

The Indian Mind

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Introduction

Today, India is witness to a feeling of elation on account of booming stock markets, adequate forex and being labeled as one of the fastest growing economies of the world. These achievements have been varied in content and nature. However, the common thread binding all these accomplishments together is the presence of an 'Indian Mind' behind them. Considering, this success is relatively recent, the question that arises in people's minds is, where was the 'Indian Mind' all these years?

The evolution of the Indian Mind

Decade of the 60's

The Indian Mind, today, is a contrast to the one that existed almost four decades ago. As the mind has evolved, so have our value systems and perceptions. As we grew up in the 60's, the ethic drilled into us was that making lots of money was not necessarily a noble thing and those that made money, needed to be taxed heavily. As a result, the tax rates were heavy. Such policies led the way for vices like tax evasion. On the economy front, the markets were plagued by problems of shortage and consumers were forced into accepting whatever was supplied to them. This was a paradox in the country of Mahatma Gandhi who endorsed the idea of 'Consumer being God'.

However, during the same decade, institutes like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) were set up. The IITs were instituted with the purpose of being apex academic institutions that offered the best of academicians and imparted world-class education. Unfortunately, however, the presence of a revered institution of this stature didn't do much to boost the confidence of Indians; the best teachers sometimes needed patronization from their western counterparts. We believed that the West was superior to us as far as technology was concerned. There was a great deal of reliance on recognition from the West for almost everything.

Technologically, the West continued to surge ahead. At best, India could copy the West's achievements. Accentuating the condition were the beliefs and value systems that played the role of a deterrent.

Decade of the 70's

The 60's paved the way for the 70's, a decade of anti-establishment movements. It began with the Jaiprakash Movement and the Naxalite Movement. These movements brought Indians face-to-face with the serious shortcomings prevalent in the political and social system. The knowledge instigated Indians to work towards change. Unfortunately though, there were no constructive programmes that could have concretized this crave for change. The Emergency and the Janata Dal Movement followed soon after. The occurrence of such events only resulted in overall disillusionment among Indians.

Decade of the 80's

On the economy front, the picture wasn't rosy. In the 80's, importing electronic component from abroad was sheer nightmare. A cumbersome procedure comprising procuring a

quotation, order, NMI certificate, duty exemption application, revalidation of quotation and order, revalidation of NMI, DE certificate, LC, shipment had to be undertaken. During the same time, a computer cost Rs 1 lakh.

Things changed in the mid-80's, when Rajiv Gandhi came to power and initiated a modernization drive with a special emphasis on computerization. During the same time, Sam Pitroda and CDOT emerged on the Indian scene vowing to design indigenous products.

Decade of the 90's

Such positive vibes ushered in the 90's. The Congress government led by Narasimha Rao who with Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, undertook bold steps, including opening up the private sector, doing away with protection and instilling the ethic that making money wasn't evil.

When the United Front Government succeeded the Congress, its then Finance Minister, P Chidambaram, introduced tax rates that were among the lowest in the world. During Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure as Prime Minister, the policies were continued. This was the beginning of change and there was no turning back.

The late 90's was witness to India's phenomenal performance in the IT sector. Indians were carving a niche for themselves within and outside national boundaries. IIT became a brand name and the confidence rubbed off on youngsters who didn't think of themselves as inferior to the West. It was believed that a combination of zeal, hardwork, intellect and values could enable us to reach the zenith.

It is the Indian mind today that is earning laurels – winning in business, technology, literature, fashion and advertisement. The brain drain has a different manifestation today – that of brain bank.

And today...

We see a striking difference between the thought processes of then and now. The customer is no more at the mercy of the market, but is God. The roles and rights of shareholders are better defined today. Employees are no more perceived as servants, they are treated as partners. Protectionism has given way to the zeal to compete.

The Indian market has undergone a tremendous change. On the telecom front, capital expenditure has come down from Rs 40,000 per line in 1994 to under Rs 15000 per line today. This has led to a phenomenal rise in the number of telephone subscribers in India – from 10 million then to 70 million today.

The reduction in capex is significant in a country like India where 60 per cent of urban households cannot afford to spend more than Rs 200 a month on telecom. Efforts must be on in ensuring that capital expenditure is brought down to below the Rs 8000 mark if the market must be expanded. This necessitates the presence of disruptive technologies.

The TeNeT Dream

Committed to assisting India emerge as a world leader is the Telecommunication and Computer Networks Group at IIT Madras. The group aims to:

- ☞ Driving broadband Internet connectivity to homes and small and medium offices.

- ✍ Endeavouring towards creating a couple of billion dollar telecom product companies from India.
- ✍ Becoming world leaders in a couple of technology areas, with wireless being one of them.
- ✍ Providing Internet connection to every village in India through an Internet kiosk operator and using it as a means to driving the rural economy in a manner that rural GDP can be doubled within a decade. TeNeT has incubated a company, n-Logue Communications, a rural service provider whose entire focus is rural India. It focuses on providing telephone and Internet connection to every village commercially.
- ✍ Using the presence of Internet in rural India to drive services like education, health and micro-enterprise and improve the condition of the rural populace.

Conclusion

Today, India is not inferior to any other nation of the world. It has the ability to overcome obstacles and emerging as a developed nation. The presence of corruption and politics will not act as a deterrent. And while we emerge as a major player in the international market, our values and beliefs remain Indian. We are not mere followers anymore, but proud of what we are. The world will probably take a cue from the 'Indian' in us and a confident set of Indians can take the initiative of changing the way the world thinks.