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THE IDEA OF INDIA : Taking India Forward : The Road Ahead; Democracy, Secularism and Social Cohesion

Hailed as the next superpower, India has been a democracy for over six decades. In 1947, when India gained her independence from colonial rule, the choice of parliamentary democracy and a universal franchise for such a vast and large nation was considered with some apprehension by many observers, at home and overseas.

A Constitution reflecting the political and ideological goals of the new nation was framed in 1952. Enshrined within it were the principles of the separation of powers, a universal Indian citizen with constitutional rights, equality before the law, the separation of civil and military powers, and the necessity for political competition, freedom of religion among other things. The press remains as free as any in the world and contributes to a lively and highly contested public sphere. India's democratic system is in a reasonable shape.

A secular democracy, its composite culture is an inimitable force in the world. In India's unique synergetic culture lies an indelible ability of transcendence inter-community barriers . In the exploration of its distinctive artistic syncretic skills, one can see the contribution of communities to social harmony, inter-religious tolerance and resistance to separation and violence. Hindu Muslim syncretism has deep cultural roots that have survived and will survive political and social upheavals.

The heritage of India's multi-religious, multilingual and multi-racial diversity, its inclusiveness has forged through centuries. For centuries India has provided a home to very significant number of practitioners of practically every other major religion of the world, be it Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism or the Baha'ism. India is the birthplace of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism . 1

This assimilation and accommodation of diversity has contributed to the richness of its composite culture and durability of its civilization. It is this intrinsic unity, integrity and harmony that enabled India to fight against the British might as one force for the cause of freedom. There were many languages, many cultures, many religions but one voice. And it is this unique

inherent unity that is the cornerstone to growth of India's success. And it is this inherent Unity that will take India Forward. The challenge before us is to fire the imagination and reignite the light that brought us together in our freedom struggle for "azadi" where religions, cultures, class and caste joined hands and spoke as a single entity. Here were many languages but one voice. That was a defining moment in the history of our nation.

The powerful idea of India stretching across half a century in the midst of spectacular and often turbulent events is the existence of its strong secular, democratic, pluralist fabric. Democracy is not simply electoral mathematics. It is the voice of the people . It is likewise inclusive participatory process of nation building. Tolerance is an integral part of our system. It entails not only tolerance of those who agree with us but also of those who do not agree with us.

Despite questions whether its political credentials can stand up to scrutiny and despite the problems confronting it , with a few triumphs and a few pitfalls, it has withstood its ground. Even its critics submit, India has taken great strides since it achieved Independence more than 65 years ago. Economic growth since 1980 has been among the fastest in the world ; social indicators for literacy, education enrollment , disease and mortality , and gender have steadily improved. 2

The Economic Survey of India report 203-2014 that the State of Maharashtra,s income has increased at the average rate of 13.8 per cent. While distinguished Mrs Sonia Gandhi leads the Congress Party ,Mrs Najma Heptulla is the Minister for Minority Affairs, Mrs Sumita Mahajan as the Second lady Speaker in Parliament in the BJP Government. The new Government also has inducted several women into the Cabinet. It is sad that Women Empowerment Bill giving women 33% seats to women was not introduced in Parliament in the Monsoon Session. It would be very commendable if it did so.

Paradoxically, crime against women generally has increased. In 2012 crimes against women have gone up to 17,800 which include serious crimes like rape, kidnapping, abduction, dowry deaths. However stringent laws for crimes against including life imprisonment and death penalty for rape need to be applauded.

In his speech from the Red Fort on Independence Day 15th August, 2014, Prime Minister , Shri Narendra Mody, said "Then we hear about incidents of rape, our heads hang in shame...I want to ask every

mother and father, you ask your daughters 'where are you going, who are you going with'. But do you ever ask your sons these questions? After all, those who rape are also someone's son. Everyone is busy giving their psychological opinions on rape.....I appeal to the doctors not to kill the girl-child in the mother's womb. I request the parents not to kill the girl-child because they want a son. Indian sportsmen brought pride to our country in the Commonwealth Games. 29 Indian women won medals at the CWG.” (Courtesy NDTV) 3

Undoubtedly, TAKING INDIA FORWARD through a corruption free nation, economic prosperity, scientific advancement are imperatives. Good governance, education, development, infrastructure , transparency , and growth fundamental and have no parallels. Enlarging areas of socio-economic inclusion, addressing the the common citizens woes on price rise, equal opportunities and jobs for all its citizens, peace and humanism are an indispensable part of democratic ideals. A plethora of issues as such poverty, unemployment , education, the common person's woe on price-rise and several others remain to be addressed.

All Indians must energize themselves in their abilities to release positive energies to gain a vantage point in growth and development of the Nation. Participation in Nation building is a prerogative and duty of every Indian citizen. Transformation of India's socio-economic political landscape can be achieved when its citizens stand hand in hand contributing to its glorious future. Marginalization of communities reduces and capitulates the productivity of the Nation. Together we can take India to the heights of unprecedented success.

In the words of our Prime Minister “We should walk together, work together and progress together. We should move ahead with this mantra. The nation should move towards one target, one direction, one intention and one decision. ” (Independence day Speech : Courtesy NDTV)

The days of coalition politics seem to be over. The success of a single Party, the BJP, winning an election with such a huge margin is phenomenal and unprecedented in the history of India. The people of

India, including Minorities have vested their trust in them and contributed to its success. We congratulate the Government and wish it all success to fulfill the aspiration of the Indian people. They have made an impact on foreign policy by holding an olive branch to all its immediate neighbors in a call for peace , prosperity and a strong Asia. We congratulate them. 4

Next to South Asia , West Asia dubbed as the Middle East by the British, matters most to India in foreign policy. It is where 8 lakh expatriates are making a living; it is their remittances that constitute more than half of our total foreign exchange earnings. Their safety is crucially dependent on Arab goodwill that has been built over the years. The region is the second most important destination for our exports. And it from there that we source 70% of our oil resources. India's electorate has rising aspirations as witnessed in the last elections.

The people of India have asked for change. Then, as Gandhiji has said "We must be the change we wish to see in the world. And we, the people of India must have confidence in ourselves. We need a quintessential, qualitative change. The politics of "majorityism" has never India's mantra. Leadership rests in trusteeship and benevolence. India is a land of equal opportunity, of cultural bloom, of fusion and synthesis for all its citizens. As Chairman Mao Tse-Tung in a speech in 1957 welcoming the Chinese intelligentsia to a conference in which he invited open criticism of the regime said "Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and the sciences and a flourishing socialist culture in our land." Such diversity of thought, he said, was the only way to further art, politics and science.

To "Take India Forward we need to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. To bring transformation the Prophets of doom must be dismissed. We need to learn to carve our own destinies. To take India Forward we need Vasudeva Kutumbakum or the world is a family and Sarva Dharma Sambhava or equal regard for all religions.

**As the Sufi saint Maulana Rumi said , But the names differ, Beloved;
All in truth are only one; In the sea wave and the Bubble lies the luster
of one Sun. 5**

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