have taken up the most arduous task of this book review. I did not experience this when I wrote first book review on 'Our Ice berg is Melting 'authored by John Katter. I can only pray to the Almighty to give me the intellectual capacity to absorb and present succinctly so as to infuse in the mind of every reader, mostly the younger student generation, on whom rests the responsibility to clean up the mess into which India has been driven by the corrupt political class, *the passion to read this book from end to end, absorb and get inspired to become NRN's dream citizen of India. I would then feel I have accomplished.*

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The Review :

I am presenting Parts 'Address to Students' and 'Education' rather elaborately, as these two parts are of immense importance to students in formulating their character. I have attempted digest of other parts.

Address to Students:

Learning from experience:

Let me pose a proposition: 'If one were to learn from one's own experience, it is only a reflection after the event. How far one can anticipate and be prepared? When something crops up all on a sudden, where are we to look to? This is where learning from other's experience comes handy. One is able to find a solution applying this model'. Let me share with you an event from my life experience.

I had to face way back in 1975 a situation. You may not even know today 'what key loan from a bank is'. Today, it is anachronism. Then, it was the order of the day with most banks, particularly nationalized banks. So conservative, for each part, say for an engine assembly, you pay the money value of the part under lock and key of the bank in your own premises. The assembly line comes to a halt if you do not have the money to get the part released. This led to corruption as the manager of the branch could be persuaded to release without payment or substituting with something of no value. One way to get over was to get rid of the bank and seek assistance from a bank more open and trusting the customer.

I had witnessed, in my first entry into the private sector from government service the uncompromising and bossing attitude of a foreign bank to a very reputed group. The chairman was so annoyed he sought the help of an Indian private sector bank of India's illustrious group. With the facilities provided by this bank, the chairman, in one go, settled the total dues running to several crores to the foreign bank and yet allowed it to continue its operations from the group premises as before. The result was the prompt removal of the expat chief manager from office by the HO abroad.

Taking this clue, I urged my MD to try and get funds even temporarily, while preparing the ground with another public sector bank, practicing liberal policy. When we got the funds, I quietly signed a cheque along with the MD and got rid of the stifling bank in one go, despite opposition from diehard colleagues. I am sure, you will be convinced of the need to learn from the experience of others, more particularly from our icon NRN's life.

NRN's four life lessons –

1. As a Graduate student at IIT Kanpur, for NRN, the spark that came from the discussions of a famous computer scientist on the developments altered his future. He took to computer science like fish to water. It shows one role model altering the future of a young student for the better, a valuable advice coming from an unexpected quarter. The power of chance events one may come up.
2. How the cold journey in Bulgarian border, the treatment at the hands of Bulgarian guards and the long journey to Istanbul, starving for 108 hrs., transformed NRN from a confused leftist, which phase everyone in need of basics pass through, to a determined compassionate capitalist, which he practised in his life and now preaching.
3. His determination and conviction that Infosys has a bright future, when even \$ 1 million purchase offer was attractive, so desperate the situation was in 1990. 1990 to 2009 is not a long journey for a corporation but the stunning growth proved NRN's vision was right, of course, he and his team toiled hard, bringing out the mind set to succeed.
4. How his tough stand not to bend to customer's brow beating and stand up on one's own lifted Infosys to great heights and the development

5. Self-reflection, the Indian spiritual tradition
The gist of his advice:-Whatever may be one's achievements, however high one goes up in career or in public life, we are all temporary custodians of the wealth we generate. The best use of wealth is to share with less fortunate, be it money, knowledge. Having eaten from trees that we did not plant, it is our responsibility to plant for the future generation so that they can eat and follow the golden principle.

The Indian of the twenty-first century :

In this, NRN brings out his perception of an Indian – well educated, responsible to society, showing fairness to less unfortunate, eager to create a future that posterity can be proud of, thereby fulfilling the promise that freedom brought. This Indian nurses a worthy dream. has the ability to translate that dream to reality by high performance action, has the mind set to accept new ideas, evaluate them for progress. More and more reservation in every walk of life breeds more corruption. Our election system provides the incentive to politicians to keep majority of the people poor and poorer, so that the vote bank could be sustained by a few throwaway just before election. (NSS addition-We are reminded of the great sayings of Rajaji- Adult franchise, without the backup of quality education of everyone, will lead to corruption becoming a way of life. rather continuing the corrupt system of British raj on a mass scale).

NRN's advice to students is to lead by example in work ethic, honesty, following the rule of law and contracts. and charity. Instead of paying lip service to Mahatma Gandhi, like majority of politicians, walk the talk and practise the precept. The ideal Indian of the 21st century, NRN hopes, will have the characteristics- Non-violence (does not mean weakness or submissiveness), controlling desires (which we badly need today), kindness to all, forgiveness, peace, meditation, charity and truth.

The need for excellence:

India has a vibrant democracy, a free press and an independent judiciary; the third largest pool of world class scientists and engineers, self-sufficiency in food grains, built dams, rockets and satellites; but, alas, it is a but, there is no single field where India has been adjudged the best. That is because we do not practice excellence in any field. There are only words but no action. Reputation is to be built with achievements and that is in the hands of the youth who are the future India.

Education:

NRN's "what would I do if I were the principal of a secondary school" reflects the model of how a school should function. Constant revision of curricula to match the changing needs, emphasis on problem solving in each subject, addressing real- life context, particularly in economics, physics and chemistry, with models in demonstrating the theory in class, thereby infusing confidence in students to tackle actual problems in the world outside the school are to be the pathway. For this, the teacher–student ratio to be such, better attention is given to each student. This in turn will give the impetus to have more quality schools, with good standard of teachers. Application of technology for interactive sessions in teaching science, mathematics and economics and introduction of Algorithmic thinking from fourth standard are his way of imparting education to children. The principal and teachers are to be the epitome of all that is good. As keen observers, students will have the role model to absorb and thus become good citizens in later life.

The urban schools should be allowed to function without interference from government. The need for good education will, by itself, regulate functioning. Primary and secondary schools in the rural areas are to be run by the government with all the available resources. The very model of urban schools will give the impetus to quality in rural schools. This is NRN's prescription for bettering our education system to produce good future leaders.

Having spelt out the platform for primary and secondary education, NRN gives a framework for reforms in higher education. 'A University should be a place of light, of liberty and of learning' so says Benjamin Disraeli, one of the finest parliamentarians of UK. Here, I would like to digress from NRN's. Our universities mostly are the hot bed of intrigues, thanks to the way Vice-Chancellors are appointed by the party in power to dance to their tunes, in utter disregard of academic excellence expected of the personality. Faculty quality is at its lowest. Too much demand and too little quality supply. Ph.D. programme India is such one can get conferred by simply sitting at home. The quality of research papers submitted are such poor standard, they are not even worth the papers on which they are printed. These Ph.Ds. are to guide our youngsters in various institutions of higher learning. One can imagine the output quality. NRN laments that the practice of getting PhD theses evaluated by researchers from abroad that obtained during 1960s and 1970s in India. had given way to *localization, leading to watering down standards to suit political bosses, with scant respect to quality.* (NSS addition- Such is the level of education of our parliamentarians they stooped to dilute the great IITs, higher seats of learning, which, along with IIMs, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre and the All Institute of Medical sciences, conceived and created by Jawaharlal Nehru, to form the backbone of the engineering and managerial talent of India. If today, India has achieved the position of a significant player in the global software, it is the vision of the Colossus Nehru. The recently introduced controversial reservations in these citadels of higher learning, under the pretext of accommodating the underprivileged, instead of tackling at the primary and secondary stage to develop these downtrodden through special programmes of coaching and thus bring them up to the standard and help them compete with others, have eroded quality input and the resultant output, as lower standards are observed

for passing out. In fact, the reservation system has been systematically exploited by the very same families who have been benefited without any justification. If in spite of all these manmade hurdles, the elite from IITs and IIMs are receiving global recognition, it speaks of the determination of this few to prove their mettle. Very soon, our IIT'ians and IIM'eans will lose global recognition. In fact some private Management institutes and engineering colleges have surpassed these citadels in quality). This NRN terms 'A tendency to descend to lowest common denominator in everything we do'.

NRN's prescriptions to bring educational institutions to acceptable standards from the present deplorable to which they have been driven:

The first is to raise the aspirations, confidence, energy and enthusiasm of our educational institutions. For this, stifling and excessive control of the bureaucracy over the last thirty years should be replaced by best global benchmark to measure the performance of our universities, supported by best infrastructure facilities, research and quality of curricula across various fields – engineering, medicine, pure science, and literature. Indian universities should participate in global rankings and use the findings to rejuvenate and excel; cultivate an environment of openness and set up interactions with the best universities of the world through collaborative research initiatives and exchange programmes for faculty and students.

NRN is of the opinion that the above is easier to implement in private universities, perhaps colleges. Private universities are few in number in India. (NSS addition- Many private institutions of higher education have sprung up as pure sources of income for political class and their supporters. The recent 'Times Now' exposure through videotape of Rs.40 lakhs capitation fee for a medical seat at the famous Ramachandra medical institute, Chennai, and another, also in Chennai, where a present

central minister is allegedly connected, are cases of gross violation of Supreme Court judgment banning capitation fee. In fact, this is going on in many institutions in south India, the governments practicing a nelson's eye. There is the urgent need to delink all political family connections, direct or indirect to ensure that admissions are purely merit based. Sale of seats of this magnitude to obviously accommodate poor quality rich students will lead to wastage and /or produce third rate engineers and doctors; quite a number get into positions of authority to perpetuate corrosion of standards).

NRN recommends replacement of excessive control of the governments by a Regulatory Committee for each group, comprising eminent men and women, including well known educationists from countries that are in top five in global educational rankings. This group should meet twice a year to set the standards in each of these areas and review the progress. The standards should be widely circulated in newspapers and internet for parents and students to know what to expect. Ranking top fifty institutions in each area in the country by national dailies and weeklies; and in regional dailies, similar data on institutions in each state, as is obtaining in USA and other countries, will bring to focus the state of other institutions and the need to gear up. This will generate competitive progress in quality. All government funded universities should be subject to the purview of the Regulatory Committee and the findings shall be binding on the government to ensure compliance.

NRN's quote of Jawaharlal Nehru at the end of this thought provoking lecture is worth remembering all the time as the guiding light: "**For growth, our country needs a scientific temper....Only science, education and the pursuit of knowledge can help solve our problems of poverty, of superstition, of vast rich resources running waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people**".

This review on education will be incomplete without NRN's views on the 'Role of Religion in Education' appearing in 'Address to students'

NRN begins with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi that is critical for a successful life as well as a successful career: "All your scholarship would be in vain if at the same time you do not build your character and attain mastery over your thoughts and your actions". NRN observes that India adopted secularism as its credo. The concept of secularism generally means that religion is an individual's private matter and it has no place in any public transactions. 'For me, secularism is about respecting every religion and appreciating the positive aspects of each such faith'. Religion plays an important part in our lives by shaping our values and our interactions with the world. Students, as the future leaders, would do well to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs of colleagues. It is not by a wish but by teaching tolerance to children. NRN again quotes Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest of all who preached and practiced: 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed . I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible'

Where do we begin teaching? In schools and colleges teaching must encompass all major religions, with syllabi updated to include such discussions. It should be ensured that children learn only the noble aspects of these religions and are not forced to follow them. In short, it should not be treated as platform for conversion. For this, specially trained teachers should be deployed. If we can ensure this, then teaching could be even at primary school level.

(NSS addition-It would be appropriate here to assess the present climate in India. Today's politics has gone to such abysmal level decrying one's own religion is construed as 'secularism'. The way caste based politics is playing havoc to spoil the young

minds; one wonders whether NRN's brand of religious teaching will have the right effect. As we know, NRN is an optimist and his concept is worth a try, starting in a small way).

Concluding remarks:

The review on two parts of immense interest to students – 'Address to students' and 'Education' is itself has taken so much space. Normally a book review is to be brief. As I said at the beginning, it is rather an uphill task to review all the ten parts speeches of NRN. It is so comprehensive that it is difficult to condense without losing the substance. However, I am attempting to give the gist of the parts so to draw the attention of the young minds to emphasise that it is a must read in full by all students who are the future of this great nation – **a chakde India.**

Values: The five lectures in this part are summarized by NRN in the article 'Chak De India', most beautifully conveyed by Shah Rukh khan:

- We have to identify ourselves as Indians first and rise above our affiliations with our states, religions and castes.
- We must accept meritocracy and enthusiastically play the role we are best suited to.
- We must discipline while following the steps required for success.
- We have to put the interest of the nation ahead of our personal interests, subordinating our egos and biases.
- We must look for leadership with determination to fight the scourge of corruption.
- Finally, we have to put in tremendous hard work and make short term sacrifices for long term Glory.

Important National Issues :

Lessons from the economic reforms of 1991

The Economic Reforms of 1991 initiated by the Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, ably supported by the then finance minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and his team, transformed India, in less than a week, from command and control economy, which brought the country to near bankruptcy, to an almost free economy and thus heralded the growth in every sector, the fruits of which we had been experiencing for a decade. Sustained growth calls for good work ethic, honesty, humility, objectivity, high quality leadership and social commitment to people. These are not easy but in John F. Kennedy's words: "our problems are man-made. Therefore, they may be solved by man. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings", we get reinforced to achieve the goal.

India's demographic profile, with a high growth of working population can be a fuel for faster economic growth, rather 'a demographic window of opportunity' for the country. This growing population is to be transformed into 'good human capital', which, in turn, would contribute to high levels of labour productivity and entrepreneurship driving growth in the economy. But, there is the question-whether this population growth will put a serious burden on environment and resource. While, on one hand, India will have to stabilize population at 1.75 billion by 2045, India has the opportunity to leapfrog old, inefficient technology and focus on new, sustainable solutions – more efficient transportation and sanitation systems, clean fuel vehicles, better product and process technologies in manufacturing and bioengineering of crops rather than use of fertilizers. All these call for innovative solutions for which India has adequate talent.

On urban development, NRN draws our attention to the words of geographer David Harper –'cities are endowed with great character and with fascinating, ever- changing personalities'. It is the need of the

hour to embrace intelligent, practical and effective policies for urban development and governance to transform our dynamic, fast changing urban centres into truly sustainable engines of growth.

NRN talks about *the eight visions that changed the face India:*

The Green Revolution initiated by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan in 1965, transforming India from a food- deficit economy to a food- surplus economy and triggering rural non-farming economy, thereby uplifting 400 to 500 million Indians.

The white revolution, the extraordinary vision of Dr. Verghese Kurien, continued ably by Amrita Patel, transformed India from an acute shortage of milk to the world's largest producer of milk. 'Amul' is the household word in every nook and corner of India in the last 30 years.

The economic reforms of 1991 initiated by former PM late P.V.Narasimha Rao, Dr. Manmohan Singh and his team, opened up the minds of Indian corporate leaders to global markets, accept competition at home and abroad and raised confidence of consumers. With hard currency reserves going up substantially, the economy took to unprecedented growth. (NSS addition: although the powers that be have been uncharitable to PVN in the subsequent years after his retirement)

The others are; '**Independent media and brave journalist**', the pillars of democracy, already pinning down series of scams which would have gone unnoticed; '**The telecom Revolution**' bringing the urban and the rural together, under the leadership of Sam Petroda, (NSS addition: **another one, sidelined by the very same powers that be**, perhaps reflecting the character of the present powers that be); **Space technology and satellite television**, connecting millions of villages of India, giving voice to a billion people-the rich and the poor, the educated and uneducated, the powerful and the

disenfranchised; **Atomic energy**, conceptualized by Dr. Homi Bhaba and his initiatives on nuclear science research in India now transformed into successful nuclear energy for application in defence, power generation, medicine and allied areas. India is recognized as a mature and responsible player in this field, thanks to its sworn declaration that nuclear energy is for peaceful use only; and **The software revolution** for which the foundation was laid by N. Vittal's software technology parks programme, leading to a 60 billion export by IT companies, bench marked with the best in the world, following the finest principles of corporate governance. All the above eight programmes were all led by visionaries.

NRN, while giving the twenty-third Jawaharlal Nehru memorial lecture in London on 4th December, 2000, proudly spoke about **software enterprises as the Temples of India**. He acknowledged that the dream of making India a significant player in the global software industry would not have been possible without Nehru's vision in creating the IITs which formed the backbone for the development of IT industry in India, which, aided by the large pool of English speaking population and assisted by competitive cost, has emerged as the world's strong contender to the top position in software development and services. It is the consistent export earnings of the IT industry that fuelled the economic development that India witnessed, meaning really the temples of India.

NRN's lectures on '**Leadership Lessons from the Infosys Journey**' and '**A leadership Mind set for a Resurgent India**' speak volumes about NRN's leadership qualities which he has put to practice in Infosys with remarkable results.

NRN's lectures On **Good corporate governance and Corporate Governance and its relevance to India** are reflected in his recommendations on *Independent Directors*, known as Narayanamurthy committee's recommendations.

NRN's concept of **Compassionate Capitalism**, a revelation that came to him at the hands of the Bulgarian guards, is about bringing the power of capitalism to the benefit of large masses. It is about combining the power of the mind and heart, the good of capitalism and socialism. NRN refers to the Swedish example of private ownership of means of production, with an elaborate welfare system that transformed poor Sweden to one of the richest in Europe. This way capitalism will be accepted as the tool of emancipation of the poor. In the words of John F Kennedy, 'if a society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich'. It is our duty to create a mandate for an ideology that we believe in –one which allows unfettered opportunities to create an upward spiral of wealth and prosperity for everyone. This duty is even more vital for us, the business leaders, who have enjoyed the benefits of the system. In other words, NRN wants the business world-nurture a revolution of kindness.

On **Entrepreneurship**, NRN draws his conclusions, based on his own experience. Entrepreneurship is about creating wealth from scratch. Openness to new ideas, meritocracy, speed, imagination and excellence in execution are the five attributes of any successful entrepreneur. Those who leverage these attributes will survive and succeed in the coming decades of intense competition.

I would like to close this review quoting NRN- 'Why has Infosys been cited as the best-respected company more often than any other company in India in the last decade? It is clearly due to our steadfast commitment to our values- respect and dignity in every transaction, conduct in a fair and ethical manner every employee be proud of and keep his head high'.

I consider we need to keep in mind all the time the great poem of Rabindranath Tagore to evaluate whether India has realized the vision of his poem. Let me end by quoting the same:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action–

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake'.

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