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ENLIGHTENED CITIZENRY

A PIECE BY KIRAN GANDHI, A VOLUNTEER WITH INITIATIVES OF CHANGE



Kiran Gandhi

holds a degree in engineering and an MBA. During a career in human resource development spanning over 30 years he has made a significant contribution to development of participative work cultures in several companies as a human resources leader and consultant.



2011 can be said to be the year of the enlightened citizenry. It began with citizen-led historic regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt, which triggered a new-found awareness of the power of citizenry in several countries around the world. India too is experiencing a historic reawakening of its citizenry under the leadership of Anna Hazare, which is rewriting the relationship between citizens and their political leaders. In fact we now have a peculiar situation in which citizens are leading the change and political leaders are forced to follow.

However, herein lies a deep concern which I wish to share. How lasting will these changes be? Together with this concern I wish to share a possible answer to it for the consideration of each one of us.

As a young man 40 years ago I was a part of a generation of intellectuals who were very unhappy with the way things were going in our country. We were disillusioned with the growing corruption in the political leadership and glaring injustices in society. Many of us were drawn into movements which advocated the use of force and elimination of exploiters for effecting change.

At that time I fortunately came across an alternate ideology for bringing change. It pronounced: *before you blame others see if you yourself might be a part of the problem. Put that right first.* To further emphasise it said: AS I AM, SO IS MY NATION.

On introspecting within, I found to my horror that germs of corruption and self-centredness were in me too. The new ideology I had found exhorted: CHANGE STARTS WITH ME by deciding to become a part of the solution and not the problem. However, I was skeptical: how much could the change in just a few individuals matter? To that doubt the response was IT IS BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE THAN TO CURSE THE DARKNESS.

So I decided to return an item I had stolen from my institute laboratory and to disclose to my father my real expenditures which were different from the statements I had sent him. I also admitted to jealousy towards my younger brothers, which if unchecked would have caused serious divisions in the family. Looking back, these steps in honesty have paid off in terms of the strong family relations we have enjoyed.

Later in life I found that sharing these and other steps in personal change helped to induce similar change in others. Amongst the first few of them were two rival union leaders in the company in which I was working. On listening to my personal experience and introspecting on it these two decided to give up their rivalry and work for the larger good of labour and the company. More recently, there has been the inspiring example of 150 doctors of Mumbai's JJ Hospital who, before joining Anna Hazare's campaign, pledged to give up their unethical medical practices of referrals and commissions.

I believe that without such personal change in people, real change in society, its systems and structures may not be possible. Personal change on a large scale is the need of the hour. It cannot be achieved by force, as history has shown. People need to be encouraged to examine their own lives to ensure it is corruption-free. BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT THE WORLD TO BE was Gandhiji's message to citizenry.

But the challenge is how to bring this message effectively to citizenry? To my mind the answer lies in training. In such training the trainers would be people who share about their own change and not lecture on change. In my experience that is key to encouraging others to change.

I have been fortunate to be able to experiment with planning and executing such training in a large manufacturing organisation of 24,000 employees with as many problems, problems of the type which are found in the larger society. The personal change which was experienced by thousands of individuals taking this training, was instrumental in bringing about a deep transformation of the organisation's culture, from one of blaming to taking responsibility. I believe that is the kind of cultural change we need today in our country.

With the availability of modern mass media tools it should now be possible to take such training to the masses. Some imagination would of course be required to make effective use of these tools.

History has taught us that whenever large scale societal changes have been attempted by only changing structures and systems of governance they have been overpowered by greed and selfishness in human nature. Therefore the time has now come to enlighten the citizenry of this simple but vital truth.

Without change in people, no change of a lasting nature would be achieved by changing systems and structures alone. Change will need to begin in each one of us. We may need to start by admitting where we were not honest or were jealous. We may need to commit to not giving or taking bribes. By introspecting we will know where we need correction. Such change in large numbers of people could be facilitated by imaginative training, using mass media tools. It will create an enlightened citizenry, as aware of its responsibilities as its rights. Let us not forget:

AS I AM, SO IS MY NATION.