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**FAST FORWARD TOWARD
CIVILISATIONAL GREATNESS: AGENDA
FOR INDIA**

by
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The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author and not of the India International Centre.

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FAST FORWARD TOWARD CIVILISATIONAL GREATNESS: AGENDA FOR INDIA*

I want to share some ideas on how to create a great civilisation, especially in the context of modern India. These ideas have been elaborated in my book, *Fast Forward Toward Civilizational Greatness: Agenda for India*.

In the modern context, to me, a civilisation is great, not because it is a super economic or political power, but, above all, if it is largely a humane, creative and excellence-seeking society. 'Humane civilisation' evokes in me the imagery of a people who are just, honest, and tolerant. They care for the weak and the needy. They are polite, civic-minded, law-abiding, generous and caring, even for foreigners. A humane civilisation nurtures and upholds the best virtues of humankind. As Gandhiji said, the greatness of humanity is not in being human, but in being humane.

By a creative civilisation, I mean a civilisation which promotes off-beat, innovative and constructive means for meeting human needs and problems. It encourages creativity in the arts, sciences, professions, enterprises, livelihoods and even ideologies.

By excellence-oriented civilisation, I mean one that has a norm of doing tasks well beyond the call of duty. The norm impels people to continuous learning and improvement, and great satisfaction at doing a job really well.

The widespread pursuit of creativity and innovation, as well as of excellence and humaneness, is powerfully synergistic. Widespread creativity and innovation provide a stream of novel offerings. Widespread humaneness tilts these towards benign uses. Widespread excellence orientation ensures

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*Talk delivered by Pradip Khandwalla at the India International Centre on 1 May 2018

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We urgently need to think of designing a great civilisation. Market competition, when it is based largely on greed for money; and a democratic system, when it is based largely on greed for power, often degenerate into widespread corruption and violence. The beast in man comes to the fore, sophisticated though it may be in attire and communication. Ethics often go for a toss. Look at human brutality and the canker of corruption and crime all over the world. As William Butler Yeats put it over a century back,

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
the ceremony of innocence is drowned:
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
are full of passionate intensity.*

It would be difficult to argue that things have changed much for the better.

My quest has been: can we design a civilisation that uses the creativity and enterprise and efficiency of the market system, and the freedom to be, and the freedom to act, of the democratic system, to nourish the best in humankind rather than to dehumanise it? Later on, I want to share some thoughts on how this may be done in the Indian context. But first let me cite the example of Sweden, where this has been achieved to a fair extent. Consider some facts about contemporary Sweden.

- Sweden is an affluent country of 10 million with a per capita income in PPP terms of \$47000, only about 10 per cent less than that of the US. Sweden is a democracy, and a market economy, with sizeable public and private sectors. It was not always so well-off. At the end of the 19th century, there was widespread poverty, and Swedes were migrating out of Sweden in significant numbers. In industrial development, it was way behind Britain, France or Germany. Its economy grew rapidly in the 20th century to surpass that of Britain and France.

Sweden is what she is today because of the choices she has made in the 20th century.

- For much of the past hundred years, Sweden has chosen a liberal and egalitarian democratic socialism. It is marked by a deliberate effort to foster cooperation, and an elaborate economic safety net.
- There has been a partnership between capital and labour, with government oversight to resolve disputes between the two factions. The government forms policy in consultation with the employers' federations, as well as the union federations. A labour court, made up of three impartial members, and five representing employers, workers, and salaried employees, has jurisdiction over the application, interpretation, and enforcement of collective agreements. Industrial peace has generally prevailed since the end of the 1930s. Swedish law requires employee representation on boards of directors of companies.
- The government has created an all-encompassing social welfare system for the citizens, paid for from a progressive taxation regime. Early in the last century, the Swedish Government evolved a compassionate welfare state. It has become a model for many other nations. It provides financial security to all citizens. Monetary support for children up to 16, and support is also available for older students. Benefits are provided to parents to be able to come home from work to take care of their children, for up to 480 days per child. Special benefits are provided to care for sick and disabled children. Housing allowance is provided to those who can't afford housing. There are benefits if one is ill or disabled and can't work; for the unemployed for up to 60 weeks; for those who have retired; and for those who are indigent. Sweden's entire population has equal access to public health care. The health care system is publicly funded and run, and funded by the county councils. Longevity in Sweden is over 80 years. As a consequence of this welfare state, Sweden is one of the world's most egalitarian societies. It has the third lowest Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality in a society. By way of comparison, the US has the world's 57th highest Gini coefficient.

- Education is mandatory for all children between the ages of 7 and 16. From the age of one, children can be admitted to pre-school. Pre-schools provide an environment that stimulates children's development and learning, and enables parents to combine parenthood with work or studies. This pedagogy is continued in compulsory schools. The vast majority of schools in Sweden are municipally run. University education has been free of charge for Swedish, EU/EEA, and Swiss citizens. Interestingly, women are more educated than men—26 per cent of women vs. 19 per cent of men have post-secondary school education of three years or more. Roughly 10 per cent of students enrolled in Swedish universities have international backgrounds, and this figure rises to 20 per cent for those studying for research degrees. Swedish universities attract a high proportion of adult-learners, and over 60 per cent of students are women. Nearly 20,000 students are enrolled for a PhD in any given year. Sweden has at least three world class universities. These attributes endow Sweden with a varied research culture that draws upon expertise from all over the world.
- Sweden has been a top performer in quality of life indicators. On the index of Life Satisfaction, Sweden was 4th in the world, while the US was 16th. The UN has rated Sweden as the most gender-equal nation in the world. Crime is low in Sweden. The serious crime rate is but a fifth that of the US, and is declining.
- Sweden has been a humane nation. It gives 1 per cent of its GDP in foreign aid, that is, over \$4 billion. This exceeds the UN's target of giving 0.7 per cent of GDP in foreign aid. The money goes to 20-odd needy nations. The country has consistently supported the United Nations, and has been one of the largest providers of personnel for peacekeeping operations. Around \$2.5 billion of private sector foreign aid also flows out to needy countries. On a per capita basis, Swedish foreign aid may be about four times higher than that of the US.
- Sweden has one of the best governance systems in the world. World Bank based research on governance systems of over 150 countries

indicates that on the criterion of ‘Government Effectiveness’, Sweden was rated one of the highest, as also on ‘Rule of Law’ and ‘Control of Corruption’. Its ratings on these criteria have been far above those for India. Along with Britain and many other countries, Sweden has opted for large scale ‘agencification’ of the government. This is a form of decentralisation involving professional, instead of bureaucratic, management of government entities. This has added to the effectiveness of government functioning. For instance, the number of government decisions has been cut by a factor of 4 since the 1960s, by delegating decision-making authority to the agency level. On Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, Sweden consistently ranks as one of the least corrupt.

- Sweden is a creative and innovative society. It scores high on ‘climate for innovation’. In the Innovation Union Scoreboard for 2011, Sweden was ranked as the leading EU nation out of 27 countries. In the INSEAD Global Innovation Index for 2011, Sweden ranked second. A contributing factor to Sweden’s strong innovation position is that, relative to GDP, industry invests a great deal in Research and Development. Sweden boasts such major inventions as the pacemaker, the three-point seat belt, the GPS, the tetra-pak, the telephone handset, the flat screen monitor, ultrasound for medical diagnosis, the safety match, dynamite, and the zipper. Literature and the arts are flourishing in Sweden. Swedish fiction is widely translated. Between 2006 and 2010, more than 3,300 titles were translated into some 50 other languages. Sweden is famous for design in wood, glass and other media. The interplay of handicraft traditions and social democratic ideals has led to world-renowned work in industrial design, ergonomics, child safety, and products for the disabled. Artists are not completely dependent on commercial sales and wealthy patrons. Their creations are encouraged by public funding. The security provided by the welfare state frees them to take aesthetic risks without fear of destitution. One result is an artistic community known for avant-garde innovation. A parliamentary act stipulates that 1 per cent of the expenditure on new public buildings must be devoted to works of art. Besides, Swedes have won some 30 Nobel Prizes, despite the small

size of its population. Americans have won nine times more Nobel Prizes, but their population is over 30 times larger.

- Sweden has moved towards a sustainable competitive economy. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2011-12 put Sweden into third place. This Index measures the institutions, policies, and factors that set the stage for sustainable economic prosperity.
- Sweden has a rich cultural and civic life. The Swedish Arts Council nurtures cultural life in Sweden through libraries, museums and performing arts centres. The aim is to safeguard and develop Swedish culture, and to promote cultural diversity. The country is renowned for its design and urban planning. The attempt is to design vibrant and aesthetic neighborhoods, complete with schools, workplaces, community buildings, parks, health clinics, and shops. Sweden has a robust civil society. Sweden ranks among the best countries in the world in the Freedom of the Press index. The media are able to access information through one of the most empowering freedom of information statutes. An informant can choose to remain anonymous to avoid reprisals, and employers are legally prohibited from investigating the source of information. Social movements, such as for sustainable development, have been strong.
- A serious negative for Sweden is marital instability. The divorce rate is, as for the Americans, the highest in the world. But children's upbringing has changed for the better. Swedish parenting traditions have been moving away from traditional gender roles and authoritarian parenting styles since the end of World War II. After World War II, Swedish society went through a series of increasingly significant changes. In 1958, physical punishment in school was outlawed. In 1979, it was made illegal in the home, too. Through the mechanism of paid paternity leave, Swedish fathers are now significantly involved in child care. Reportedly, 85 per cent of Swedish fathers take paternity leave. Many Swedish men now identify with home life as much as with their work.

- People's values indicate what kind of persons they want to be, and what kind of life they want to lead. Most Swedes are members of a Lutheran church, the Church of Sweden. It is a Protestant offshoot, and preaches liberalism, altruism and a strong work ethic. It has had a tradition of educational, social welfare and missionary activities. Swedes are known for their pro-social inclinations and desire to be good persons. According to a survey, the top Swedish values include honesty, responsibility, justice, happiness, togetherness, meaningfulness, involvement, teamwork, adaptability, etc. Most of these values are compatible with being a good citizen, family member, employee, employer and professional.

Sweden may not have reached the peak of civilisational greatness. But it is worth pondering how Sweden has come this far. Through its welfare state, Sweden provides a platform for the widespread rise of what Abraham Maslow called higher order needs or self-actualisation needs. These include the need to excel in one's calling and be creative, and the urge to be humane. As a social system that promotes autonomous human development, good citizenship, cooperation and tolerance, the Swedes have developed a distinctive identity while remaining pluralistic. This identity is anchored in cooperation, even between traditionally antagonistic groups like workers and employers. Such cooperation facilitates widespread innovation and changes. The result is the emergence of growing humaneness, creativity and innovativeness, and the pursuit of excellence in one's chosen vocation.

Some may dismiss Sweden's achievements by citing its small size, compared to Goliaths like India or China or the US. But there are plenty of small countries in Europe and elsewhere. And there are plenty of Sweden-sized states and districts in these Goliaths. How many can claim to be in Sweden's class as a civilisation? Sweden is not an economic or political superpower; but it stands tall as a role model civilisation. The world's nations differ widely, and each must forge its own distinctive path to civilisational greatness. But Sweden is inspirational. She demonstrates that advance towards civilisational greatness is possible, even in our savage times.

Besides Sweden, in my book, I have also described how Japan and Germany, after crushing devastation in the Second World War, dumped their authoritarian, brutal and militaristic past and opted to become much more humane, creative, and excellence-seeking societies. These three examples strengthened my belief that despite an atmosphere of gloom and doom, it is possible for modern societies to take steps for advancing towards civilisational greatness.

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Can India become a great civilisation in the modern context?

We have much to be proud of and also much to regret. We are proud of the non-violent way of gaining Independence and the Gandhian legacy, and our being and remaining a democratic, secular state. Despite huge diversity, we have remained one nation with a strong Indian identity. We are also proud that our economic growth rate has sputtered from less than 1 per cent per year under British rule to 4 per cent until 1990, and 6.5 per cent since. This has more than halved deep poverty in this country, despite a four-fold increase in population after Independence. It has raised real per capita income five-fold. We now are the world's third largest economy with a PPP GDP of over \$8 trillion. Thanks to determined efforts by the state and civil society, literacy has increased to around 75 per cent, up from less than 20 per cent at Independence, and longevity has also risen to over 65 from less than 30 at the time of Independence.

Compared to pre-Independence times, women have been empowered a great deal. Female literacy is behind that of males, but it is at 60 per cent, compared to less than 10 per cent at the time of Independence. By law, one-third of the *pradhans* of the panchayats have to be women, and women are quite active in national politics. Several women have been chief ministers, and in the past, a prime minister and a president have been women. There has been comparable empowerment of Dalits.

We also have a robust civil society. Our political parties have ideologies that range from the extreme right to the extreme left. We have a vibrant media, a huge television and telecommunications coverage, and over 35,000 newspapers and periodicals that have increased access to information and entertainment exponentially. A number of NGOs are doing wondrous work for improving livelihoods, education, health, water availability, skilling, employment and sustainable development. Amul is a shining example of the power of cooperation. We have also taken giant strides in space technology, IT and telecommunications, and we are poised for accelerated economic growth in the future.

But we have much to regret also. Violence and crime are rampant in India. Around 2,00,000 murders, dacoities, robberies and kidnappings occur every year. Over 25,000 rapes are recorded every year, although the actual number may be much higher. Besides, rape seems to be on the rise, doubling between 1990 and 2008. Dowry deaths and female infanticide are commonplace. Domestic violence, too, directed mostly at women, is pervasive. Around 70 per cent of Indian women were estimated by a Cabinet minister to be victims of domestic violence.

Another major blot is corruption. India is regularly rated as one of the most corrupt states by Transparency International. In 2014, it ranked 85th out of 183 nations. A 2008 study by Transparency International found that about 40 per cent of the Indians it surveyed had first-hand experience of paying a bribe or peddling influence to get a job done in a public office.

Governance quality is key to growth, justice, equity and quality of life. Governance effectiveness, as assessed by the World Bank, indicates how free the government is from red tape and is supportive of business, the quality of government personnel, the absence of political interference in administration, efficiency in delivering public services, etc. India is far below the scores of Western countries. The Indian judiciary is independent, but what a mess it is in! There are 30 million cases pending in the courts, some for decades. Judicial accountability is weak, and reportedly there is a fair amount of corruption in the lower courts.

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Western countries. The Indian judiciary is independent, but what a mess it is in! There are 30 million cases pending in the courts, some for decades. Judicial accountability is weak, and reportedly there is a fair amount of corruption in the lower courts.

The quality of schooling, especially in government schools, that cater to about 70 per cent of children, is abysmal. According to studies, 25 per cent of teachers are absent every day. Among rural children of age 10, half cannot read at a basic level; over 60 per cent are unable to do division, and half drop out by the age of 14.

There is a further platter-full of problems facing India. Over 90 million live in urban slums in sub-human conditions. The homeless and the beggars in the cities number in the millions. Some minorities feel unsafe, as do many women. A pan-Indian identity is growing, but frequently it is overridden by

linguistic or communal chauvinism. Poor Indian children tend to be stunted because of inadequate nutrition and an over-reliance on foods rich in carbohydrates. There is a culture of cleanliness at home, but filth in public places. Civic sense is weak. The media keep on peddling negative news. Television serials mostly project intrigue, crime and hatred. Moral standards, especially in the young, seem to be declining.

The economy is likely to grow at an annual 8 per cent growth rate or more, and the government's poverty alleviation and developmental measures will likely wipe out deep poverty in the next two decades. It may make India's GDP the second largest in the world. India may well come to be regarded as a super economic and political power. But will this make India a great civilisation? Will India be a much more humane society? Will it be much more creative and innovative? Will a norm of pursuing excellence in one's tasks cast deep roots? Let me share some ideas on how we can become a greater civilisation.

We badly need to reform our rote education system, so that students are well-educated and pick up good values, learn to ask questions and develop their creativity, and the spirit of excelling at whatever they

wish to do. Let me give three examples of how this has been attempted in India. These examples can give us clues about how to scale up creativity, excellence, and humaneness in youngsters.

- In a remarkable experiment originating in Tamil Nadu, Activity Based Learning or ABL has revolutionised primary school learning in tens of thousands of government primary schools in a number of Indian states. ABL abjures rote learning and draws on the principles of the Montessori method of education. In this method, the responsibility for learning is that of the child, and the teacher is a facilitator. It unleashes the child's innate learning appetite and creativity and develops them further. ABL uses child-friendly educational aids to promote self learning, and the method allows the child to study according to his/her aptitude and skill. The curriculum is divided into study cards for English, regional language, mathematics, science and social science. When a child finishes a group of cards, he/she completes one 'milestone'. Activities in each milestone include games, rhymes, drawing, and songs to teach a letter or a word, form a sentence, do math and science, or understand a concept. The child takes up an examination card only after completing all the milestones in a subject.

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A baseline survey was done in Tamil Nadu in 2007–2008 to assess the effectiveness of ABL by comparing learning and outcomes before ABL was adopted, and a year later. The average achievement of children increased significantly in all the subjects. Gaps in achievement between the two genders, between children living in urban versus rural settings or well-to-do versus poor localities, and social groups such as higher versus lower castes, were narrowed down. Children asked many more questions after ABL was introduced, and instead of sitting in parallel rows, they were usually found sitting and interacting in circles.

The ABL pedagogy of self-learning can be extended, with suitable

modifications, to the full spectrum of education in India, including higher education. The result could be more creativity and self-learning ability, and a higher appetite for excellence.

- Educomp, an educational enterprise operating from Delhi, has been able to deliver multimedia enriched education digitally to over 12 million children in over 25,000 government as well as private schools' classrooms. This programme is delivered via the internet with audio-visual aids and animation. The content is in English as well as in regional languages. Educomp has developed a digital library of thousands of multimedia modules for assisting teachers. Multimedia education has several features: audio-visual aids, animation, additional learning facilities, interactive facility and two-way communication with the students, questions to probe comprehension by the students, and assistance to teachers to make learning truly exciting.

Such education offers much hope for bypassing decades of pathetic schooling, and alongside the computer and telecom revolutions, it can provide deeper learning and creativity-enhancing education at relatively low cost to practically all school children in India.

- How do we make our youth more humane? How do we inculcate good citizenship values in students? Lokbharati, a Gandhian institution of post-school learning in Gujarat, provides some insights. Its mission has been to demonstrate how higher education can contribute in practical ways to tackling the problems of rural India.

Community life at Lokbharati lays emphasis on co-education, physical labour and cooperation. The institution teaches subjects like economics, science, philosophy and politics, but as anchors for practical living. It lays stress on values and character building, the dignity of labour, and the application of higher knowledge to solve the problems that beset poor people, especially the rural poor. For instance, knowledge acquired through studies is applied by the students to alleviate suffering during famines, floods, earthquakes, communal riots and so forth.

Lokbharati is committed to holistic development. For instance, every student must study both the sciences and the humanities. The idea is to fuse technical expertise with wisdom and compassion. Second, the practical use of knowledge is strongly emphasised. As an example, students studying chemistry may go to a village, analyse the water from its wells to identify impurities, and counsel the locals on how to solve the problems created by the impurities.

Lokbharati has adopted several dozen villages. Annually, in one of these villages, a 10-day camp is organised to get the students to understand the pulse of an Indian village, and its problems, strengths and weaknesses. Every Thursday, students and teachers go to selected villages to work with families to improve their quality of life.

At Lokbharati, community life in the dormitory is considered an integral part of the syllabus. It is regarded as the most effective way of developing a balanced, multi-sided and noble personality, and good citizenship. Self-reliance and goodness are inculcated in the students through their preparing and serving food, cleaning vessels and latrines, elimination of caste and gender inequality, evening get-togethers etc.

If we use the pedagogy of Lokbharati widely in our colleges, especially work in rural areas, at least some physical labour, and the blending of arts and humanities courses in technology and science curricula, and vice versa, India can experience a surge in high quality, socially relevant, character-building education.

As mentioned earlier, another area where effectiveness can make a huge contribution to the emergence of a great civilisation is governance. Exceptions apart, our governance at the central, state and local levels is notorious for its corruption, bureaucratic rigidity, lethargy, poor implementation of policies and projects, and so forth. Are there practical ways by which governance can become much more accountable,

Exceptions apart, our governance at the central, state and local levels is notorious for its corruption, bureaucratic rigidity, lethargy, poor implementation of policies and projects, and so forth. Are there practical ways by which governance can become much more accountable, citizen-centric, innovative, result-oriented and effective? I believe this is quite possible, and can be achieved fairly quickly.

citizen-centric, innovative, result-oriented and effective? I believe this is quite possible, and can be achieved fairly quickly. Over 50 developed and developing countries have opted for a new paradigm of governance called New Public Management, or NPM, and it has dramatically improved governance in many countries. NPM aims at professionalising the management of government, making it much more accountable and result-oriented, much more citizen-centric, and much more innovative.

The kingpin of NPM is agencification. This involves converting government organisations into executive agencies, or carving out of unwieldy departments, bodies called executive agencies that are specialised in terms of their policy objectives. The distinctive feature of agencies is that they are professionally managed. Their heads are not bureaucrats, but are competitively selected professionals, selected for their domain expertise, commitment and excellent managerial skills. These agencies have charters that lay down their respective mandates, powers and responsibilities. They have operating autonomy within their mandates. In Britain, their heads are usually appointed on fixed-term but renewable contracts, and with a variable pay component that is tied to their performance. Typically, the CEO enters into a contract or an MoU with the parent ministry that lays down his/her deliverables, and the support he/she can expect from the government. The performance of the agency is monitored by a system that periodically assesses the agency on agreed upon quantitative, qualitative and impact targets. Often these agencies are supervised by stakeholders' boards that represent the key stakeholders of the agency.

Let me give an example of how a notoriously bureaucratic department gets transformed when it is turned into an executive agency. Inland Revenues of Britain, the equivalent of our tax department, was huge and had some 60,000 employees. After its agencification, it implemented many changes. It replaced over 100 government grades by five broadbands. New job descriptions for its managers were made to fit its requirements. It eliminated surplus staff, but on humane terms. As many as 40,000 employees were trained to provide better services to

the taxpayers. It empowered lower-level staff with greater responsibility and accountability. It enhanced the application of IT to its operations. It outsourced the staff, buildings and equipment related to IT support to another government agency for greater IT effectiveness. It became a lot more taxpayer-oriented, and changed from an investigative and ‘giving orders’ mindset to one of service and support. For instance, it opened 200 Taxpayers’ Enquiry Centres to help taxpayers with information and advice, and increased the use of Mobile Enquiry Centres to reach the disabled and those living in remote locations. It publicised the Taxpayers’ Charter that informed the taxpayers what to expect from the agency, and in turn what the agency expected from the taxpayers. The Charter also stated what the aggrieved citizen could do to redress a grievance.

In Britain, 75 per cent of former government servants have been transferred out to executive agencies. A review in 2002 of over 120 executive agencies operating in Britain concluded that: ‘...executive agencies...brought about revolutionary changes in the culture, processes and accountabilities of those services delivered directly by central government.’

Agencification may represent the best hope of making our public administration and the implementation of developmental programmes efficient, humane, and innovative. Agencification, combined with a robust performance management system, can make a major contribution to the emergence of India as a great civilisation.

Government, business and civil society are the basic institutions of a modern society. For advancing towards civilisational greatness, my book considers their alignment of purpose and partnership indispensable. It lays special emphasis on this partnership in the execution of the government’s numerous public welfare and developmental schemes. It argues that generally speaking, the government has resources and public interest at heart, but poor implementation capability. Business has resources,

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Excellent NGOs have idealism and commitment but often lack sufficient resources. Such NGOs also have a deep understanding of ground realities. Higher institutions of learning have research-based expertise, but lack a good understanding of ground realities. If all of these are yoked together for public purpose, they can complement each other to produce a powerfully effective execution capability, which can rapidly advance a nation like India towards civilisational greatness.

innovation and professional management, but often falls short on a sense of social responsibility. Excellent NGOs have idealism and commitment but often lack sufficient resources. Such NGOs also have a deep understanding of ground realities. Higher institutions of learning have research-based expertise, but lack a good understanding of ground realities. If all of these are yoked together for public purpose, they can complement each other to produce a powerfully effective execution capability, which can rapidly advance a nation like India towards civilisational greatness. The book provides many examples of such partnerships, and outlines numerous areas where it can be very productive.

Let me give one example of the high potential such a partnership holds. There are some 2,50,000 villages, many in tribal areas and drought-prone areas, that are more or less wholly dependent on vagrant monsoon rains. In years of poor rainfall, there is much suffering and around 1,00,000 indebted farmers are known to have committed suicide during the past decade because they could not repay debts and feed their families. These quarter million villages have between them nearly 40 per cent of the arable land of India, and the well-being of some 200 million people is at stake.

A number of NGOs are active in water management in India, and they have intimate understanding of ground realities. These include Acwadam, AKRSP(I), Dhan Foundation, Sadguru Foundation, Tarun Bharat Sangh, Tilonia, Wassan, etc. They have found that participatory water management in rural areas gives good results. For instance, AKRSP(I) has developed ways of mobilising the participation of rural people in managing newly created water supply. It not only hires local persons and trains them to mobilise people, but also gets government funding for needed infrastructure. The result is that where check dams, bore wells,

tube wells, etc., have been created to provide water security with the combined initiative of the government, AKRSP(I), and participative management organisations set up by the locals with NGO support, there is dramatic increase in the production of crops and incomes.

If the government were to partner with NGOs and assign, say, 15,000 rain-fed villages for five years to each well-performing NGO with expertise in water management; pay the costs of the necessary structures (bore wells, check dams, etc.); provide the needed electricity and other infrastructure; and the costs of hiring a large number of mobilisers who can each mobilise about 30 villages for participatory water management, then the job of providing water security to these quarter million villages could be done in five years on agreed upon timelines and performance indicators. These NGOs, being familiar with traditional water conservation systems (there are 20-odd such systems), may be able to come up with better context-specific solutions. If, instead, the government were to go it alone and let bureaucrats manage the entire water security system, the chances are that it may be decades before the job is completed, possibly quite poorly, and that too at a horrendous cost over-run.

That is not all. If the detailed hydrological, topography-related, water purity and other necessary studies for each region can be parcelled out to scientific establishments, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Space Research Organisation and Indian Institute of Science, the studies could be done rapidly and effectively. If the business sector is roped in to contribute CSR funds to this mission, and also commercially participate in providing infrastructure etc., some 200 million people could double their annual income within a year or two of their getting water security, and what is more, they would have stable incomes. And India's food production could go up by a third.

My book has one more suggestion for building a greater Indian civilisation. An annual one-year immersion programme for a million carefully selected young men and women, say between the ages of 18 and 21, can strengthen a pan-India identity. This would happen by mingling youngsters from all parts of India, and from all communities and castes.

My book has one more suggestion for building a greater Indian civilisation. An annual one-year immersion programme for a million carefully selected young men and women, say between the ages of 18 and 21, can strengthen a pan-India identity. This would happen by mingling youngsters from all parts of India, and from all communities and castes. Such a programme would include a three-month stint with NGOs involved in constructive work to turn these youngsters into effective change agents.

Such a programme would include a three-month stint with NGOs involved in constructive work to turn these youngsters into effective change agents. Also, some self-defense training, plus remedial education for identified weaknesses, and training in yoga, meditation, livelihood-earning occupations, and brainstorming for creative solutions could be included. Modules on the way the country is governed, its problems and priorities and how they are being tackled, and community level issues should be included. Also, exposure to role models of humane and innovative excellence, career counselling, and what it is to be a good citizen and family member could also be included.

At the end of the one-year period, each participant would have acquired at least one livelihood-related certified competence, and reasonable competence in Hindi and English. By using the pedagogy of Activity Based Learning, their learning ability and creativity can be enhanced. Multimedia digital distance education technology can bring the best teachers to these youth. Their contact with the poor and the disadvantaged, as in Lokbharati, would spur their humaneness. Each participating youngster would get a stipend of ₹1,000 per month plus free board and lodging and other amenities. The recurring cost would be about ₹20,000 crore a year, barely 1 per cent of the government's annual revenues. But think of the return: five million potential social change agents and upright and innovative citizens in just five years. The return in terms of excellence of our youth would be huge, and could yield a greater civilisation. To keep unwarranted political and bureaucratic influence at bay, I recommend that the whole programme is managed by an autonomous empowered authority, with a council of experts, and a CEO who is competitively selected, highly competent, and has a solid anchoring in training and development of youth.

Let me conclude with a poem by Tagore that captures for me the essence of a great civilisation:

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Pradip Khandwalla was born in Mumbai in 1940. He obtained a B.Com. from Bombay University, an MBA from Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and an MS and Ph.D. in Industrial Administration from Carnegie-Mellon University. He also qualified as a chartered accountant. He taught at the Faculty of Management, McGill University, Canada and the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA). At IIMA he held the L&TChair in Organisational Behaviour, and later on served as its Director, before retiring in 2002. His main research contributions have been in Organisation Theory and Design of Organisations, Creativity, Turnaround Management, Management of Public Sector Enterprises, Excellence Government, and Civilisational Excellence. He has authored nearly 30 books. Four of his books have received the best management book of the year award, one has been translated into Chinese, and he has also authored several volumes of poetry and of translated stories and poems. He has received three lifetime achievement awards.

