

ATMANIRBHARATA WITH QUALITY

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Growth & Development - Industry & Services Sector incl. MSMEs and PSUs

By P Narahari

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has given a call — “Vocal for Local” — for making India “atmanirbhar” or self-reliant. India’s aspiration for self-reliance is as old as our modern history but never before has a call been given from the country’s topmost office to turn India’s quest for self-reliance into a national movement.

Every society, every country in the world aspires to be self-reliant. It dreams of expanding exports of its products and formulates policies to help that goal. The prime minister has given the mantra “Vocal for Local” to realise that dream for India and to ensure that every Indian commits herself to the movement of swadeshi. Self-reliance and “Vocal for Local” serve each other.

Self-reliance is directly connected to quality. It is widely accepted that the developed nations are able to dominate global markets because of their innovative products and their quality. It is clear that the prime minister wants India to produce goods of a quality that not only reduces our dependence on imported goods, but also makes them well sought after globally while placing India amongst the foremost exporters of the world.

Be it human resources or any other goods, competition is always centred around quality. If we look at natural products from the agriculture sector, we find that quality products have the maximum demand in the market. Sub-standard quality can’t fetch any customers, while top quality products are sought after even at high prices.

Like all developing nations, the biggest challenge India faces is improving the quality of its products to global standards. India has enough resources to do that. Nature has blessed India abundantly. While India is bestowed with all kinds of physical features and climatic conditions, our population and our religious, cultural and language diversity are strengths. What is needed is instilling the desire for quality in the Indian consciousness such that our goods are sought after worldwide.

Quality pertains not only to industrial goods but rather to every walk of life because all activities in society are interlinked. We can realise the dream of self-reliance only when we bring quality to every facet of life. For instance, if we look at the situation created by the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), we find that the biggest crisis facing economies is the weakening of demand. The pandemic has made it a global challenge.

That is why while we work at strengthening infrastructure like supply-chain and storage, we must simultaneously adopt measures to strengthen demand in the economy. Only then can we ensure that top-quality products are not deprived of consumption and suitable prices in the market. Lack of demand has the maximum impact on farmers. They only get the minimum support price in respect of a limited number of crops. An adequate price for their other crops is directly dependent on demand and demand is led by the people’s buying power or the income they spend in the market. As a result, before we try and increase demand, we must work at increasing people’s incomes and creating new employment opportunities.

India has tremendous opportunity in handicrafts and Ayurvedic products. These products will

have to deal with challenges in terms of quality, branding and marketing. Agriculture is India's most traditional and fundamental sector. However, its productivity and contribution to economy is the lowest even though a large percentage of the population is dependent on it. We need to move some of these people to other sectors like industry, infrastructure and services and that will only happen when these sectors see a consistent rise in demand.

It will not be the case that even when India's agriculture sector reaches productivity levels of developed nations, its products will dominate the global markets and will be sought after in every corner of the world. Indian products will face stiff competition from those already in the market. So, be it agriculture or any other sector, if we want to make ourselves strong to face the competition, we have to manufacture top quality goods at competitive prices. The answer to every challenge is quality.

In order to make the prime minister's call a success, we have to bring about a major change in Indian society. Just like cleanliness (Swacchta), we will have to make quality a part of the public consciousness. We will have to improve the quality of our human capital so that its demand in the employment market increases. Skill development will play a crucial part in finding avenues of employment for the jobless.

If we explore the challenges regarding human resources, we find that on the quality parameter, Indian products are lagging globally. It is imperative that a country of 135 crore people makes some world-class products that the world is forced to buy from us. We have to raise our research and development to world standards. There are some fields where India has excelled in R&D — for instance, ISRO has many achievements to its credit in space technology. Our achievements in the field of atomic energy have also done the country proud.

These achievements are directly linked to education. Therefore, it is crucial that we increase the number of top educational institutions in proportion to our population. In medicine, we mostly rely on imports for hi-tech equipment. Following economic liberalisation, India may appear self-sufficient in the automobile sector but most of the companies are fundamentally foreign. Similarly, big sectors like defence and communication still rely on imports. These are the sectors that need self-reliance the most.

It is a similar story with the pharma sector. Though India is a major producer of drugs, it mostly imports API (active pharmaceutical ingredient). Indian companies have immense opportunities in this sector.

It is clear that if India wants to be truly self-reliant, then it needs to make the pursuit of quality part of our DNA. The prosperous classes of Indian society will have to lead the quest for quality. They can bring about a change by using their earnings to increase incomes of their employees.

Like any developed society, India needs to have a national movement for quality. The prime minister's call is a starting point. From here on, only cutting-edge research and quest for quality can place India into a new orbit. There are no short cuts. Quality cannot be achieved overnight, it requires years of dedication and focus. And India seems to have set off on the path.

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