

■ Gurucharan Das

Shri Gurucharan Das is a well known writer. He has written "India Unbound" and many other books including plays. He regularly writes a column for The Times of India. He was formerly Chairman & Managing Director of Procter & Gamble (India) Ltd.

Team Abhivyakti : *Welcome to Railway Staff College!*

Gurucharan Das : It is a privilege to be here. I will say you people are really brave to invite me here because my last two articles that I wrote on the railways would not be very popular with the railways. They are actually quite critical of the railways. In fact, I was taken to the court by the Railway unions for the articles because I suggested the problem of excess manpower being one of the problems of the railways. But the one person who liked my view after reading my column on the railways was Dr. Man Mohan Singh. He was in the opposition and the Parliament was not in session. So he just picked up the phone and said, "come over, let's have a cup of tea and let us discuss the railways". He is a different kind of an individual and I was very touched by that.

T.A. : *So you are not having very kind views about railways!*

G.D. : No, No. Not at all. I am a friend of the railways. I am truly a person who believes in the future success of India and some of you might have already read "India Unbound". But if you do not get the opportunity to read it, the BBC keeps showing it again and again. They have repeated it a number of times. So if you want, you can see it too.

My view is basically that India has achieved a major transformation already and the biggest transformation that has already occurred, is in the minds of the people, especially the young people. In the 90s, the minds of the young actually became what I call 'decolonized'. The old British Raj finally went out of the system. That has not happened in the older people who are still in power, including in the railways. So the young people will find that they have been dealing with two kinds of mindsets

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those minds that have changed, and those that are still unreformed.

T.A. : *What were the reasons for this change in the mindset?*

G.D. : It is another story. We can talk about it, why this change happened in the 90s. This, I think, had something to do with the reforms. There is no question about it. When the economic reforms unfolded, the pent up energy in the country was unleashed and young people suddenly felt a sense of hope. Our economic numbers are a testimony to the fact that it was the best decade in our history of economic growth. The economic growth rate for the 90s was 6.2% in real terms, net of inflation, compounded over ten years. You can see the multiplier, if you have a compound interest calculator, you can quickly calculate that at the end of the decade the wealth of the country was 75% greater than what it had been at the beginning of the decade of the 90s. So, the economic growth itself was a very big factor in the 90s. Along with this came liberation of minds. You see, for example, earlier we could watch Doordarshan only on the television and suddenly we had people talking in a very different way on a multitude of channels. They were not talking like bureaucrats; they were talking like ordinary people.

T.A. : *Any specific instance of this change*

G.D. : I shall just illustrate to you with one story of 90s. When I was 50 years old, I took early retirement from my company and then I became a full time writer. I decided the best thing for me to do was to come back to India, and I started to travel, and these travels resulted in the book "India Unbound". Now, the first journey I took was from Chennai to Pondicherry and in the morning we were in an Ambassador car. As we were going, I had a Tamilian photographer with me. We stopped in a village outside Madras. We decided to have some good South Indian coffee and Vada Sambar. The boy who was serving us coffee, his name was Raju. The first thing he told us — he was a 14 year old boy, I still remember he was wearing push-shirt, he was from a low caste and he was wearing

Khaki half pants — First thing he told me (he was speaking to the fellow photographer who was translating it for me) He said, "This is a summer job". I said to myself, "In a village job! It means India is changing". He said, "He is earning Rs.450/- per month". He said, "That is very good". I thought Rs. 450/- was a little less morning till six in the evening. But he said in the problem with that because "At 6'o clock in the evening I get on my bicycle and I go to the neighbouring village and in that village there is an APTech computer center and I learn computer. I am learning JAVA", and he said, "Basically I know this training costs me Rs. 450/- per month and that is perfect". As far as he was concerned it was a perfect deal that he had in his life.

Then he said his ambition was to run a computer company one day. I said to Raju "Where did you get this?" You know, a village in Tamilnadu and this dream of running a computer company. He said "Simple. Our family had a black and white TV for Rs. 2900/- last year and I saw on TV the richest man in the world - his name is Bill Gates. He said, "I am going to be a Billigy one day. He was using it as one word. He was talking about Bill Gates and his ambition was to become that rich.

I went back to home at Delhi. I told this story to my wife and she said, "This must be very unusual. You cannot have this as a typical story of India. But you know, after that I traveled for six months I traveled in Eastern UP. I traveled in Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. I came across stories like this everyday.

One of the things I noticed about Raju was that Raju represented not only dreams and hope but Raju also represented a very practical attitude to learn, which had been missing earlier. Raju told me his formula for success. You know, he told me, "Look if I am going to be Billigy, I have to do three things". I said, "What are these three things, Raju?" He said, "Look, one, I have to learn Windows and I am learning Windows right

"Number two" he said "I have to learn 400 words of English." I said, "What is 400 words of English?" He said, "I heard that to pass TOEFL you need to know 400 words of English", I said, "Is that so", and I did not know that. "Number three" he said, "I need to learn to write an invoice". He needed commercial skills. That is what he was talking about. Now, you see, our attitude to English language changed in the 90s. I must tell you that Raju's attitude of 400 words of English illustrates this point very well.

When I finished from Harvard, here I thought, I have gone through one of the best universities in the world. I have studied philosophy and those great subjects. When I came back to India, I went to visit my grandfather. My grandfather lived in Madhiana. So like a typical 21 year old, I started showing off and telling him of the people that I had met, the books I had read, and the ideas that had come across. After a few minutes my grandfather said, "Not quite Oxbridge". What was he doing? He was comparing me to his times of Oxford and Cambridge. Now that was the gold standard for him. I was not good enough, because my accent was not: I was just speaking like this, with Indian accent. English was thought of as language of the Queen of England at that time.

Raju's attitude to English is that it's a skill. For Raju English does not carry any flag, just as Windows does not carry any flag. It does not matter whether the Windows was invented in Seattle by Bill Gates or same thing with English. As far as Raju is concerned, he thinks if he knows 400 words of English he owns English, and that is his language. That is what happened in India in 90s. English became very quietly an Indian language. All that criticism against English died. Gujarat where we are today, Gujaratis had stopped teaching English in primary school and they found the whole generation of students got left behind in Gujarat and could not be employed. Bengal did the same thing. Any way all that criticism against English died.

These cable channels, I was referring to, were an important part of our liberation. One day I tuned in Zee News. The announcer on Zee News said:

AAJ Middle East MEIN peace HO GAYEE. That is what, three words of English and three words of Hindi ! See this is a newscast ! Imagine, she would have been sacked on Doordarshan, if she had done this. She would have been thrown out. But she had the freedom, the liberty. That is what I mean that the minds of the young people have changed and that is the hope of our country. **That** is the hope of our country. There is an attitude of young people which is: can do attitude. You know, 'we can do it' and that confidence, is what partly my book "India Unbound" was all about.

T.A. : *What is your first memory of Indian Railways?*

G.D. : OK, let's come back to the railways. Now you know every Indian, I am sure, has one impossibly romantic railway memory. Mine is that of a journey from Kalka to Simla, when I was a five year old boy and when I first feasted my eyes on the snow-tipped crests of the Himalayas. Now, I have told this story at great length and described this journey in my book "A Fine Family". Shyam Benegal is making it into a film. The railway journey is part of the film. I do not know where they are going to film it. This was in 1947. We were, frankly speaking, refugees from Pakistan. We had fled Lahore. My father was working for government. He was an engineer and he was based in Lahore. I have seen before my eyes my aunt being killed at the time when we were coming. We escaped with our lives, from Jalandhar station we took a train to Kalka and then from Kalka we took this train. After Kalka everything was like a new world, a new age and the whole stench of death was left behind. All those memories of partition were a past. So there was enormous pleasure in that journey.

Now, I still travel by train. In fact tonight I will be going back to Delhi from Vadodara by train. Almost every two months I take the Frontier mail to visit my mother who is 89 years old. She lives in Beas on the river Beas in a Radha Saomi Ashram. So I go and visit her. Of course, now I am financially well off. Earlier, I was a government servant's son. But now my investments have done well, so I travel

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by first AC. But today, I must tell you, traveling by first AC is not as good as it was in those days. We had first, second, third and inter. There were these four different compartments. I do not know what compartment we were in. But I think, we were in second class that my father was entitled to, because he was a junior officer in the government. But what I am trying to tell you is, why the journey today is not a nice journey, even when I can travel by First AC. It has to do with small things. One, the fact that the carriage - the compartment - is not clean, often it is dirty. I have to tell the attendant *ISKHEE SAPAAI KARAA DO*. Two, the windows are dirty from outside. One of the joys of traveling by train is to look outside, see the green fields outside, and if the windows are dirty from outside then where is the pleasure? You are paying so much money. Then the third is that starting from Delhi station, for the first fifteen kilometers both sides of the tracks are filthy, you know, because in our country people throw things. But what I do not understand is that there are so many people working in the railways. OK, people throw things but you could use some of these extra people that exist, to clean it up. Surely we are dirty people, let's admit that. Railways are a mirror of the society in which we live. But I can tell you that these small things make all the difference. Sometimes I take a walk in Delhi in the evening in Lodi Gardens. One day, some person who is responsible for managing the Lodi Gardens in Delhi, he decided to put a lot of dustbins everywhere, all with the sign "Please throw garbage in these dustbins". There was an immediate change in the habits of the people. When they saw dustbins, they started putting it to use. I thought to myself - just imagine if at every 15 meters railways had a big sign: "Put things in the dustbins", "Here is the dustbin". Now I noticed that in the South there are more dustbins. I was at Madras station and I saw dustbins. But in Delhi I did not see one. I was looking for a dustbin. Anyway, this is a small example to tell you why my journeys today have lost some of the pleasure. Because I have to close the curtains. So I do not look outside. Imagine that. Because it is filthy outside. The windows are dirty. The

carriage is dirty. I am paying so much money for first AC ticket. I am paying as much money for First AC as much I would pay for air ticket if not more today. These little things are important because they tell you about the culture.

T.A.: *Don't you think, it is difficult to change things in a system like Indian Railways?*

G.D.: Well, one can talk about that, you know. I asked one railway person at New Delhi station which is a premium railway station. As you know New Delhi is one of the busiest railway stations. I said, "Why don't they just get people to clean the station". He said, "NAHIN HUM LOG TOH GANDE LOG HAIN". I said, "I know that but you have so many people". They can do the job. Then he told me that a lot of Safaiwalas in the New Delhi Station, come and mark their attendance and then they go and they play in bands. Their job is to play in marriage bands. These Safaiwalas, this is their real job. The railway job is just they get their cheque every month. They collect their money every month. But they do not really do any job. This is devastating. I mean, I felt so bad. I just could not believe that. Can nobody do anything about it! I know the constraints under which the railways work. It is a job for life. In most cases you cannot sack people who don't show up for their jobs. But still within the constraints you can punish the employees and this is up to you.

It's a failure of management not punishing the employee who is not doing his job. If you start with the assumption that if a person is absent and I cannot do anything about it then you have got a miserable career in the railways. I think you can do it. Most people do not have the courage. There are people every day in India, in the government, in the private sector, who are making a difference. That's where you can. You walk into one office, it is clean, and you walk into another government office, it is filthy. One person is making it for sure. This dirt & filth is just a symptom of a bigger disease.

Let us start talking about the real disease that is besetting the railways. You know, as I said that

the railways hold a mirror to our society. I mean, they are a mirror of contemporary India. They show us what is good about India. They also show us what is bad about India. What they show that is good about India is that they have woven the nation together and they are like Sachin Tendulkar. Every time he scores a century the nation comes together. Now the railways do that everyday. They weave the nation together as one organization 'Indian Railways' and we all have a common experience of this everyday. They carry 4.5 billion passengers. Now India's population is 1 billion, they are carrying 4.5 India per year. They have made the poorest Indian mobile for Rs.50/-. This was the last time when I calculated it. For Rs. 50/- you can travel 200 Kms. Now you cannot do that anywhere in the world.

But there is something wrong in that also. Because, you see, if you make something free, then people lose respect for what they get free. I agree that there are lots of poor people in India. One should have compassion for the poor but subsidies, any economist will tell you do not work. You know, one of the things I believe, we should do is: everybody in India should take a basic course in economics so that lot of our problems could be solved. Actually, our President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam keeps saying that he was a scientist, but for the last 20 years he has been educating himself in economics. Because the basic problem of India is: poverty. So an economist will tell when something is given away free then you do not value it. It disturbs the whole pattern of economic life of the country. For example, water is available at a very low price but it costs enormous money, in some cases, to bring water from the river to your home. So it is very important to price activities in the right way in the economy. So I will give money to the poor people. Give vouchers to every poor family to travel on the railways as a state grant. This is a grant you get like food stamps, Ration-stamps. But you must charge whatever will be the cost of service.

T.A.: *But, possibly, we can't raise the fares ...*

G.D.: OK, so fares are too low and the problem is that the railway ministers are, after all,

political people and they are scared of raising passenger fares, especially, in the second class. They think that they will lose their political clout. They do not have the courage to do it. This is the trap in which we have fallen into and so the good side of the railways has become the bad side of railways.

Let me recapture, the good side is that everybody can travel because it is cheap but the bad side is that you do not recover your costs. Then you are creating inefficiency and distortion in the system that will destroy the system. And that is what is happening.

T.A.: *We cross subsidize passenger travel from freight.....*

G.D.: Yes, somebody has to pay for this low cost, low price of tickets. And this low price of the tickets is paid for by raising the freight rates every year and that means that the railways do not carry the freight at competitive rates. No sensible businessman in the country - forget in the private sector or public sector - is lunatic enough to pay the kind of freight rates that are being charged by the railways. This, partly, is the reason because railways have failed in their mission. The main source of revenue for the railways world over is freight. This is true for all railways and in India railways have failed in this mission miserably because they raised the rates so much that even things that you should carry by the railways: coal, petrol, gas, you know, are now being carried by trucks in India. I mean that is just disgraceful and you know how country pays for it. It is more expensive to transport something from Delhi to Mumbai than it is from Mumbai to London.

T.A.: *You mean, this affects our competitiveness in exports?*

G.D.: Yes, our exporters are disadvantaged. If railways were competitive to trucks then the truck fare would also come down with the competitive market. Now you have given a monopoly to the trucks.

Railways say we are not in the business of carrying these goods. Having this kind of freight rates they say, we are not in the business of carrying

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freight and we are in the business of carrying millions of people, practically free, and therefore we are not a business organization, but we are a charity. So let us call Railways the charity! It is not a serious commercial activity at all. To me it is a national scandal, where it costs more to move goods from Delhi to Mumbai than from Mumbai to London. This has hurt industry after industry. Most countries move steel on rail. In India you ask Tata steel about the railways !

Why are the railways freight costs so high? One is that we do not charge properly for passenger traffic. But the real sickness in the system is that you have 15 lakh employees in the railways and even by the railways' own internal studies you need no more than 10 lakh. So one out of three persons does not belong inside railways. That is the fundamental cause of sickness, which explains why freight rates have to be so high. This is seven times more manpower per kilometer than in the countries where railways are successful. Imagine one out of three people is excess! This is a national disgrace! You will think that the more people you employ the better off you are. Again you need to study economics. You do not know how much harm does it cause. One is economic harm that you are making the whole nation's freight uncompetitive, nation's export uncompetitive, but also what has this done — this has destroyed the work ethic of people who want to work. You see, there are three people working on a job and one out of the three is not needed. Amongst all of us, one out of three will be performing regardless of the environment. You and I demoralize that one who wants to do good job. So what does this extra labour do? It demoralizes the person who wants to work, who wants to do something good and when he sees that this fellow comes there, signs his name and goes home, how does he feel? You work till 8 o'clock at night, I know people, and there are very fine people in the railways. Hard working people. That is why the damn thing runs. How will it run otherwise? It is an achievement carrying 4.5 billion passengers per year. But their achievement is being done away by those one in three people.

The damage done by the excess labour is enormous to the work ethic.

Now this is not an easy problem to solve. I wrote about this in my column. I am speaking to you in the same emotion because this bothers me as a citizen of the country. As a friend of the railways, I get sick in my stomach, when I see this kind of behaviour. When I see the filthy railway station in the North, not in the South that much, and I say with all this excess manpower what are they doing? There are answers, you are a party to the implementation. You may not be able to change it immediately, but slowly you must. Also, I must tell you India is changing. Indians are changing. You should understand what are the answers. There are many ways. In the private sector, it is done everyday despite our difficult labour laws, which I hope, will be reformed soon. I hope those labour laws will be reformed. Right now I must say that they should start at the top. I would retire three out of four people from the top. So one out of four you keep based on the performance. This will again be a good signal because it will tell people that we value performance and there are people today in power who can make this happen.

Another way that has been tried and has been successful within the government, in banks etc. and that is: offer surplus employees a generous voluntary retirement. Voluntary retirement has to be implemented in the way that the best companies have implemented it. The best companies implement voluntary retirement scheme by retaining the best people. You see, the way it happened in the banks in India was that the best people left State Bank and all the good banks. Now, that is not the way to manage it. The way it is to be managed is very carefully, very successfully. Tata Steel has been doing a good job by keeping the good people and letting some of the deadwood go. Therefore, the idea again will give a signal that we value people who work hard, who do a good job, who deliver results.

So, you know, I would say, it would be cheaper for the railways today, these half a million people

that are deadwood - 5 lakh people who are surplus, we should pay them full salary and keep them at home, tell them not to come to work. It is cheaper in the end for railways to do that than to have them come even to office or to do their jobs wherever, whatever they do. Better to do a clean up like that. In the end society will gain more. You just pay them. OK, these are the outstandings of our part, we will pay the people until they retire. I would also offer a retirement package. But this voluntary retirement is like this. Basically you have to pay a lot of money to get somebody to take voluntary retirement.

L.A. : *Is retiring people the only solution?*

G.D. : One is to shed people who are not required and the other is to shed the activities that are not required for railways to do. See, whatever the lessons I learnt in my business career were that a company primarily exists for a business activity and the railway is a business activity, it has a job to do.

Railways' job is carrying passengers and freight in the most economical way and to make a profit at the end. That is the job of railways. If you believe it should not make a profit we can discuss that. The profit is only a symptom of proficiency of an organization. So, when I wrote this piece, you know, in the newspapers at that time, the railways were contemplating bottling water in the country. Why should railways get into this business? This was the time of Nitish Kumar. I think, I was horrified. I said the railways' job is to run the train safely. Why should they talk about bottling water when there are hundred other manufacturers available to bottle water? OK, some of them may not be producing very clean water. And I was told, the water was very bad in our country. I said, "But look Nestle is bottling water, Pepsi is bottling water, Coke is bottling water and they are very good. Parle is bottling water. They are very good manufacturers of water which we drink everyday. Are you telling me that the water I drink everyday is not good enough for the people who travel on trains?" I said, "This was a question of buying properly". You just have good standards, check the water, you go

into the plants where they package the water and certify those plants. This is how the whole world runs!

Someone said railway passengers consume water therefore railways need to bottle it. But I said, in that case you could argue that we serve tea on the railways in our catering services so we should have tea gardens tomorrow. We also serve Chapatis therefore we must grow wheat. Railway conductors wear uniforms as well, so we must grow cotton for our conductors who wear uniforms because we cannot trust people to make proper cotton clothes for our railways. And then we should manufacture shoes because railway people wear shoes and we cannot trust existing suppliers! So, the issue is not bottling the water. The issue is that of mindset.

One of the key lessons that the managerial world has learnt in the last twenty years is the concept of core competence: every business enterprise has its core competence. The author of this idea is actually a well-known Indian Professor in America. His name is C. K. Prahalad. He described the concept of core competence. Meaning, that if I make Vicks Vaporub, my job is to sell that and market it and if somebody else can do other activities better than me let him do that. For example, Safaiwalas — Most offices today contract out this work. Security, we contract security work because it is not part of our core competence. Somebody else can do it better. If somebody else can do this job then why I should do that? In fact, companies have gone so far as to engage accounting firms, let them do the accounting. I do not have to employ an accountant. Payroll, I do not have to do my own payroll. Somebody else can do the payroll and pay to my people. So you can outsource. In fact some companies, in Procter & Gamble, my old company, we realized even manufacturing was not our core competence. We can outsource the manufacturing. We can train people and it will be cheaper for us if somebody else would manufacture and we just buy it. Our core competence is creating new products, understanding customers and their needs. Creating products to fulfill those needs better than our competitors. So, the core

competence of our company really lay in R&D, making superior products, and inventing superior products. Number two, marketing them, building the brand. Everything else could be outsourced.

So, the question that really we come to is should railways shed all non-railway activities. That means they should stop manufacturing. They should stop making loco-motives. They should stop running hotels. They should stop running hospitals. They should stop running schools. They should stop even running printing presses. They should stop even making coaches. That is somebody else's competence. Why should the railways make their own coaches? Why should railways run school?

So there is the French Railways which is one of the best run railways, I believe, at least I have read about it in the Rakesh Mohan Committee's report, they have got rid of all these — factories, making locos, coaches and they just buy everything now and as a result they could shed a lot of people. So what will this do to the Indian Railways? It will create focus. If you do not have to worry about your all other activity, you will focus on running trains on time and safely. The biggest lesson that we have learnt in the business world is that those companies who focus on one activity, always do better than a company which is a conglomerate focusing on a lot of activities.

You all know that in the last 24 hours or so, there has been a lot of criticism of the railways. Railways have suffered a huge loss of image. Now accidents happen all the time. But this accident (Referring to Mukerian Accident in Punjab dated 14.12.2004) has really caught imagination of the country.

The problem, the deep disease, is the same which caused this accident. The deep disease is that too many people in the railways represent which makes for the 50% of the railway cost. It is people's cost, that is too high. Therefore, less money available for upgrading, modernizing and what seems to have failed in this & almost all the railway accidents. You read reports, they talk about human error and the fact of the matter is that the technology has

gone so advanced today, communication has advanced so much today, that investing a little bit in modernizing communication could have prevented this. But where is the money? Because employees of railways are eating that money.

The culture is such, if you go to a railway accident site, the top brass of the railway is not looking after the people who are injured. They are looking after the VIPs who have come. That is why I wish that the minister or any of the top people should never go to railway accident site, because they divert the energy of the railway people from looking after the accident site, the people who are victims. Can you imagine anything so disgraceful? Makes you want to cry.

T.A. : Fair enough, we have problems, but what about answers?

G.D. : Now let us look for the answers. I think, we have talked too long about the problems. You all face these problems. But there have to be answers. Now clearly, there is the problem: railways are a part of government. That is the chief problem. The principle behind 1991 reforms was that the business should do business and the government should do governance. Business activity should be left to the business and railway is not a matter of governance. Railway is a commercial activity. However, you know the difficulty in privatizing that we are having across the country. So, I don't think, it is going to be easy to make changes. The problem of excess labour, excess cost, not enough spending on modernizing. These are all partly the fault of politics. If one way I could achieve a dream it would be not to have a railway minister. That would be the best thing to happen with the railways. There is no minister of the railways. This whole problem of subsidizing passenger fares etc. will go away. What you need is a regulator like TRAI, a regulator for transport. This is a monopoly so in other countries these problems are sorted by a regulator. But in successful countries where you haven't privatized railways, railways still have autonomy. They run like commercial enterprises. They are not a

departmental undertaking. But in India even where we have corporations in public sector, you know, the fate is not good of our public sector. In fact, Rakesh Mohan Committee's conclusions, I do not think, those are the answers. Rakesh Mohan said let us corporatize railways. Let it not be a departmental undertaking. Let it become a public sector. Let us create and give autonomy to them but in our system, we promise autonomy but we do not give it. The whole public sector is not free, almost all. Even in the case of Nav Ratnas it is not the answer.

So what is the answer? Let us realize that we are a democracy. We have to bear a price of our democracy. We have to have a railway minister and so on. OK let us accept that. But even after that there are a lot of improvements that as a manager one can do. I can tell you, even we in the corporate sector, we operate under constraints, as we have Board of Directors etc. and sometimes we do not agree with the Board but we accept the Board. So let us accept politics of the country.

Let us look at the managerial culture of the railways and I think a lot of improvements can be made there. They have made improvements at times when railways wanted to perform. You had that golden age when M. S. Gujaral was the CEO of the railways and the railways turned around. In fact today you are reaping the rewards of the things that Gujaral did. In the 70s railways were in a real mess and the whole country was sick of the railways because they could not carry freight, they would not carry coal. The electric power plants were shut down. The NTPC power plants were shut down because railways were not carrying coal. It was all in a mess. But that man came and he sorted it out. He transformed the railways dramatically. So it can be done. Of course, top leadership makes a big difference. Unfortunately, the culture of the Railway Board is such that it centralizes decisions making. Board Members have only a few months left and then they want to retire happily without upsetting the system. What you need is people who would upset the system.

One of the key mistakes that was made

in the 80s was when the tenure of the Divisional Railway Manager was reduced. It used to be three to five years earlier. It was reduced to two years and this was done in a very democratic and idealistic way that everybody should get a chance. Well, this is not how to run an organization, to give everybody a chance. You put the best people and they must perform. The real benefits of such a job comes from the third year onwards because the man takes one and half year to settle down and learn the job.

T.A. : *This makes it a rather depressing story!*

G.D. : The last thing I wanted was to depress you. But it is good to see yourself in the mirror and see your organization in the mirror rather than living in dreams.

Other day, I saw a railway person, on the platform and there was a paper lying and he picked it up and threw it where the garbage bin was. Now this person's attitude was like that. Nothing can put this guy down. He was doing an outstanding job. So there will be people who will be doing outstanding work. What I want to say is that despite what I have said; individuals can make a huge difference. You won't have to be broken by the system. Do a good job.

Now what does that mean? It means not to have fear. Fortunately, in the system that you have, you cannot be sacked. So you should not have that fear. You do not have to do that CHAMCHAGIREE of anybody. You can have your own self-respect. What does that self-respect mean? That I continue doing my job and even if my neighbour is not doing his job, it does not bother me. But I will perform because of my own integrity. I do my job and if I see a wrong doing, I will correct it. Now to correct the wrongdoing is not easy. You know, if you see somebody doing something wrong like these Safaiwalas, I was telling you, who do not show up, you have to punish them. There is nothing wrong. That is part of integrity. That is the problem in our nation. If we punish a few people everyday, the rest of us would be helped better. That is part of integrity.

In Conversation

I will give you a small example from my own experience. We hired a temporary security guard. This was before the time we had outsourced the security service at Procter & Gamble. We were hiring our own security guard. We were a small company then and this fellow came and took the job. This was an evening job. He used to come when the office closed at 6'0 clock. He was a DEHAATEE fellow. In fact he was from rural Maharashtra and we were, you know, Procter & Gamble, a multi-national company. He used to insist on pronouncing it as 'PROKTER & GAAMLE' instead of Procter & Gamble, like a good Maharashtrian. His name was Kamble. I have told this story in "India Unbound" also. This fellow was so diligent that very quickly after 6'0 clock, when he came he realized that all these people who keep working until 9'0 clock or 10'0 clock at night, needed all kinds of facilities. I mean, for example, photocopying had to be done, faxes had to be sent out, projector had to be run, tea had to be got, etc. We were doing lot of advertising commercials for Aerial, Vicks, Whisper and many of our products. There would be 40/50 people in the office and he would have to look after their needs. Somebody would call him and tell him "Look connect me to the Finance Director", this fellow had to call the Finance Director at his home etc. Within about six weeks, he learnt to operate the fax machine, the photocopying machine and learnt to run the projector. He learnt what the home phone numbers of all the senior executives were. He even went to the extent of finding out who were traveling where, which hotel they were staying in, etc., in case somebody was needed at night. And the man, in fact, was such that our office ran much more efficiently after 6'0 clock than before 6'0 clock. Any time you needed something you could call Kamble - KAMBLE KO BULAO and Kamble knew the answers to every question. In fact, he was so diligent that one day I was leaving office at 7.30 p.m. and he said SAAB YEH LIFAFI DEKHIYE, MUJHE LAGTA HAI address GALAT HAI. He was right. It was an advertisement - a film commercial - to be shown in movie halls. It was to go to our advertising agency and they

were going to put it on air the next day. So it was very important. The courier was coming to collect it. The secretary by mistake had written the right name, but the address of the agency was wrong. So he said YEH MUJHE GALAT LAG RAHA HAI. I said, "You are right Kamble. Let us correct it immediately". We checked the directory. We put the correct address. Now, I said, you know this was an amazing guy that he actually took the trouble to look at the address and thought YEH address GALAT LAG RAHA HAI. There was something in this person that made him 'somebody very special', and that is why our office functioned so well in the evening.

Once, our telephone operator during the daytime went on maternity leave. This was about almost a year later, and Kamble said, you know, "I have been working for one year on this night time job and I am very tired. So once she is on maternity leave, let me do the job of telephone operator in the day time". Now, the personnel head of the HRD was horrified. We were a multi-national company and this fellow said 'PROKTER & GAAMLE', we couldn't have this. He hardly spoke English. I said to the personnel guy, "Look, let us give him a chance because he may not have the best accent but he always delivers the goods". So we decided to take the 'gamble' and we decided to make Kamble our temporary telephone operator. In those days telephones were not like today with those switching system etc. You had to put those things — wires. It was an old technology PBX system. Suddenly within a week, all our business associates started saying AREY BHAII TUMHARI telephone service improve HO GAYEE HAI. Have you got a new technology or what is it? Because they said: "In the old days your phone only got answered after the fifth or the sixth ring. But now it was answered on the second ring. Of course, there was a strange voice. But we got through very quickly". So I asked Kamble now, "Kamble what have you done? Why do you answer the phone so quickly, when our old operator used to answer it only after the fifth ring? Why are you answering after the second ring?" He said, "SAAB

SACHCHEE BATAUN TO MAIN SAMAJHATAA HOON KEE SHAYAD WOH DOOSREE side MAIN KOI customer NA HO, KE APKA order NA KHO JAYE". You know, the man was thinking that there may be a customer on the other side and the order might get delayed or might be lost. Now, you see, wouldn't you like to have all our employees behave like Kamble? Now to me he is the 'ideal' employee.

I will tell you that even in the constraints that I have talked about, with all the constraints of unions and all that, your job - one is to be like Kamble, and two, to create Kamble around you; to reward Kamble that you see around you. Because the more you entrust to them the more they will succeed. Well, Kamble's story is very simple. He went on and became the Office Manager. He was an amazing character. But more than anything else he typified the spirit of his excellence. Anybody who came in touch with him, it was so important to have him. In fact, all our HRD interventions had him in it. Kamble should be involved in some way, because he was such a role-model inside the company. No ego of any kind. He was happy to leave telephone operator's job when a girl came back from the maternity leave. He was happy to go back as Assistant Security guard at night.

So, it can be done. The world is full of Kamble and you have potential to do that where it begins with the right attitude. The attitude that has certain integrity behind it, "I can make a difference". No complaining at the time. Too many people complain all the time. So I just wanted to close with this story as a way to think about. When you are feeling down in your organization, in your job, think about Kamble. All the best!



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