

2047: Globalizing Indian Thought

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Given the current trend, the world population is projected to rise to 9.5 billion in 2047.

India will take the top spot with a staggering population of close to 1.6 billion to leave behind the current world leader in population, China, at the second place with 1.3 billion people. The Indian economy will easily be among the top three largest economies of the world. If one human being is considered the unit of currency of a nation rather than a dollar, a renminbi or a rupee, then India will find itself to be the richest nation of the world by virtue of its human potential. India's voice in the coming years will be of planetary proportion. One would be optimistic and say that by the mid-century India would have found the solution to its most vexing problems of poverty, inequity and corruption through evolving institutions. Our water problem may be solved through coastal sea-water desalination using renewable energy sources. Our food and health problems will be solved through breakthrough research in agriculture and health sciences. By solving its own problems, India will have helped find solutions to the world's most persistent problems.

However, the genius of India has always been rooted in the perennial wisdom of its greatest leaders: the whole continuum from Gandhi to Buddha. Their thoughts have had a global impact without the help of the Internet. The three elements of Indian thought that have the potential to hold sway over the world in the twenty-first century are *satyam* (truth), *nityam* (sustainability) and *puṇyam* (wholeness). These three elements can be explored in some detail and their relevance established in the times to come.

Satyam

While an American dollar bill had 'In God we trust' printed on it since 1957, the Indian rupee has had *satyameva jayate*

(the triumph of truth) as its enduring signature. Gandhi experimented with and conveyed to the larger world that truth was indeed more powerful than an empire. With the onset of the digital age and the era of transparency, it is possible to find out something about almost everything in nanoseconds. Facts are easy to put together by the click of a button. However, truth demands psychological commitment to pursue facts until they reveal more than they conceal. Truth is more than the collection of bare facts. Truth is contextual, subtle, and the earnest pursuit of truth requires the fortitude to go through truth-ache. This is what a scientist does hunched in front of a microscope for hours together until he discovers the truth of his subject matter. Truth is our mental alignment with reality. Our limited intellect cannot grasp the whole of the reality of our universe. However, if we pursue truth diligently, we have a greater chance of encountering reality. Here is the equation of facts, truth and reality in the ascending order of subtlety and wholeness:

Facts < Truth < Reality.

No wonder therefore that the greatest leaders that India ever produced were men and women who were established in ultimate reality. They were often known as realized beings!

Nityam

Nityam is the principle that sustains us perennially. *Nityam* is about sustainability: the ability to nurture, support and endure. Our future world has to come to grips with sustainable development. *Nityam* is that mindset that enables the present generation to meet their requirements without compromising the ability of future generations to meet

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their own needs. Committing to *nityam* puts our shared values ahead of our selfish needs. Mahatma Gandhi had articulated the notion of *nityam* in a beautiful expression that highlighted the importance of service before self. He said, ‘The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.’ We find our place in the continuity of life by embracing the spirit of *nityam*.

Purnam

Purnam is wholeness. India did not define wholeness as an assembly of parts. The seers of India realized the importance of a part-less whole as the abiding definition of *purnam*. They had the vision of the universe where the micro and the macro were integrally linked by one unbounded consciousness of the whole. Therefore, *purnam* did not refer to an object or a concept. Rather, it was about a conscious and realizable intelligence that kept planets in their orbit and everything in order and harmony with each other. An expression from the Isa Upanishad explains the wholeness of this conscious intelligence in this telling expression: *That is wholeness. This is wholeness. From that wholeness this wholeness came. If you remove that wholeness from this wholeness, what remains is still whole.* The nature of wholeness can be explained by the analogy of an oil lamp. You can light up a million lamps from that original lamp, yet the source lamp remains undiminished. The realization of wholeness awakens in us a reverence for life, reverence for each species and fosters the need for harmony and interdependence in existence.

Vision 2047

The world of the future will belong to innovators and creative conceptualizers rather than narrow specialists working inside their own silos. It will become more and more important to be able to connect the part to the whole. In envisioning the future, we need to look at the year 2047—which will be the centenary of Indian independence and the golden jubilee of Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode (IIMK)—from the eyes of the school student of today. It is today’s school-going generation that will be at the helm of affairs in 2047. Our primary concern here is how to broaden the identity of the student. We want to make them ponder the question: what makes a human being more wholesome? We want students to leave this institute as more evolved persons. This means focusing on the core of our humanity as much as the skills. The specific skills required to function in any job can be picked

up along the way; the core, on the other hand, relates to the central values of a human being. These values are commitment to truth, sustainability and wholeness. It is this core that we must focus on developing in students.

Education must go beyond a transactional system that involves a fixed number of hours’ interaction between teacher and student: learning needs to be an ongoing engagement with our whole life, on the lines of the gurukuls of antiquity.

How are we Globalizing Indian Thought?

The spur to creating the Indian Business Museum came with the realization that much of the thinking on the current business environment had become limited and parochial. We wanted to create a repository of knowledge about India’s business heritage that would broaden the discourse on Indian business, introducing historical depth and a sense of rootedness. It is about creating a confident and secure identity. The strength of one’s roots is directly proportional to the magnitude of one’s visible achievements.

In addition to being firmly rooted in our country’s heritage, its traditions and knowledge systems, it is our vision to bring the fruits of that knowledge into the worldwide discourse. For several centuries now, the world’s centres of learning, and the conversations developing within them, have been dominated by Western analytical thought. This is like one species causing the decline and near extinction of other species. Conversations on globalization have for a long time been synonymous with Westernization. Indian thought does have a great deal to contribute to those conversations. The very complexity of our nation and its intellectual heritage make it ideally suited to take a lead role in dealing with what will be an increasingly dynamic future in a globalized world. Our recent experiences, too, are extremely relevant—practices such as *jugaad*, *dhandha*, the *langar* system and frugal engineering, which have evolved to meet the needs of our society at present, are cases in point. The Dabbawalas of Mumbai and Arvind Eye Hospital in Madurai have blended efficiency with the value of service in a way that is unmatched in the world. Indian businesses have deftly dealt with the paradox of creating value for money and value for many at the same time.

Such an orientation has for long existed in our minds, but it also needs a symbolic manifestation for our future generations to identify with these symbols. This is the thinking behind the Arjuna statue that stands at the entrance to the main block of our institute. An exceptional individual from Indian mythology, Arjuna symbolizes concentration, unwavering focus and a deep grounding in the skills

and values imparted by his guru. Above all, Arjuna stands for *dharma*, which is the moral and ethical code of a professional in any walk of life. Some of our buildings are named after iconic Indian achievers such as Kautilya. You will see billboards on campus that have quotes from great masters ranging from Buddha and Vivekananda to Tagore and Teresa. Our new campus inside Infopark in Kochi has very aesthetically designed walls and classrooms. All our students' hostels are named after Indian music ragas such as *Jog*, *Kalyani* and *Hamsadhvani*. India is the only culture that has different music for different seasons. Our music is a reflection of our non-linear minds. Our musicians realized that the music for spring had to be different from the music of the monsoon. This non-linearity is expressed in the awesome architecture of our campus: in the circularity of our open-air auditorium for instance. Our annual food festival, in which our students cook different dishes, showcases India's myriad culinary traditions. Our construction work does not happen at the expense of our ecology. In fact, our buildings have grown with the hills rather than against them.

IIM Kozhikode is perhaps the only business school in the country with a very vibrant humanities and liberal arts area that coexists alongside finance, operations research, marketing and other business disciplines. The concern of this area stretches from a very popular course called social transformation in India to Indo-China relations, classes on Indian business history and culturally congruent communication classes. India's primary contribution to the world has been in the realm of humanities. Our Nalanda and

Takshashila were world-class universities that fostered a human and humane world. Our goal as a management school is to give to the world competent and compassionate professionals. We believe that no one can be a good manager without first being a good human being.

IIM Kozhikode has pioneered gender diversity. Our class of 2013 has 54 per cent women. For more than 50 years, the pioneering IIMs had an adverse gender ratio of about 90:10 in favour of men. IIM Kozhikode changed that in 2010, with more women than ever before entering the portals of an IIM that had long been the bastion of male engineering graduates. Through this, we ensured a more vibrant learning environment in our campus as women brought in different perspectives to decision-making, learning and conflict resolution. At IIM Kozhikode, we truly believe that India cannot be a true economic power when half of its population cannot make it to the boardrooms and the higher echelons of leadership.

The institute has indeed set for itself a pre-eminent role of globalizing Indian thought. The sheer scale, scope and potential impact that India will have on twenty-first-century business make us believe that this is a legitimate aspiration. IIM Kozhikode's mission is bigger than just disseminating academic or even professional courses. Our vision extends to those major challenges like infrastructure, health care, education, managing the aspirations of an ever-growing population with scarce resources. We truly wish to play our part in the creation of a new and resurgent India.