

Total Reform Movement

जहाँ डाल डाल पर सोने की चिड़ियाँ करती हैं बसेरा

वो भारत देश है मेरा



Soné Ki Chidiya

<http://sonekichidiya.in>

An India to be proud of¹

1. Security for everyone and quick justice
2. Total elimination of corruption in three years
3. Strong rupee not degraded by inflation
4. Removal of obstructions on production and trade
5. Access to high quality schools for the poorest
6. Total elimination of poverty in three years
7. Low taxes because government will only perform key roles
8. High quality infrastructure including transport, power, and water
9. Motivating good people into public life through electoral reforms
10. Better prices for farmers till prices are deregulated

For thousands of years, our science, agriculture and craftsmanship were unparalleled. We supplied most luxuries and needs for the Roman Empire and Europe². In return, India was the final destination for most of the world's gold. It was therefore viewed as a golden bird (*Sone Ki Chidiya*). India was also humanity's guiding light, with many of world religions and philosophies having emerged from here.

Given this proud history, British rule was a huge blow and pushed us back by hundreds of years. But sixty five years after the Britishers left, we are hardly any better. Today's India is surely not what the heroes of our independence struggle dreamt of. We are less a Republic today, more an oppressed nation ruled by tyrants. And we can't blame the British now – after six decades of self-rule. We must take our share of responsibility for the continuing injustice, decadence and corruption of India. It is time we do something about this.

Our 'honorable' politicians have degraded India and brought our once proud country to its knees:

¹ Draft, 12 February 2013.

² Mukund, Kanakalatha, *Merchants of Tamilakam: Pioneers of International Trade*, Delhi: Allen Lane, 2012. (Series Editor: Gurcharan Das), see Foreword.

- India is more famous worldwide for corruption than for its knowledge, innovation, wisdom, or character. Our corrupt politicians have hoarded massive amounts of black money which is used in unproductive assets like land and gold, reducing productivity and destroying the nation's character.
- No citizen is safe and justice is virtually non-existent. If citizens demand justice they are met with police brutality. But politicians who incite rioting and murder escape untouched.
- India is an oppressive police state, with innocent youngsters arrested for expressing opinions on social media. Our police are known mainly as bribe-seekers than our protectors.
- Dishonest, corrupt, and criminal elements reach the top in India, while the honest are sidelined, harassed and even killed.
- Our Constitution, ravaged by exceptions to equality of status and liberty, and destruction of basic liberties such as property rights, is a bare shadow of the Ambedkar Constitution.
- Public property is plundered by politicians, who give away mines and minerals at throw-away prices to their cronies.
- Severe tax inefficiencies (over 30 types of taxes) have put a brake on saving and investment.
- The last two respected pillars of the Republic – courts and the media – are at risk of becoming an extension of the ruling party and corrupt interests.
- Politicians, to facilitate their loot, enforce outdated British laws, policies and governance systems, and refuse to introduce much needed world-best frameworks.
- Instead of governing, our governments have spent more time in establishing a centrally planned economy, so governments can engage in business, while preventing citizens from producing and trading.

Government is our servant but acts like our master. Our corrupt leaders, sitting on vast piles of black money, are more oppressive than our colonial masters ever were.

Most of our talented people, unable to use their talents in India, have left in droves to settle abroad. India, which had 25 per cent share of world trade not so long ago, now has a mere 1.2 per cent share. Our economy is just 2.7 per cent of the global economy, compared with one-third of the global economy in the past. Tiny countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong; mid-sized countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Japan; and large nations like China have all made significant progress but India continues to resemble tyrannies like Zimbabwe and kleptocracies like Russia.

The current conditions are reminiscent of those in which the Mughal empire broke up. In this darkest of hours over the past three hundred years, the ongoing anti-black money and anti-corruption movements of 2009-2012 – under the leadership of Swami Ramdev and Anna Hazare – have tapped the country's deep unhappiness and brought about an awakening that is now unstoppable.

The time has come to build on these movements and not just demand, but ensure, complete overhaul of governance, making India the best country in the world, a country we can be proud of, again.

Clarion call for action

We must wake up and take charge of our own country. The *Sone Ki Chidiya* movement hereby gives a clarion call to Indians to:

- (1) overthrow the tyrants who in the name of governing, are looting India; and
- (2) demand liberty, good governance, and accountability from government.

We want an India where no child, woman or man goes hungry or feels unsafe. We want to release the energies of our people so they can make India once again the land of milk and honey, the land of

bountiful fruits and plentiful water, dark with the crops of the harvest, and where *Sone Ki Chidiya* chirps on every branch on every tree.

सुजलाम् सुफलाम् मलयज शीतलाम् शस्यशामलां मातरम् । वन्दे मातरम्

Proposed vision for New India

We propose the following vision to be improved as we go along. We want an India:

1. Where our governments fully respect us as masters of the nation.
2. Where we are free to pursue our happiness and spiritual goals so long as we don't harm others.
3. Where our children are ambitious and know they will be rewarded on their merit, not because of whom they know.
4. Where environment is created in which everyone is enabled to earn their own *roti, kapda aur makaan*.
5. Where prosperity is rightfully earned and not stolen or redistributed.
6. Where everyone, including the poorest, get an equal opportunity to achieve their potential:
 - the poor don't have to depend on corrupt welfare schemes but instead, get a direct transfer of an appropriate amount to bring them above the poverty line;
 - children of the poor attend similar schools to those that children of the rich attend (with citizens free to establish their own institutions of learning and learn without government's permission, but with accountability to parents and students); and
 - everyone gets access to immediate emergency health care, with the poor also given access to basic care through social insurance.
7. Where we are safe from criminals and from marauding politicians, policemen and bureaucrats.
8. Where there is quick and proportionate justice:
 - with investigations and decisions being undertaken at "fast track" speed;
 - courts being quick to deliver honest and dispassionate justice; and
 - the ill-gotten of the corrupt being confiscated.
9. Where rogues and criminals cannot become MPs and MLAs:
 - only good people are allowed to contest and bad ones blocked; and
 - and if any criminals do get elected, they are quickly removed after speedy trial.
10. Where government officials are fully accountable, corruption is totally eliminated and black money is declared and brought back to India.
11. Where citizens are able to produce and trade without the nanny state's control:
 - so we can transport goods without being stopped at every *chungji*; and
 - trade globally, consistent with our history as a great trading nation.
12. Where our property is safe:
 - we can buy and sell land and property without using corrupt means; and
 - where the government doesn't forcibly take our land to hand over to big business.
13. Where the government facilitates clean water, sufficient roads, power, ports and railways, and other critically needed infrastructure.
14. Where the government operates within its means, taxes are low, debt is paid off, and our currency is not made worthless because of inflation.

How will we know we have succeeded?

We will know that we are going in the right direction when security, justice, freedom (subject to accountability), education and health, and the status of women will rapidly increase, and corruption, social oppression and discrimination become a thing of the past. In addition, we will know we are in the right direction when everyone becomes more prosperous, and poverty becomes history.

Given the chaos and corruption seen today, many of India's most talented citizens line up in foreign embassies, waiting to permanently leave India. Not only would we want these lines to reverse but we will know we have succeeded when the world's best graduates are desperate to migrate to India, and Indians who previously left return as the world sees India as the land of freedom and opportunity, and the land of science, knowledge, spirituality, and integrity which it once was.

Principles of good governance

For this vision to become a reality, the government must follow the following basic principles:

1) Democracy and subsidiarity (विकेन्द्रीकरण)

Democracy is not license to oppress on minority: Democracy is a tool for public debate and decision making, and not an end in itself. Democracy must therefore be strongly overseen by constitutional constraints that prevent any undue imposition on minorities, or limitations on freedom.

We believe that all powers except those explicitly entrusted to the state should remain with the individual (and family). This is also the principle of subsidiarity, by which the individual is sovereign, with some powers loaned to the local government, a few others to the state government and only the fewest, to the central government. True *swaraj* can only be achieved if functions of government are delegated to the lowest effective level, such as village or mohalla.

Where such delegation is implemented in the interest of effectiveness, misuse of power (e.g. by khap panchayats) must be prevented and the rule of law ensured. Such local bodies, subject to accountability, should be empowered to levy and collect their own taxes (rates) to become financially independent for local decisions such as infrastructure.

2) Strong accountability mechanisms

We must ensure that governments hire people of high integrity and calibre, pay them well (according to market rates) and hold them to account. Governments must, in particular, give incentives to good people to enter public life through significant electoral reforms that also eliminate incentives for crooked, even convicted people to enter the system. Public servants at all levels must be held to account for delivery of results. Performance must be rewarded, and non-performance (based on performance feedback from citizens) lead to termination without notice. Tenured services like IAS must be replaced with contractual services that allow termination for non-performance, and severe punishment must be enforced for corruption.

3) The government must perform its basic role very well

A government's main role is to provide defence and police (security), and justice. Justice should be easy to seek, be swift, and be seen to be done. Government should catch and punish all criminals, murderers and the corrupt.

4) After doing its basic roles properly, the government can perform a few additional functions

It is very dangerous for a government to take on the role of a businessman. As the ancient Indian saying goes: जहाँ का राजा हो व्यापारी वहाँ की प्रजा हो भिखारी. We envisage that government will get out of many of its current functions and consider new functions only on the basis of a world-best policy framework that tests whether government has a role, and whether it can deliver a net benefit.

After delivery of security and justice, the government could potentially facilitate infrastructure that can't be built by private enterprise, and help citizens achieve their potential (on merit) through equal

opportunity. As a result of such revision of government functions, public service jobs in security (police, defence) and justice will increase while many other jobs will reduce.

5) Transitional arrangements

It is important that changes are not disruptive and are well planned, so there are no losers except the corrupt. This might mean that till prices are fully freed, some inefficient subsidies might continue for a while, and direct prices paid to farmers.

Values for a New India

The following principles of national building, based on the ancient Indian tradition of open debate and respectful discussion, can guide us in our efforts to make an India we can be proud of.

1) *Samagra Bharat*

India is one nation. The rule of law, not whimsy, should apply. Government should treat each citizen equally without reference to any innate or group characteristic such as gender or religion including 'caste'. Any social insurance decisions should be made solely on the economic, not religious or caste considerations.

2) Equal opportunity

We believe that a free society must ensure equal opportunity for all (particularly in education). This includes elimination of poverty.

3) Individuals are the foundation of Bharat

All men and women are unique and form the foundation of a society. We hold that progress, welfare and happiness of the people depend on their initiative, enterprise and energy. Through our individual striving and learning, through working with and serving others, we achieve our potential, and the community its best results. An emphasis on the nation must not come at the expense of the individual.

4) Family as key social unit

We recognise and value the role the family plays in bringing up new generations and imbibing the values that lead an individual to self-actualisation, and society to its greatest success. In particular, we value the role of mothers, sisters, and daughters in the formation of a great India.

High fertility is more often than not a symptom of desperation; of poverty. Fertility tends to decline as people get richer and become hopeful that their children, if educated, will achieve more than they themselves could achieve. With the right education and incentives, our large population will produce unparalleled wealth. As good policies are introduced, we expect birth rates to rapidly decline, as parents find it worthwhile to invest in their children's education.

5) Freedom to pursue spiritual and material goals

Each Indian should be free to pursue his or her material and/or spiritual goals, both of which form an important part of India's culture.

यतो भ्युदयानी श्रोयस सिद्धिः स धर्मः³

We stand for the principle of maximum freedom for the individual and minimum interference by the state consistent with its obligation to enforce contracts, prevent and punish those who harm others.

³ In the Vedas it is said that if someone enters *only* into the world of materialism, he enters into a world of darkness. But equally, if someone enters *only* into the world of spiritualism, he too enters into a world of darkness. Only he who seeks both can swim across the three worlds.

In such matters, the government, our servant, cannot tell us how to live our life or what choices we should make. Its role is limited to preventing us from harming others.

6) Freedom comes with accountability

Freedom comes with accountability (कर्मफल सिद्धांत). That is the basic principle of all Indian systems of thought. There is no freedom to harm others. Accountability is not limited to humans. Even animals have a right to live without pain. In particular, where animals are consumed as food, they should be treated with due respect and their pain minimised. Further, plant diversity must be maintained, particularly given the enormous medicinal uses of plants, and natural resources should not be exploited unnecessarily.

But what about self-harm? Many things in life can harm us in excess, or even in moderation. But as Gandhi said, "Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes". We believe that except for regulations for public decorum and public safety, everyone must be free to make their mistakes and learn from them. We are responsible for guiding our friends and family, or even advocating social reform. But we do not agree that coercive powers of government – our servant – should be used to prohibit private folly.

7) Truth and the scientific method

A powerful ancient Indian dictum says: *Satyameva Jayate*, which means that the truth triumphs. Truth requires openness to new ideas (आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः – "Let auspicious thoughts come unto us from every direction", Rg Veda I-89-1) and openness to debate (वाद-विवाद and चर्चा). The scientific method, with roots in ancient Indian science, is one of the best ways to seek the truth.

Accordingly, we hope that the inevitable differences among participants in the *Sone Ki Chidiya* movement will be based on genuine debate and search for the truth.

8) Diversity and tolerance

We value diversity of opinion and belief, and a tolerant India. Arguably, indigenous Indian thought had more diversity than the combined diversity of all modern systems of thought. We agree with Jean Pierre Lehmann that "in a global environment desperate for ideas, philosophy and religion, India is the most prolific birthplace of all three because of the great synergy of democracy and diversity. The planet needs a sense of moral order, spirituality and an ethical compass. The Indian religious and philosophical traditions can provide a great deal of all three."

9) Freedom of occupation and trade

India was a great free market (in labour, goods, services, and capital) for thousands of years. The whole world came to India's shores to buy and to sell. We value freedom of occupation and ability to trade. Free sale of agricultural products is particularly crucial to our farm sector.

Perhaps the occasion where freedom to trade can be questioned is when goods are dumped into India at prices well below cost of production. Even then, free choices on quality and price are better for Indians than imposing barriers which can lower India's long-term competitiveness. In any event, the use of 'infant industry' arguments after 65 years of independence is not tenable.

A society that follows such principles can live in mutual harmony with itself and its environment. Perhaps a useful expression to summarise these aspirations is आध्यात्मिक न्यायवाद.