

India @ 75:
Frequently Asked Questions

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Preamble:

India@ 75 is about change. It is about creating an India that is more just, more vibrant, and more oriented to leading the world. India @ 75 is important for India but also for the whole world. This is not about being paralyzed by “ground realities”. It is about changing them. We need moral leadership. As Gandhiji rightly said: “We must become the change that we want to see in others.” Mother Theresa summed it up best when asked about why she tried to do anything in Calcutta: "When I look at the masses, I feel I cannot do anything. When I look at individuals, I know I have to do something." That is probably the best reason to commit to India@75.

India @ 75 has spawned a lot of questions. The most frequently asked questions can be put together into the following buckets:

- a. Size, scale and speed of ambition
- b. Creating a mass movement
- c. Involving the political, bureaucratic and civil society infrastructure
- d. Impediments such as corruption and bureaucracy
- e. Relationships between state-level visions and India @75
- f. Role of Vision Ambassadors, YI and CII
- g. What more needs to be added: Olympics,...

a. Size and Scale of Ambition:

Typical questions:

- i. Is India@75 too ambitious in a country where poverty, illiteracy, corruption, low Human Development Index loom large?
- ii. Has any other country done such a thing?

The size of the ambition by design is large in scope and scale. Only when ambition exceeds resources we will find new ways to accomplish the goals. For example if we commit to educating 500 million Indians in professional areas in 15 years, we must find new ways to educate. We need to innovate new systems that allow for

* Low cost (to ensure affordability for all)

- * High Quality (to ensure that all are employable not just in India but anywhere in the world. Therefore, world standards are essential and non-negotiable)
- *Reduced time for schooling (so that people can be employable sooner)

This means that the traditional approaches to education- brick and mortar, small classes, obsolete teachers will not work. We have to adopt new solutions; hopefully hybrid solutions involving advanced technology.

Let us look at IT industry in India. Forced to find new recruits, they have developed methods to train BScs in two months to be IT professionals. Similarly, BPO has developed skills in teaching people different accents and different cultures. TCS has a system to teach reading to adults, in their language in 4-5 hours. NIIT, Pratham (NGO) and others are experimenting as well. Manish Sabharwal at.....has trained over 100,000 people cost effectively in multiple disciplines. These are just some examples. We need to innovate.

A commitment to the combination of scale, scope and speed will force innovations.

People said that it was too ambitious for India to feed Herself in the 50's and 60's (Club of Rome)and India carried out the green revolution. Then Amul did it in milk. These were considered impossible for a country of India's size at the time. They both required radical departures from current practice and reaching out to the masses. We have precedents in India. We now need to extend the commitment to change to every sphere of activity. No other country has attempted this scale of change, except China. India will be the first, complex diverse and democratic country to attempt it. However, see what India has accomplished in just 15 years from a paralyzed economy in 1993-4 to now.

b. Speed of Change:

Typical Questions:

- a. The dead lines are too tight. Things don't move fast in India.
- b. There is not enough decentralization and devolution and there is too much bureaucracy. Can this hamper the speedy achievement of goals?

Yes. Things don't move fast. But this is the problem that India @75 is supposed to rectify. There are two reasons for this.

- i. If we do not *reduce income inequality rapidly*, we will get into significant social problems. Already 170 districts out of 560 are becoming "lawless and controlled by naxalites". Speed is critical

to address these problems. Further, given the *demographic composition of India*, young people need to find jobs.

- ii. Speed also forces innovation. We need to ask ourselves questions that challenge tightly held but perhaps outdated assumptions. For example:
 - a. Does basic literacy really take six years of primary education?
 - b. Do we need four years to give someone a college education?
 - c. Can we get world class quality in 50% of the time? This saves resources and reduces costs. For example, the same “brick and mortar” infrastructure can be leveraged. Why not use the infrastructure at night (evening classes). We need to get into, for example, an “outcome based” system of education
 - d. Do better results necessarily correlate with increased spending? Around the early 90’s, Kerala spent approximately Rs.71/capita/year on health care and was able to achieve world standards (P. Sainath, Everybody Loves a Good Drought, p.26). Even if the figure is Rs. 200/capita with inflation, it implies that if Kerala’s methods and spending levels were replicated across India, India could have reasonable public health for \$5-10BN/year in aggregate spending.

c. Building a Mass Movement:

Typical Questions:

- a. How do we convert this vision into something that every Indian can relate to?
- b. During the Freedom Movement, Gandhiji said “don’t buy foreign cloth” and everybody could relate to it. What is the equivalent here?
- c. How do you touch each Indian emotionally? Engage emotionally with India@75?

Ultimately the success of India @75 will depend on *how ordinary folks can relate to it. This is critical.* We have to do this without anyone of Gandhiji’s moral authority. This requires innovation on our part as well.

That is the reason we are trying to use animations to *show what India is today and what it can become.* The structure of these animations is very straight forward. Each will show how India today is (children in slums and not in school) and how it can be (well educated, professional and proud). This becomes the tool. We

should always start all our meetings with a five minute animation- the morphing of India- that is what India@75 is about. These animations will be made to appeal to all Indians – rich and poor, urban and rural. If they can relate to this morphing, then we can ask them to behave differently to create this new India. (I am told that there is a scene in the Rajnikanth movie “Shivaji the Boss” that does this exceptionally well).

Let us start with “universal aspirations” of all mothers- good quality education. That is also the reason India @ 75 starts with education. (This is loud and clear in focus groups in Tamil Nadu). Health is critical for children to stay in school and get a good education. So I would say:

“don’t buy foreign cloth” be substituted by
“All Children in School. High quality education for all”.
(Let us make sure that all must see access to education as a basic birthright and the passport to a good quality of life).

At a basic level, India @ 75 is about all Indians; mostly about people who are disadvantaged.

d. National Identity and One Vision for India

Typical Questions:

The Youth in India have narrower identities How do we build a national identity?
Can a state like Bihar’s vision and that of India as a whole find a common ground? Isn’t India too large to have a common vision? Is this possible?

India has always been complex and diverse.

During our freedom struggle we had to contend with 500+ Rajas (and their principalities and states) and the British. It was more complex and diverse. The Freedom movement united them. The goal was the same.

During the last 60 years different states have grown at different rates. India’s growth has been asymmetric. Kerala, in terms of education, population growth and healthcare is different from Bihar or UP. We have to recognize this difference. *One solution will not fit all. But all of us need one future.*

We should have: *One vision and multiple routes to get there.* We must have one standard but multiple routes to get there.

We must recognize as we focus on India @ 75 that we are starting from different “realities”. For example, the percentage of girls in school varies from Kerala to UP/Bihar. India@75 may mean getting the girls in Kerala to become professionals. In Bihar, it may mean getting them to school and making sure they stay there past puberty.

It is fashionable to ignore the states that have not done well by its people for all kinds of reasons. This is dangerous. The “so called backward states are also the most populous”. In a democracy, they will set the tone for the national discourse. We also need to be concerned by states normally out of the national consciousness altogether like the states of the northeast. If we don’t we will be nurturing separatist movements by default. Moreover, many of them are closer to China and can see the difference in what each system is delivering quite easily.

e. Involvement of Politicians, Bureaucrats and NGOs:

Typical Questions:

How can we work with governments? How do we get government agencies involved in the implementation of this vision?

Can we work with NGOs? Are they critical?

How will India@75 leverage the excellent work done by social entrepreneurs?

We have to recognize that one of India’s biggest assets is its bureaucracy. With all its faults of being slow to act, ponderous, and risk averse , it has kept the country glued together. Similarly, NGOs (civil society) are a well established and well functioning system. *We need to work actively and collaboratively with both.*

During this process of rolling out India@75, we have worked closely with politicians, bureaucrats and NGOS. For example, we have briefed all bureaucrats. I have personally talked to all senior bureaucrats in Karnataka and New Delhi and a large number in AP and Tamil Nadu. We will do the same in Gujarat and West Bengal.

NGOs are an integral part of the deployment process. We have talked to large number and will continue to do that.

The deployment of India @ 75 requires the active collaboration between CII and YI, bureaucrats, politicians, NGOs and entrepreneurs and established firms. *This is a collaborative activity.* No one can be left out. The central players will be individuals across the county in addition to the institutions such as firms and NGOs.

f. India @ 75 and State Level Visioning Exercises: How do they Fit?

Typical Questions:

Many states have invested in developing a vision statement. How will this tie with India @ 75?

How can we use the know-how that is being generated at the state level?

As I said earlier, we have to recognize that states are asymmetric in their ability to plan and execute their plans.

The vision statement in most cases is strategic plans. They accept the constraints in resources and figure out what best they can do. Our starting point is not about resources but about a desired future. Aspirations must exceed resources. India@75 is also about the socio-political and cultural milieu within which we must accomplish our goals (the development sandbox).

Most of the state level plans are sectoral. They make projections, based on anticipated investments. Most often it is business on a larger scale. India @ 75 is about qualitatively changing the level of ambition. We may not fully know how to get there but the goal is clear. India @ 75 is about clarity to goals. The means have to be discovered.

The data from state level visioning can be extremely useful in operationalizing India @ 75. We can incorporate many of the findings. Each state has had somewhat of a different approach; based on who was the lead in the process- be it PWC, IIMB or others.

g. Should arts, culture and athletics be included?

Typical Questions:

The vision does not talk about the field arts and culture. How about cultural renaissance and the media industry?
How about 50 medals in Olympics?

Yes. India@75 talks directly to arts and culture. The idea of 10 Nobel Prizes is not a budget but a measure of intellectual vitality – be it in the arts, literature or the sciences.

Yes we can aspire to 50 gold medals (we got the first one this time. There are three more Olympics before 2022).

The broad idea is to excel, to be world class and to become a meritocracy. This must permeate each field of human endeavor.

Imagine the golden age of India during the last 150 years – the period between 1910-1950. In science we had world class figures – Sir CV Raman, Meghanath Saha, Bose, Ramanujan, and Chandrasekhar. We had in the arts Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, Bharati, and others. In arts we had Ravi Verma, Nandalal Bose and others. In politics we had the dream team led by Gandhiji. India was only

300 million strong. Now we are 1.1 billion. Why don't we have the capacity to excel in every field of human endeavor?

h. Corruption and Development

Typical questions:

Corruption is so systemic and endemic that can we overcome its influence?
Should we accept corruption as a given?

Corruption is the most corrosive influence in our society today. It permeates all economic, civil and even social activities (you even find it in temples). In all focus groups people recognize it as a problem. Corruption is visible, widespread, and creates huge barriers to change.

There are multiple aspects to corruption.

- a. *Supply - Demand imbalance.* Corruption becomes a way of accessing and allocating scarce resources. Consider the corruption and political influence that was needed to get a phone, a two wheeler and a car just 15 years ago. Today, the supply exceeds demand and there is no need to seek politicians favors to get a phone or a two wheeler. So, fix the supply problem for all goods and services like education, etc.
- b. *We have archaic laws, policies and concepts.* Take engineering education. No private institution can charge the real economic costs. So we have a fee of Rs. 10,000 and capitation fee of Rs. 300,000. The real cost of education is Rs. 310,000. Laws are making people dishonest. Because of our unwillingness to recognize it, there is lots of black money, opaque transactions and corruption. These laws also impact the right to information. Why should the ordinary functioning of government in a democracy be treated as a state secret?
- c. *Some goods and services will be in short supply-* such as urban land. Access to use it commercially can be very lucrative. Therefore, people who control the access such as politicians and bureaucrats extract a price. We need more transparency in these transactions.
- d. *Election financing is a major contributor* to endemic corruption. Everyone is in the same boat. We need election financing reforms.
- e. Finally a significant source of corruption is also the *willingness of to accept corruption.* People focus on their private and privileged access to resources be it college admission for their children, access to land or contracts of all kinds. "It benefits ME, therefore it must be OK" is the mentality. There is very little discussion of the corrosive influence of millions of individual acts of bribery.
- f. Let us recognize that corruption has multiple roots. But at the heart of it is personal ethics. Are we as individuals willing to forego a personal opportunity to do the right thing? Are we willing to stand up and be

counted? Are we willing to expose the problem and demand greater transparency? Democracy at its core is about the will of the people reflected in the law of the land. How can we have a real democracy if citizens feel free to or forced to subvert the rule of law in every sphere of life?

- g. There is much concern in India about terrorism and anti-national activities. Is there a more anti-national activity than corruption? Corruption serves over time to erode the nation from within more effectively than any terrorist can. Corruption has the ability to traumatize, frustrate and scuttle the lives of hundreds of millions.

i. Stability of State Governments and Policies

Typical questions:

There appears to be no stability to state governments (e.g. Karnataka). Every time the state government changes, policies change? How do we implement India @ 75?

Yes. This can be a problem. That is the reason we have to go to grass roots-district levels and get the concurrence of not just the politicians and bureaucrats but the entrepreneurs and civil society leaders. India @ 75 must be embedded in the communities. It must become a local agenda. That is the only protection against idiosyncratic changes in policy, priorities or individual politicians.

j. The time commitment of YI

Typical question:

As members of YI we are building our businesses and our careers. Do we have the time to do this?

As YI members our focus is limited to our areas of operations. Do we need to think of India as a whole?

I do recognize that this will take a significant amount of your time. Some of you may not be able to give that much of time given your other priorities. That is OK. However, if you commit to doing this you must allocate the time. Make the commitment with the explicit knowledge of your priorities and the importance of this mission to you and India,

Second, I am suggesting that 3-4 YI form a team for each district. So, even if one, for some unforeseen reason has to opt out, there will be continuity of effort.

Yes, YIs have to think of all of India. There is no safe sanctuary. If a big part of India stagnates all of India will feel the pain and pay the price. We cannot fail. The results of our efforts will have global consequences.