

Book Review

Today's India, India of Tomorrow

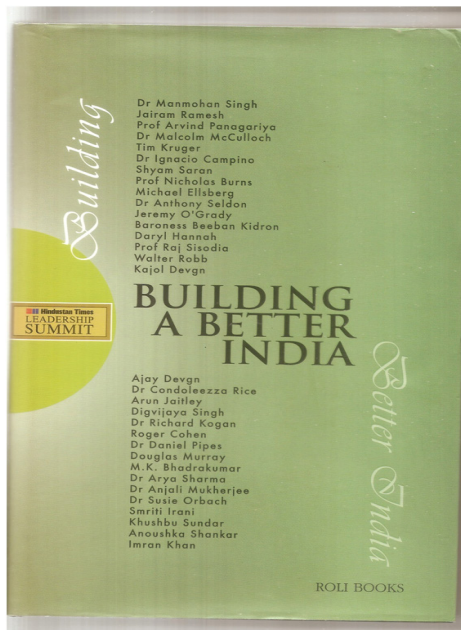
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Shobhana Bhatia (ed.): Building A Better India : 2014: Proceedings of the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit

Singh M, Ramesh J, Panagriya A, et al.

Published by: Lotus Roli, New Delhi. 272 Pages, Price Rs. 695.



The book under review is the result of an effort to bring together political leaders, strategists, corporate players, management bosses, artists, actors and trail blazers in the field of science, medicine, and technology to discuss the way forward for India. This effort made itself manifest in the eleventh Hindustan Times Leadership Summit with the theme *Building A Better India* held towards the end of the regime of UPA II.

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This book carries a message of tremendous significance that Asia requires a strong India as well as a strong Pakistan. It is brought out in an elegant manner by Imran Khan in the capacity of Chairman, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf who acted as a resource person in the Summit. To quote him, “ I think that what the two countries [India and Pakistan] need is a strong and visionary leadership, a leadership that sells the idea to the vast majority of the people that war is not an option for resolving your problems.”

The other resource persons included Arvind Panagaria, Jairam Ramesh, Malcolm McCulloch, Nicholas Burns, Jaremy OGrady, Daryl Hannah, Raj Sisodia, Kajol Devgn, Condoleezza Rice, Arun Jaitley, Richard Kogan, Daniel Pipes, Arya Sharma & Anoushka Shankar. These eminent persons were assisted by other equally eminent persons in their own chosen fields. The presentations were followed by questions and answers which have also found a suitable place in the book.

The sub-themes covered in the Summit were micro finance, sustainability of development, conscious capitalism ,building stronger bridges between USA and India, a new vision for India and changing the Indian mindset for women and of course the mindset of women themselves. There are also interesting essays on the power of music in healing and improving relations between India and Pakistan. Interestingly enough, some of the resource persons are occupying key positions in the government of the present Prime Minister Narendra Modi .It remains to be seen whether they can put into actions what they presented in the Summit.

The then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh inaugurated the Summit by speaking on the Future for India. He emphasises the need for strategy of inclusive growth initiated by his Government. Six elements of this strategy are a new deal for Rural India in the form of Bharath Nirman, increased investment in education and healthcare, providing livelihood for the poor , a more transparent and responsive Government , improving skills especially for small and micro enterprises and public investment in urban transport. Though there were already some indications of political change that followed the 2014 Lok Saba elections, Manmohan Singh hoped that India would continue to rise and in doing

so would help everyone rise. Thanks to his basic quality of goodness, though it did not get proper reward in the Indian politics.

Arvind Panagaria's views on micro finance as a tool for poverty alleviation are important in his own right. In his words, "I firmly believe that growth really is what matters most, but it also provides the government with more voluminous programmes which will help alleviate property." (p.27). Jairam Ramesh exhibits his characteristic wit. He does not find any distinction between microfinance and micro credit at all. (p.30)

Malcolm McCulloch is realistic when he writes that for the twenty first century, we are going to require an energy system that is sustainable, user-centric, smart, and cognizant of the total of the energy system (p.46). Ignacio Campino finds some challenges for mankind in the energy sector. For the coming forty years the energy supply will remain a big challenge as the requirements of mankind keep on changing.

Catching up with the Dragon will be a formidable challenge for India. Nicolas Burns finds that China's strength can be a challenge for the democratic countries of the world. As he concludes, China is rising to power, but China is rising to power in a region where the democratic countries are strong and where we have rights as well, and that is the best way to keep the peace with China looking forward. Shyam Saran makes a sharp observation that the only way that India can really meet the Chinese challenge is not by being more like China, but being more India. India's inherent strength is thus effectively brought out.

A liberal arts education is a waste of time and money. This is what Jermy O'Grady and others try to convey, though not in a convincing way. In this part of the volume presentations do not turn out to be that enlightening because they are too brief and sketchy. Anthony Seldon is terribly worried about education in India because it is going headlong down the absurd path of following international meaningless tests of science, maths, and literacy (pp. 94-95).

A lucid analysis of conscious capitalism is provided by Raj Sisodia and Walter Robb. They find in this capitalism that there is much beyond making money. The real issue in the world is not the unequal

distribution of income but rather the unequal distribution of freedom and therefore opportunity, where people are able to lift themselves up if they are given political and economic freedom. Incidentally the readers of the book may notice that the views of Sisodia and Robb coincide with those of Manmohan Singh. They could think with ease that there is a strong case for a plan of action to realise the dream of inclusive growth.

Condoleezza Rice expresses some thoughts on the task of building stronger bridges between USA and India. Had she maintained greater clarity her essay could be much more useful for both the countries. Her remark that education is key to building human potential and human potential is the key to building national greatness constitutes, in a sense, a repetition of similar thoughts already expressed by others.

There is a interesting presentation on a new vision for India. It is interesting because Arun Jaitely and Digvijay Singh together give some friendly fire as they belong to political parties constantly maintaining deadly rivalry. Here is what Jaitely firmly believes: “You speak in terms of a new vision of India, there is no revolution which is going to take place in a democratic society overnight. You have to improve the quality of governance. You have to improve the quality of politics. You have to increase the credibility of politics and this will broadly involve various parameters which are aimed in terms of: A- higher growth rates and greater poverty reduction; B – making India a most secure place; C – making India a more just and fair society” (pp point 172- 173).

Digvijay Singh was more demanding than Jaitely, presumably because he was in the ruling party when the Summit was held. To reproduce his words, “....what we need in this country is a political consensus on issues, on issues of governance, issues of development, and issues of I would say broad economic policies, and I think this is the area we should be looking at.

Given the change in the political scenario, what Digvijay Singh then said may be what Arun Jaitely demands now from Singh’s party. What Arun Jaitely said in the Summit is what his government has to accomplish now for making a new vision of India practically meaningful and useful in the light of the election manifesto of NDA of 2014. After all

the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. There have been movements of wheels of the largest democracy in the world aspiring for a better tomorrow.

It is a pleasure to read the essay titled *The Power of Music in Healing* by Richard Kogan, a concert pianist cum psychiatrist. Listening to pleasurable music stimulates the reward centres of the brain to release dopamine. For cardiac patients, listening to music can lower blood pressure and increase cardiac output. For patients suffering from stroke, with lingering speech difficulties, singing would become a valuable edge in terms of recruiting parts of the brain that are healthiest. This is called melodic intonation therapy. Music could also have a profound impact on unlocking memories (p.180).

A few pages are devoted to a debate with the proposition *Better Dictators Than Elected Islamists*. The participants in this debate were Daniel Pipes, Roger Cohen, Douglas Murray, and M.K. Bhadrakumar. Non-violent Islamists and violent Islamists all seek application of Islamic law in a severe incomplete way and includes everyone, Muslims and Non-Muslims alike (pp.192-193). This is contradicted in the assertion that it dishonours the fundamental faith in a shared humanity that stands at the core of Nelson Mandela's legacy (pp.196-197).

Arya Sharma humourously remarks that a lot of people have lost weight, there are a lot of commercial programmes out there that will help you to lose weight, they will charge you money, they will provide you with diets and exercise, and they will sell you supplements. However the problem is that once you lose the weight, virtually it always comes back. This reviewer with his own experiences unhesitatingly accepts what Sharma clearly states!

Changing the Indian mindset in respect of women is by no means an easy task. Anoushka Shankar minces no words when she writes that for many women, from the moment they are born till the moment they die, they are bound helplessly to life without choice or opportunity (pp.238-239). Khushbu Sundar strongly argues that though she is a woman she is very strong. As she declares, "I am a woman and a man is incomplete without me".

No doubt the book celebrates the Indian diversity in the rapidly changing global environment. For those who have unbounded faith in diversity the different sub-themes in the book may constitute its strength. For others who maintain caution even while accepting the Indian diversity, the divergent themes in the book may constitute its weakness.

There is no denying fact that the thoughts in the book are powerful. Many of these thoughts have a high degree of novelty. But it is difficult know how the book can attend to the major issues of leadership which the students and teachers of management science often raise.

What is really lacking is an introduction to the book. A fairly exhaustive introduction connecting different sub-themes could help the readers to imagine how a better India would emerge out of today's India.