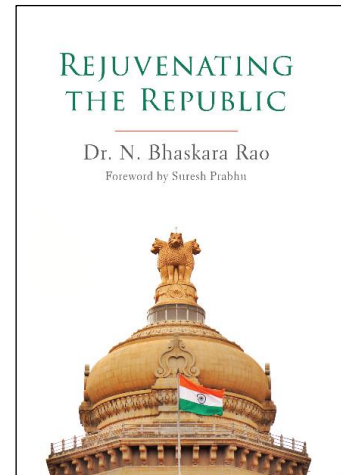


Concerns of leaders at the helm signals future prospects of the country

Dr N Bhaskara Rao
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With leaders at the helm having concern for the country and moorings of its roots and gross roots, do we need to worry much of our future? This thought is what I had when I visited the Vice President of India last Friday to present two of my just published books. In fact, I felt happy that I dedicated the book ***“Rejuvenating the Republic”*** to Vice President Shri M Venkaiah Naidu. He amazed me with his frank views on several of the trends in public space of the country. I came back confident.



During 60 years of my career in New Delhi I must have met at least five Vice Presidents of India. With one I had interesting interaction in Moghul Garden after he was elevated as President of India end 1962. Meeting the great philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan remains memorable. In fact, it was a turning point in my life. It was inspiration from him that led my starting more than thirty years ago Basic Research in Education and Development (BREAD) and its taking to children libraries in public schools. Meeting M Venkaiah Naidu last week I was reminded of that 60'years ago. Now, I came back meeting the Vice President with determination to take forward the Next Big Change course to rejuvenate the Republic next 25 years taking much beyond what we have in the last 75 years.



Unlike any of his predecessors in Vice President office and even political leaders, Venkaiah Naidu has been criss-crossing the country last couple of years to reach out the young and old, visit villages and schools at all levels, share his insights to revive the roots of the country, take a dispassionate view of diversities and ready to take introspection in a transparent way. These are the features which bind people and take us forward with new vigour. This is what the prime minister Modi had also called for from Red Fort on this August 15. He said that "people work together" and put in "collaborative efforts" next 25 years.

During my brief meeting with the Vice President on Friday I was surprised to find that he was concerned about the trends which is what I dealt in my books. If leaders of the country join together in taking forward such concerns for the future, we are sure to accomplish much more next five general elections than what we did in the 17 elections. Political parties and leaders coming together has to be a prerequisite for people work together as the PM has said. It is in that direction that the Vice President has been taking initiatives both as chair of Rajya Sabha and during his extensive visits to the gross roots of the country.

I was pleasantly surprised that the Vice President is thinking about the kind of Politicalization sweeping the country as if that is the ultimate. Like what Mahatma Gandhi envisioned and even advised about political parties, Shri Venkaiah Naidu views that they are losing their focus and priorities with collaborative outlook no where in sight as they are preoccupied with power games. Despite that political parties are on collusion course with public service no longer a priority and busy making citizens dependents, nothing better could be expected. No one else seems to realise this root cause for the shortfalls in the accomplishments of the country. Also Shri Naidu is aware of slipping on three tire system of governance as a unique feature of Indian democracy. This is one of the issues discussed in all my recent five books.

To my delight I found that the Vice President is aware of suggestions made much earlier by several high level committees to correct the lapses and expedite much needed reforms in the trajectory of development, democracy and governance. He even tried to remind the powers to take on but vague impression that such initiatives require "constitutional amendment" had inhibited progress until recently.

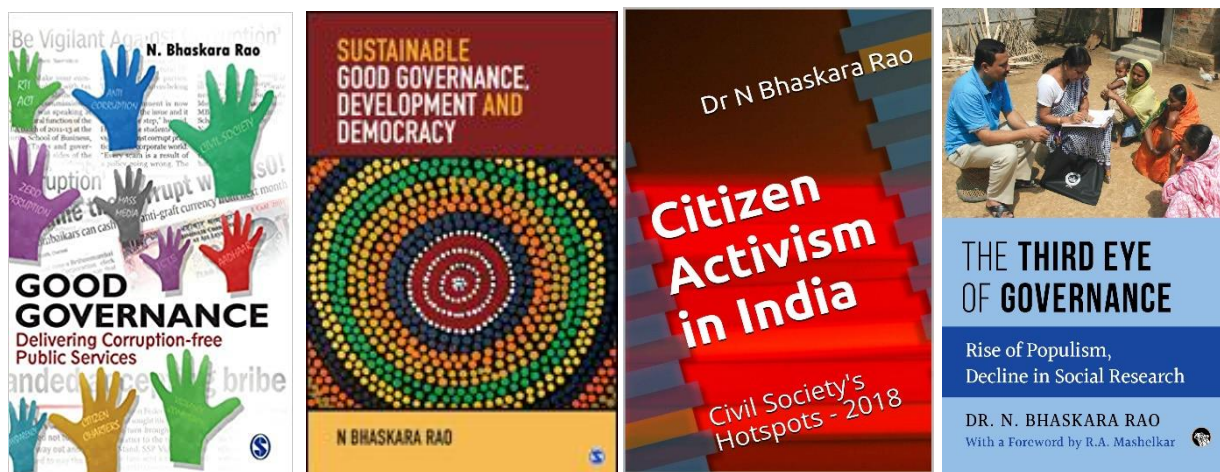
Shri Venkaiah Naidu is disappointed very rightly and concerned for lack of objective and transparent assessment of performance of members of parliament even in the House. He knows better for he has been the chairman of the Rajya Sabha. He regrets that we could not sensitise voters to discriminate. That accountabilities and assessment of performance of elected representatives and of the voters are not getting improved should obviously be a concern of any leader.

The Vice President with intense connectivity with gross roots, wide ranging interactions and insights of decades, is disillusioned that we are caught in the web of caste, religion, parochialism and yet no one is concerned as if we have conceded to these divides.

Venkaiah Naidu, a voracious reader of reports, books and 18 news papers daily, realises the dilemma being faced with the kind of preoccupation and priorities of news media. He is hoping that the merged Sansad TV channel will set new benchmark for news in the country. He regrets that bandwagoning in news media is undermining their own relevance with exaggeration, hype and reflecting priorities of a few.

Why I thought of sharing these insights from my first ever interaction of fifteen minutes with Vice President Venkaiah Naidu is I felt like explaining why I dedicated my book *Rejuvenating the Republic* to him. Also because these are some of the issues that I have been pursuing now for a decade. Five of my books during the decade were about these very concerns. Two books on *Sustainable Good Governance, Development and Democracy* (2018), *Good Governance: Delivering Corruption-free Public Services* (2013) and *Citizen Activism in India: Civil Society's Hotspots* (2018), *The Third Eye of Governance* (2021), and the just out *Next Big Game Changer of Elections in India* (2021), together, they bring out my own concerns which I hope to take forward to stakeholders of the trajectory of Development, Democracy and governance.

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