

## Bharat Transformation

**Shekhar Gupta**

---

Thank you, all for being here. I would like to extend my compliments to the director concerning the marvelous achievements of your institute in this short span of eleven years. For an institution, eleven years is very young, and for a fledgling institute to have come so far in such a short time – well, that speaks for itself. In my talk with the director, I was impressed with the vision he has for the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, and am pleased to know that he has teachers and students who are willing and able to stand by him and transform this vision into a reality.

Keeping this in mind, I would especially like to commend the teachers for their dedication to the institute and more importantly, to the students. In these days of instant gratification and materialistic pleasures, it is heartwarming to be around teachers who impart knowledge and challenge a student to think for himself/herself and do so for the sheer joy of teaching. It is a great pity that people have not realized that 'teaching' per se is the actual “fountain of youth”. Teachers are forever young in spirit because they are always connected to the vitality of new ideas and schools of thought that young people come up with.

On National Youth Day, we pay our tributes to the youth of this nation and also to those who contribute to the empowerment and the transformation of young minds.

The youth of a nation, any nation, are the ones with the power to effect change. In a country like ours, where almost 65% of the population is below the age of 30, society, politics and culture can be transformed by the power of the youth. The power of this kind of change is both a tremendous opportunity and a subtle danger. It has the potential to change the way we live, the way we think and the way we are, however, it will take a skillful touch to tap this potential, without bruising the sensibilities of the youth.

Almost any discussion about the future of India will include a session on the demographic dividend. This term is used to describe the rise in the rate of economic growth in direct proportions to the rising number of the working professionals between the ages of 15 to 64. According to India's economist, Kaushik Basu, India had a dependency ratio of 0.6 and a population of 1 080 million in 2004 of which 672 million were between the ages of 15 and 64. The remaining 480 million were the dependent population. It has been predicted that due to the declining fertility rate, India's dependency ratio will come down to around 0.4 by 2030 and the average age of a person will be 29. This translates into huge benefits and a rise in the average savings rate.

Unfortunately only 13% of our population is enrolling in higher education – one of the lowest percentages in Asia. As more young people join the workforce with skills inappropriate to the demands of economy, the challenges increase and tension levels rise. Nandan Nilekani suggests that India's young population in the north be equipped with skills to participate in growth via effective policies in education and health. The northern states are ones with some of the worst social indicators and messed up politics. In this analysis, Nandan Nilekani states that if we do not get this right, it will have the potential to cause immense political and social upheaval. Even in the face of such a gloomy picture, I prefer to remain optimistic about the future of our nation, both culturally and politically – though of course the latter might cause people to look at me askance or with pity for my deranged mind!

The elections held in Kashmir went a long way in justifying my decision to remain optimistic. In 2002 the turnout of voters was only 43% but this year saw an unprecedented rise of 19% bringing the overall figure to 62%. The additional growth of 19% seems to have come from the youth of Kashmir – first time voters in fact! In spite of the militancy and the troubled way of life in Kashmir, these young people chose to be more concerned about the promise of a future, than be weighed down by the bitterness of the past. All the political parties in India encourage people to vote for them by showing them clouded visions of the future through the glasses of a murky past. Why is it that the intellect of the people of India is frequently taken for granted? Why do politicians suppose that today's generation is even dimly interested in a past that holds no relevance to the present? Thomas Friedman had a remarkable talent for one-liners that cut through to the heart of the matter with the delicacy of a scalpel. In one of his books, as he speaks of the young people in Bangalore, he remarks that, “The weight of their dreams was more than the weight of their memories, and on an imaginary balance, the way the scales tipped would show what track they were on.” If the memories weigh more than your dreams, and if your memories are ones of problems and hurt, then you don't just try and settle your scores with the past, you try and settle them with the people who caused them. Furthermore, if things can't be resolved amicably, we immediately call for blood and then settle it in a way so that those people are six feet underground.

After the Bombay attacks, I was flooded with calls from media persons from all over, wanting to discuss the situation. Hamid Mir, a well-known Pakistani anchor called and interrogated me during a live telecast. Had I seen Ajmal Amir Kasab's interrogation report? Was I aware that Kasab had issued a statement saying he killed those people because of what had been done to the Muslims in Gujarat? He went on and on for quite a while, becoming progressively quite rude in the process. I tried discussing the situation with him, but apparently the only thing he was interested in was ratings and the sound of his own voice. After he switched off, I realized anew how susceptible the minds of the young are. They can be deceived and set on the wrong track,

only when they have no stake in the present and no interest in the future. The Middle East and certain parts of India have a lot to answer for, not just because they themselves are intolerant, but also because they bring up future generations to think, act and live exactly like them. The strange thing is, they are eager to portray a progressive appearance and be just like the west, but they choose not to be democratic in their thoughts. Change is almost an unknown word over there, perhaps because it isn't put into practice all that much.

I laud Omar Abdullah, recently elected Chief Minister of Kashmir. His father, Farooq Abdullah, would I have no doubts, prefer to be Chief Minister himself, but even he recognizes the wisdom his son has shown. The young want to be led by their own kind, and they know instinctively when someone genuinely has the makings of a leader whom they can all admire and respect. When Omar Abdullah stood in front of the parliament and declared, "I am a Muslim and an Indian", his party members told him to forget about becoming Chief Minister because after that statement it wasn't going to happen. Much they knew about it. In less than six months time, this dedicated, charming, idealistic 38 year old young man showed all the unbelievers that change was possible – even in war torn Kashmir.

President Barack Obama's dramatic victory was based on the promise of hope for a better future. So, it wasn't a surprise that over 66% of those who voted for Obama were under 30. The one common thread that connects countries across the world is the desire of the young to look forward to, and to look to the idea of a better future. The flip side to this, as journalist Fareed Zakaria puts it, are "a bunch of restless young men looking for trouble", who spell bad news for any country. He uses this logic to provide a fascinating insight into the extremism prevalent in the Middle Eastern countries. He argues that globalization has caught these countries at a very bad demographic moment. Its societies are going through a massive youth bulge considering more than 75% of the population there is under the age of 30. Unlike India, where there is freedom of speech and movement (too much at times) and the angry youth of our country can demonstrate their displeasure by revolting and taking to the streets, countries like the U.A.E., for example have no such outlet valve. When the young people there get angry, they stay angry and it festers inside them till the time the wrongs done to them are blown all out of proportion and they are consumed by their own anger.

A youth bulge precedes any sort of revolution in any country, and more often than not it is the youth who incite and lead a revolt. The power of youth - shamefully misused.

So, which way do we go now? There is no question. Democracy and sustained economic growth have ensured that the winds of change accelerate in the right direction. But there is still a lot to be done. Fundamental to that effort is the creation of opportunity and the evolution of thought.

Which is why, it is such a pleasure for me to be here at IIM Indore, the youngest IIM until the one in Shillong was started. This is a place where I see opportunity welcomed, and change embraced with open arms. The drivers of change will always be the young, because it is they who take risks and aren't afraid of adventure, who possess the passion and the sheer daring to try new things. I encourage the young people to choose to go against the flow, to soar to new heights and most of all to grow up exploring your full potential.

### **Author's Profile**

#### **Shekhar Gupta**

The author is the Editor-in-Chief of the daily 'The Indian Express'. As a reporter and editor he has covered some of the major investigative and public affair issues in Indian Journalism. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for the year 2009 for his contribution in the field of journalism.