

Beyond the shells of metros!

“The future of india lies in its villages”

~Mahatma Gandhi

Largest Democracy, Second Largest Population, leader in art & culture are a just few parameters, which raises our head high as Indians in the global outfit. Multiple Indian born Nobel Laureates ignites our pride. Indira Nooyi as CEO of Pepsi or Vikram Pandit as CEO of Citibank at World level defines the tremendous success of entrepreneurial and managerial worth of Indians at the top most level. This is worthy mentionable that Laxmi Mittal is reckoned as Steel King of the world.

Indians have always been proud of their brains and its constructive applications to rule the world. India is yet to achieve the status of a developed country, but Indians have proved to show the proper direction to the leaders even in most advanced countries. A little bit of supporting data - The latest statistics shows that as many as 12% scientist and 38% doctors in the United States are Indians and in NASA 36% or you can say even 4 out of 10 scientists are Indians. And in software? The phenomenal success of Indians has even been recognized by the software giant Microsoft Bill Gates and IBM. The figures make all other countries of the world becoming jealous. 34% of the total employees of MS are Indians; in case of IBM it is 28%. Among the leading brands, Intel has preferred to fill up his employee quota by 17% Indians and Xerox has 13%.

Here are some interesting statistics for the inquisitive minds. In the field of Education, Indira Gandhi Open University (IGNOU) with millions of students have got the crown of the largest open University in the world. Indians are in the prime slot of ornamental richness with a commendable contribution of 20% revealing their foppish fancy. It is the country India, where the people get indulged in the extravagant expense of Diamond. Don't get surprised by the fact that 9 out of 10 diamonds in the world are made in India!

The irony is that the glamorous figures of achievements come mostly from the metros or cities. You can plunge into the hi-speed traffic over the glittering flyovers or even in the comfort of air conditioned vehicles only in a very limited number of cities in India. Broadband, Leased Lines have opened up the gateway to the dynamic world to a city inhabitant. Indian Rail runs Metro railway only in Kolkata and Delhi. You can even pamper yourself to the luxury of a night-life in a metro city only.

Brushing aside all such comfort, luxury and even hard earned achievements of the city dweller's, the lifeline of India still owes its root to the villages. Just for an example, the glitters of a diamond embedded wrist watch can be the icon of a mid-night party, but it hardly satisfies you

appetite, rather you need to bank on agricultural products, which still remains as the backbone of the country's economy. Our key exports are still agricultural products like rice, grains, fruits, flowers, oils, sugar, which add value significantly to our country's worth. The crux is that we hardly show homage to the people, who reasonably contributes to the improvisation of agriculture, unfortunately, they remain un-honoured and unsung. The Indian scientists, who have been recognized as international achievers in agricultural research, hardly get the desired fame in Indian community. Perhaps, the myth is ironically translated in real life that a Prophet is not honoured in his own country.

The fact of life remains that the highly talked off IT sector is not the only industry in the world. The glamour is just because of high returns, fabulous pay packages and enormous employment opportunities. The illusion of IT orientation has made us forget about the basic strategy being formulated during Nehru's Era which gave rise to making of five years plan. Most of the problem of pollution, water crises, global warming and poor traffic conditions in Metros are the result of our continuous metro centric mind set. The exuberant focus on metros have diluted some basic norms and ethics.

The recent past has witnessed that we have insisted the farmers to sell the fertile lands even to the builders without evaluating the true potential of the land. When the actual metro is becoming over populated, we are extending the metros somehow even by encroaching upon the golden land removing greenery. Even the environmentalist hardly bothers to calculate the actual number of trees sacrificed every year. The age-old plan of improvement and development of Industrialization in the country used to consider the socio-economic growth of the locality.

As an example, we can talk of the steel plants, which could also bring sizeable investment through collaboration and partnership, but they used to focus on the overall growth of the locality by building solid infrastructure, developing the concerned villages and villagers, which simultaneously opened up a scope of enormous employment. We must recall that all these were developed in the places like Bhilai, Rourkella, Durgapur, at a point of time, when they used to be considered mostly as villages and even today their status falls much shorter than the status of glamorous metros.

The short-term gain and glitters at times lures us too much, so that we forget the basic philosophy of industrialization and the key pillars for the growth of a country. We must NOT deny that a well accepted truth is that if an Industry is started in a village it lifts the status of the village into a town through a steady process of development and after emerging as a city, the place get roads to drive, schools for upbringing of children. Markets are developed and a transportational system gets improved during the course of time. I mean to say that the whole structure of the village will undergo a sea change over a period of time, not overnight. One big industry gives rise to number of small industries as ancillary units. Today, the glamour of IT sector focuses only on Metros. The very pertinent question comes, Why new IITs to be made only in Metros or big towns? Can't we think about an under-developed village with huge surplus land which is not good for agriculture for

making transportation, Medical Institute or a University? Can the distance or location act as a hindrance in young aspirants' minds?

Let me take the opportunity to clear the ambiguity. We don't have the intention of criticizing or undermining any industry in particular, rather the initiative is to send culminating opinions to the decision makers. We obviously want to emphasize on the crucial role of the villages in overall growth of the nation and we must raise the voice against the unnecessary move of people from village to metro just by the luring glimpses of the city life. The cities have reached their threshold limits and the further influx will simply act as pumping a balloon beyond its capacity, which can only result to a blast.

Why can't we think of an alternative way, which will raise interest even in the private sectors to move to the villages instead of the saturated metros? We must be passionate enough to listen to their genuine grievances and will try to mitigate them through a systematic approach. As an example, the main reason which repels the corporates to venture out in villages is the infrastructural lacuna like road, transport facilities, supply of adequate electricity etc. A proper strategic planning ensured by the planning commission can focus at providing such basic amenities even in remote villages, thus enabling corporates to consider a village as a true alternative of a metro in the long run. Right here, we need to appreciate the courage of the Steel King, Laxmi Mittal, who has initiated a refinery in a much lesser known district Bhatinda of Punjab. The exuberance of Laxmi Mittal will attract other ancillaries and Bhatinda will witness an investment of thousands of crores, which will surely bring up a radical change in Bhatinda in the upcoming years.

I feel like touching one very important aspect which is otherwise not related with industrial growth but, has got its importance and relevance for modernization, Transport System in Metros. You may come with any number of BRT, Road Widening, Flyovers, Metro Rail, etc. but still the solution will be there in the form of mass transport system. Look at Delhi which has already got a proper rail network since last 3 to 4 decades touching the ring road, but the same is not connected with buses and there is lack of public awareness. Have you heard of Dhaula Kuan Road Railway Station or Lodhi Road Railway Station, all are in the same way and you can easily cover the entire Delhi by a circular journey. You do not find passengers in these trains. When you stop your car at railway crossing, then only you watch good trains to run with utter annoyance.

The history repeats itself and even if we talk of metro railways, it lacks modern outlook. I think the ring road would have been better converted into elevated Metro Route in phased manner. Similarly, in Bombay you have Marol Pipeline catering the water requirement of the entire city. It flows from one reservoir to another by channels. It is properly guarded, well maintained, covers the entire Bombay and suburb having proper space then why cannot we think of a tube rail above it?

The problem is that when we go to Singapore, Switzerland or other places for studying or analyzing the transport system, we certainly forget about the population and the number of vehicles over there. We just get carried away by looking at the surprising co-existence of Tram, Local Bus and

Metro, running on the same road and that too astonishingly without any traffic jam. Let us appreciate that these countries are just like a city of India, if we go by the parameters of area or population.

To summarize, lastly, I would like to say that the Industrial growth of our country still need to be studied in three tiers. We cannot forget Gandhian thoughts. The milk was important and will remain important for which cows, buffalos, goats and camels are required. You can't go away from them. Therefore, villages are necessary as well as villagers. Farmers and other people living in the village need to be given importance. We must not hide that the poverty is still existing. Therefore, in the first tier manufacture of handmade articles, small scale industries should be promoted. The earthen pots and crockery made in the villages should be highly encouraged . The government should provide adequate subsidy to promote the handicraft. The second tier of industrialization should touch upon the ancillary units which may manufacture the small parts for the big industries. The use of cycle needs to be increased and encouraged. I have seen even in a progressive country like Switzerland and Singapore, people love to ride a bicycle in the clearly designated cycle lanes. Why can't we have well planned and designed cycle lanes even in Metros, which will take 1/5th of the space earmarked for BRT? The third tier does not require my suggestion or recommendation because we are already doing it. Look at the multistoried buildings, BPOs, Factories in the Metros.

We, the Indians need to think again and again. Let's go away from these Metros to create new mini Metros in our villages which is still the heartthrob for majority of Indians and the hard fact is that we are dependent on them not only for food and milk, but we also inherit the true Indian culture from them only!