



THE LAST WORD

GANESH NATARAJAN

Harnessing collective action to empower every citizen and build a developed India

Last month saw the launch of a book titled *Viksit India*, which took a dual language (English and Hindi) and dual format (prose and poetry) approach to articulate fifty themes that would lead to the success or failure of this aspirational goal we have set for our country. As we all know, India is well on its way to becoming the third largest economy in the world in terms of GDP and has been the fastest growing major economy when measured on the same yardstick of GDP. However, our nominal GDP per capita still hovers below the \$3000 level and there is much to be done to make every Indian an aspirant, a participant and a beneficiary in the attainment of the 'developed nation' destination.

Inspired by the profound collective action that defined the 'Quit India' movement, a new social enterprise, the New India Empowerment Foundation (NEF), has been established. Its core mission is to collaboratively design clear, accessible pathways for every Indian, cutting across all age groups, backgrounds, demographics and genders, to contribute and benefit from our nation's maturation. The initial categories identified for focused intervention are youth, urban women executives, rural women artisans, women entrepreneurs and motivated senior citizens.

The rationale behind this initial choice of categories is rooted in unmet potential. India is notable for the high percentage of able-bodied and experienced individuals who retire in the prime of their contributing years, often to fulfilling but solely personal pursuits like gardening or grandchild-rearing. While joyful, this tradition overlooks an enormous opportunity to harness their accumulated wisdom and invaluable experience for nation building.

The second category is dedicated to unleashing *Nari Shakti* in three distinct forms—first, encouraging urban career women to overcome societal and self-created barriers to shatter the glass ceiling; second, training rural women artisans in e-commerce and enabling them with digital platforms to sell their products globally; and third, motivating women entrepreneurs to build world-class, scalable companies from India.

Agency by Design, an Imperative



(For representational purpose only) (Photo courtesy: Freepik)

The third category is our youth—leveraging the much-vaunted demographic dividend by enabling structured collective action, where young people themselves generate, plan, and implement movements to address community, city, and country-level issues.

What does it take to motivate each of these segments to lift themselves to a level of enthusiasm and effort that is above the ordinary? To enable large numbers of ordinary people to achieve extraordinary things, one either needs a passionate leader like Gandhi or King or Mandela, or a collective surge of agency. Agency is a social sector word that signifies the willingness of a group of people to become agents for their own transformation, and it is in the awakening of agency in all the categories of people mentioned and indeed in every citizen in every part of the country that the successful attainment of *Viksit Bharat* lies.

To this end, NEF advocates for 'agency by design', a meticulously crafted and executed five-step process to enable personal and collective transformation. While each category requires

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individually developed pathways, the overarching philosophy remains consistent. The first step or the process initiates by awakening a profound aspiration to succeed beyond previous limits and instilling a palpable sense of urgency to embark on change. The second step involves developing a deep awareness of the possibilities, understanding relevant government and international support schemes, and clearly articulating the objective and the very definition of success.

Having articulated the 'why' and 'what' of the proposed transformation in the first two steps, the next three steps are all about meticulously planning the pathways to success. The third step would be laying out the action agenda through specific sub processes for identifying customers, articulating marketing messages and planning the approach strategy. Fourth step would undertake preparedness for the first big leap by training on skills and attitude. And, finally fifth step would be execution. In the case of youth, it would be the mission they are collaboratively out to accomplish. For women, it would be the goals each segment and indeed each individual chooses; and for seniors it would be the mentorship they seek to impart and their own goals they would like to see accomplished in the process.

Ultimately, every individual is entitled to their own vision for the country and the world, and their own dreams of the future. However, there is a clear opportunity to raise every aspiration and light up the road ahead. There are many worthy individuals and agencies that want to do this and through this column, let me welcome any of you who would like to be part of this movement to reach out and participate.

Dr. Ganesh Natarajan is Chairman of 5F World, Honeywell Automation and Lighthouse Communities Foundation.