

“Potential for Enterprise in Indian Youth”

Amarjeet S Kudle’s speech at Inspire India Launch at Hotel Green Park, Hyderabad
April 30, 2010.

Distinguished Members of the Panel, Mr. Ramanand and Mr. Jagannath Rao,

Trustees of Inspire India, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening!

It’s a fantastic feeling to be back in the twin cities after a gap of nine years. This city has a very special place in my heart because way back in 1994, I met the girl who would eventually be my best half. Those endless walks at Tank bund, those nightly drives to Gandipet and sitting at the British Council Library pretending to read... wow, those were the days.

Do pardon my self-indulgence, but it can’t be helped. This city has that magical quality about itself. When Raju Ravitej so graciously extended this invitation to come and speak in front of this distinguished audience, it didn’t take me a moment to confirm as it would give me an opportunity to strike two birds with the same stone. (I sincerely hope that I haven’t offended any PETA members in the audience by using that expression)

“Potential for enterprise in India’s Youth” is the topic on which I’m going to share some thoughts that are very dear to me. At the very onset, may I request you to please bear with me as I go through the subject, because I’m going to be blunt and I’m going to instigate.

We live in a paradoxical country where two nations are struggling to co-exist. One is India which is restricted to the urban metros and the other is Bharat which is found everywhere else. Drive 25 kilometers away from the National Capital Region of Delhi into the hinterlands of Haryana where Khap panchayats sit and you will see how the world has metamorphosed into something that is totally different. I will be well within my mark when I say that these two nations are set on a collision course unless and until the great Indian Middle class wakes up. I know I’m going to ruffle quite a few feathers when I say that we, the great Indian Middle class have failed this great country of ours.

In the last four years, having spent more time at airports than at home, I’ve seen the obsession of the middle class to go and settle in the developed world. One might argue to say that there’s nothing wrong in wanting the best for oneself. While that is true at the individuals level, it leaves a huge gap at a more boarder level – that of nation building. I want to leave this thought with all of you before I move on: When a group of Chinese students, who after graduating from

Harvard, went back to China, and were asked as to why didn't they want to settle in America itself, the response was "we are coming back to China to make China better than America".

Those students didn't reveal the blueprint of how they were going to achieve it, but that doesn't matter. What came shining out like a beacon of hope was what they had said.

Ladies and Gentleman, in the next 8 years, we will overtake China in terms of population and will have about 700 million people in the age group of 20 – 35 years – the largest population of youth in the world. What are we going to do about it. As per some estimates, it is said that the number of new jobs that need to be created every year is 10 million. How are we going to achieve this? Is it only the government's responsibility to do this? Should development be done only in the urban centers or should the rural areas be developed so that they are self sufficient in all ways. Just to bring out an interesting trivia, 60 percent of Americans don't travel more than 150 miles from the place that they were born during their lifetime. They live in small towns, villages, get educated, get married, work, live and pass on. They don't feel the desire to uproot themselves and migrate to the cities for earning a livelihood because the rural parts are all very well developed.

The need of the hour in India is that we have to develop Bharat . While the government is doing it's job of providing basic infrastructure, we have to think of innovative ways of ensuring that jobs are created in the rural areas itself. That's where entrepreneurship comes in. This is where the great Indian middle class needs to rise from its own needs and wants and try to do something for others as well. It's futile to expect the government to create 1 crore new jobs every year.

This is where ventures like 'Desicrew' a business process outsourcing company started by a 25 year old Saloni Malhotra need to be applauded. It's a BPO that recruits workforce from India's small towns and rural areas. According the Saloni, the biggest challenge that Desicrew is facing is to convince clients about the productivity of rural areas. We need many more such ventures to focus on providing employment opportunities to the rural youth. Rural entrepreneurship is the way forward and we need more and more professionals from the urban areas to think creatively and not tread the beaten path. This is the only way forward. I remember having a conversation with Raju back at the High Commission in Delhi just after I was back from Lashkar Gah and Kabul. We were talking about India and the development taking place and I happened to mention that India resembles the poppy plant. The bulbous head perched atop a long slender stem. The bulbous head being India and the long slender stem on which it stands being "Bharat". If the bulb keeps getting bigger and bigger and the stem weaker and weaker, there is only one inevitable end –the plant is going to fall flat on the ground.

Only we can make the stem stronger by concentrating on developing the rural areas.

India's youth have tremendous potential and that's why I'm hopeful that against all odds we will come out victorious. Just to give you a flair of how ingenious our youth are, I must mention the name of young Sandeep Gajakas, all of 17 years when he started out 6 years ago. His venture, the Shoe Laundry has been taken up as a case study in the IIMs about how passion and some creative thinking can create a market of 1200 crores per annum by just washing and repairing sneakers. Creating a market from thin air. Another ideas to help student in the Delhi University to photocopy referral notes is "Phokatcopy". Photocopying free of cost. A4 sheets which are blank on one side the other side has adverts from different sponsors. The students don't need to spend money on photocopying referral notes. Fascinating isn't it.

I have hope ladies and gentlemen that we shall become developed in the true sense. "Potential for enterprise in India's Youth" is tremendous. Our challenges are humongous but I have faith that better sense will prevail.

Before I conclude, I must say that when Mahatma Gandhi said "Be the change you want to see in the world", I've taken that step and come October, my wife and I will be starting our own 8 bedroom boutique hotel in the Himalayas employing underprivileged youth from the mountains and giving them a livelihood and our guests the most amazing experience.

Thank you and God bless.

Mr. Amarjeet S Kudle is an entrepreneur and hotelier who is presently establishing his own boutique hotel, La Villa Bethany, in the Himalayas.