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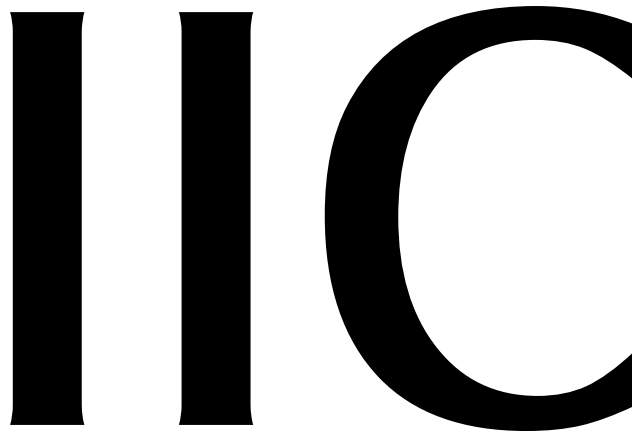
**GALVANISING THE SHIP OF THE INDIAN STATE:
AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE**

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Galvanising the Ship of the Indian State: An Agenda for Research and Dialogue

Saurabh Kumar

I. OVERVIEW

Three major tipping points affecting the future of the country vitally kick into play at about the same time, no more than a few decades from now:

- reversal of the (currently favourable) youthful demography of the country (by 2055 or so);
- danger of calamitous climate change globally beginning to affect the Indian subcontinent harshly;
- likely disruptive impact of mainstreaming of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the socio-economic order (and therefore on political stability) as a result of robots surpassing human capabilities and replacing all human labour in repetitive and routine tasks.

The prospect of large sections of society finding themselves free of want (basic survival needs) but idle, and therefore terribly distraught, in other words—an ‘unknown unknown’ that would beat the classical recipe for breeding a fair crop of devil’s workshops hands down. Especially so in conjunction with maturing and convergence of other fourth generation technologies (digital, nano, bio and machine learning) and increasing fusion of cyber and physical spaces.

This essay, a strategic take on the overall Indian situation, is premised on the reading that the latter two of these mega challenges (which can, without exaggeration, be characterised as existential ones) cannot be addressed adequately in ‘business as usual’ (BAU) mode within the ambit of the existing organisational structures of over a century inherited by the Indian Republic from the colonial State. The likely sweeping, 360-degree impact of these

overarching trends makes for urgent review of the machinery and mechanisms of the Indian State in a pragmatic, strategic mindset aimed at bracing for the new challenges.

That rationale for a focus on revving up the State machinery adds to the standing domestic imperative, by no means any less weighty, for getting it to perform—deliver—better than it has so far.

Accordingly, this essay takes the form of a ‘concept note’ of a proposal for a research-cum-dialogic project on a critical appraisal of the delivery capacity/performance capability of the Indian State, and identification of structural deficiencies in it, with a view to streamlining and fine-tuning some of its features or remodelling them for enhanced effectiveness.

Much action to that end (enhancing the efficacy of the State) lies in the realm of governance reform and policy innovation, which are the natural (first) ports of call for action in the wake of all such mega challenges and developments. Those aspects have received considerable attention in the public discourse, and rightly so. They are, however, not the focus of this essay, which abstracts from governance failures, human failings at root, and pleads for a focus on the structural gaps in the architecture of the Republic instead.

This is not to overlook or belittle the place of governance reform and policy innovation for ensuring optimal outcomes. It is to take up the cognitive challenge of identifying structural weaknesses—both inadequacies and unresolved *inter-se* conflicts, of turfs or tiers—in the State machinery, which are deeper impediments to advance that can be anticipated to persist even with ‘ideal’ governance, if there be such a thing. Also, which can, at the other end, make the State apparatus a little ‘bad governance proof’, hopefully, if there be such a thing again.

Identification of structural shortcomings from what standpoint, it would be asked? On what criterion would the adequacy (or otherwise) of the existing structure of the Indian Republic be assessed? The answer suggests itself quite naturally—for delivering on its founding vision of an egalitarian socio-

political and an equitable economic order conducive for society transitioning from the ‘world of want’ (materially) to the ‘Heaven of freedom’ (spiritually and materially) that Gurudev Tagore wished his countrymen to awake into. Also, for India to assume its rightful place in the comity of nations and be able to project its (philosophical and savant-like) soft power to its full potential, a *desideratum* rightly foregrounded in recent political discourse in the country.

In the opinion of this analyst, that shortcoming—the Indian State’s failure to do better in making poverty a thing of the past—is what is responsible for its punching below its weight on the global stage, not any cultural prejudices or denigration of the Indic civilisation, as is being propounded in some quarters.

India’s standing relative to other nations—particularly China—in this respect (and also economically, in general) has slid sharply in the last few decades since the change in the global political climate in the eighties and nineties of the last century, which wrought far-reaching structural changes in the global economy. It is further challenged by the galloping pace of technological advances in AI and other fourth-generation technologies.

That gap translates, unsurprisingly, into a consciousness of power differential in the minds of many (including, worryingly for India, the Chinese leadership itself, apparently—if the messaging of Ladakh 2020 is to be read right, without blinkers or illusions). It needs to be blunted and bridged if the country is to have a fair chance of dealing with its aggressively assertive northern neighbour in an intrepid manner (i.e., without having to look for ways of ‘external balancing’ every time there is a crisis in Sino-Indian relations contrived by the accomplished practitioner of cold calculation-driven realpolitik that the Chinese Party State has shown itself, quite amply, to be).

Redressal of that asymmetry vis-à-vis China, so as to be able to play a role on the international stage commensurate with its potential, thus becomes a third imperative for brainstorming on structural reform for galvanising the ship of the Indian State; an externally driven domestic imperative, if it could be so described, in addition to the purely exogenous and endogenous ones mentioned earlier.

The project is, accordingly, envisaged to be a two-fold one:

- (i) A study-cum-research project for identifying shortcomings and recommending (structural) changes in the institutional architecture of the Republic that can perk up the ‘performance’ (delivery capacity) of the Indian State.

This would be in a managerial perspective¹, drawing upon corporate ‘strategic management’ practice, contextualised for the State as a whole.

- (ii) A ‘strategic dialogue’ between three key stakeholders in the national polity:

- (retired) apex level State and corporate functionaries, at one end;
- civil society organisations/activists from the grassroots level, at the other; and
- analyst academic-scholar-media ‘commentariat’ and other knowledgeable observers not falling in either of the above categories as the third grouping (for mediating the dialogue between the first two groups).

The aim of this tripartite conversation would be to make a ‘determination’ about the feasibility and suitability of the recommendations of the Study for alterations in the State structure being presented to the political class for deliberation and adoption, if deemed appropriate by them.

Part I of the project: The objective of the Study would be to review the record of (performance of) the Indian Republic in a strategic (structural) perspective, i.e., focusing on State capacity limitations to realisation of optimal and/or desired outcomes, transcending those of leadership capability and political party manifesto dependent policy initiatives (which can get politically partisan).

This would be attempted through a critical survey of the literature on national affairs and that of the policy discourse, mainly, supplemented by original research on selected aspects as necessary. It would:

- (a) cover a confluence of domains—politico-managerial, economic, environmental, technological, military, diplomatic and others—that go into the making of (what in Chinese strategic discourse is posited as) the ‘comprehensive national power’²² (CNP) of a country, and
- (b) focus on enhancing the delivery capacity of the Indian State by buttressing the politico-managerial (and institutional machinery) component of its CNP in particular.

The study-cum-research project is envisaged to be undertaken by (task forces of) domain experts in a variety of fields. Each task force would be guided jointly by duos of eminent practitioners and thought leaders—pairs of polyglots, one drawn from amongst experienced apex level (bureaucratic/technical/military) State and corporate functionaries (to keep the exploration grounded on *terra firma*), and the other from the scholarly stream or media (to provoke and push the envelope for innovative ideas and possibilities).

The aim would be to bring out what the governmental and academic discourses in the public domain have to offer in respect of identification of deficiencies—managerial slack—in the *praxis* of national governance (and of remedial action/reform of a structural nature), tapping, at the same time, into the world of bold new ‘imaginaries’ inhabited by original thinkers.

The Study will be tasked with the responsibility of arriving at concrete recommendations for reform of the State structure for enhancing its ‘functionality’, with detailed justification of the rationale for each recommendation. It would be an exercise carried out in ‘strategic planning’ mode, building on the *praxis* of ‘strategic management’ in the corporate world (contextualised for the State as a whole, as averred already).

Part II of the project: The strategic dialogue between representatives of three key stakeholders in the national polity is meant to embellish the relevance (and legitimacy) of the cerebration exercise by subjecting its results (recommendations of the study) to ‘field tests’, bringing the ‘normative’ face to face with the ‘existential’, as it were.

This dialogue is envisaged to take place over a series of seminars, structured such as to facilitate a no-holds-barred deliberation on those recommendations in an overall framework of the ‘grand strategy’³ of the State. The tripartite conversation would seek to evolve a consensus on actionable steps for a revamping of the institutional architecture of the Republic that would facilitate ‘Bharat’ being pulled up by ‘India’ by the boot-straps, as it were, and ensure that the Bharat–India divide, which is today a grim reality, does not act as a drag on the country’s standing internationally.

In sum, the objective of the proposed cogitation, consisting of both in-depth study/research and wide-ranging dialogue, would be to evolve a crisp agenda for structural reform of the Republic, ripened (through wide debate and discussion in the public domain) for deliberation by the political class.

Overall, the idea is to service a vital, but neglected, strategic interest of the democratic Indian Republic—viz., State-building, as a strand of statecraft. The latter is a continual work-in-progress, always, anywhere and everywhere, but is particularly pertinent in the Indian context because historically, the genius of the Indic civilisation has perhaps lain in evolving a resilient society, not in strengthening the sinews of the State.

It would be a timely exercise because of the urgency of the enlightened founding vision of the Republic being realised in the next decades now, without further delay, lest the ‘revolution of rising expectations’, already in its mature phase, turns sour. And/or ugly.

And all this will have to be done with a watchful eye on (political trends within) the People’s Republic of China, the ideological rival of the Republic of India that is also its only peer in the comity of nations as the only other ‘civilisational State’. For, the authoritarian model of China tends to tempt the starry-eyed prone to falling for shortcuts, in the mistaken belief that the ‘performance deficits’ of the Indian State stemming from it being constrained to operate within the in-built checks and balances of a democratic framework (viz., democratic functioning being predicated, necessarily, on due process) can be made up by going the Chinese way in a perverted ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’ kind of illogic.

II. THE INDIAN STATE: A BRIEF LOOK BACK, AND LOOK AROUND, FOR LOOKING AHEAD

Independent India can be said to have been extremely fortunate to have had a far-sighted founding vision, and perspicaciously drafted Constitution, bequeathed to it by a sagacious Constituent Assembly comprising a generation of leaders and lawyers steeped in Gandhian values and steeled in the course of the freedom struggle.

In the main, that structure has served it well so far—exceedingly well, in fact, as becomes evident from even a cursory contrasting of the resilience of its formative practices with the fragility of the failed/failing States formed in other formerly colonised countries in its neighbourhood, and those which gained independence at about the same time as India. Transformational social engineering could, for instance, be undertaken under the aegis of the Constitution, which, for all its limitations, stands out as a beacon globally, in historical perspective.

The focus in the initial years of independent India was, however—understandably—on ‘processes’/‘basic systems’ (the historical challenge of setting up a ‘just State by just means’), not on ‘performance’/‘outcomes’, stemming possibly from an exuberant belief in the democratic ideal as an end in itself, and the premise that ‘if the process is right, results (outcomes) cannot be far behind’.

This worked out well in the early decades, which were truly a period of ‘nation-building’. A uniform ‘politico-administrative framework’ of ‘cooperative federalism’ for governance was established across the country.⁴ There was rapid enlargement of the educational and health sectors, and of public transport and other infrastructure facilities, and the nation got off the ground for construction of dams and irrigation systems, founding of heavy and light industries, and establishment of visionary scientific and industrial research institutions under the aegis of that scaffolding. India broke new ground in charting a unique, ‘non-totalitarian, path to economic transformation in a Third World country’⁵ within the framework of a mixed economy and a

plural polity that stood out in the global development discourse. It stood out for two things: for democratising before industrialising; and for undertaking the Herculean task of political, economic and social transformation all at the same time, in a timespan of decades—something that the ‘developed’ countries of the West had centuries to accomplish, sequentially, after first going through the Industrial Revolution under miserable and retrograde political conditions characteristic of the pre-modern age.

Those early successes could be achieved because it was a period of political stability domestically and the external environment, of global geopolitical rivalry of the Cold War era, was also relatively benign, in the sense of being static and predictable (compared to the turbulence that was to come later in the last decades of the last century). The preoccupations and issues of the day were foundational, pertaining primarily to political practice in the then pioneering developmental odyssey (re-organisation of provinces, land reforms, local self-government (Panchayati Raj), Five Year Plans, property rights, national language, and so on). Not so much managerial, concerning performance, outcomes, accountability or consequence management (as, for example, degree of success in consolidation of land holdings, quality of implementation of community development programmes, timeliness and cost-effectiveness in completion of infrastructure building, etc.), which were to occupy centrestage subsequently.

The managerial issues of the day were dealt with in an *ad hoc* manner—piece-meal, as they came, one by one—willy-nilly, in the pristine atmosphere of the time. In the process, the reach of the State grew—extended—in all directions, and gradually got overextended perhaps, without occasion for adequate attention to the question of its impact on efficacy, and with even less concern about impact (of that all-round extension of the State) on agency, i.e., sense of empowerment of society.

That experience did nothing, moreover, to prepare the State machinery to cope with the buffeting that was to come with the emergence of a completely different, far more dynamic and difficult, external environment (for all

developing countries, not just India) in the eighties and nineties, with the rise of conservative political philosophy in leading Western democracies led by the UK and USA (most visibly under the late Mrs. Thatcher and President Reagan, respectively).

The remorseless, ‘devil take the hindmost’ approach of the ‘neo-liberal’ economic order that came to take shape worldwide towards the last two decades of the twentieth century, shedding all pretence and striving for equitable global governance mechanisms, spewed a climate of rolling back of the State, globally, from its post-World War II evolution as a provider of public welfare to a new conceptualisation of its role as a mere enabler of market-led ‘development’ (envisaged as economic growth, primarily). Globalisation of the world economy—shorthand for the spurt in trans-boundary investment and relocation of manufacturing/supply chains that began to take place concurrently, driven by technological advances (significant reductions in transportation and communications costs and revolutionary changes in the latter, culminating in the emergence of the I-net⁶)—was the most consequential outcome of that radical churning of politics in the West. A process that was dominated by Western multinational corporations (MNCs) and facilitated, inordinately, by the crumbling and eventual collapse of the ideological rival—the avowedly socialist model of the former Soviet Union—in 1991, on the one hand, and by China’s wooing of Western capital and technology morphing into ‘State capitalism’ under cover of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ close on its heels in the build up to its entry into the WTO in 2001, and subsequently on the other.

Much water has flown down the rivers since. Domestically, the era of fragmentary ‘competitive politics’ that dawned at about the same time in India as the dramatic shifts in the international political climate came to stay. Externally, the Indian Republic slipped several notches somewhere down the line in relative standing in the comity of nations, amidst undeniably substantially greater amelioration of poverty and all-round rise in living standards elsewhere, both regionally and globally.

More importantly, it (the Indian State) found itself at sea in the new game in town—geo-economics (as against geopolitics hitherto) in which the private sector (and its concomitant, professional managerial skills prizing cost effectiveness, efficacy and efficiency, which the bureaucratic labyrinth of the Indian Republic, unused to having its stranglehold over the State challenged, was innocent of) came to be understood, worldwide, as the indispensable economic engine, rather than the State dispensing ‘commanding heights of the economy’.

Causes for its lagging behind other nations and detailed delineation of the contours of the course corrections attempted, or opportunities missed, aside, the Indian State is at a crossroads now, its earlier record of transformational successes notwithstanding. It is badly in need of updating its hardware and operating system, so to say, because of the severe time constraint it is under, as elaborated in the succeeding sections. That is an unprecedented circumstance, for never before was there a ‘now or never’ time crunch facing the Indian Republic. It makes it difficult to be optimistic, realistically, about prospects for the future in the absence of drastic steps stemming from a sense of crisis and urgency.

III. CURRENT CHALLENGES, OLD AND NEW

1. *Strategic ‘stasis’ in low ‘exergy’, high ‘entropy’ condition’ lacking in ‘entelechy’*

Enhancing its functionality—improving delivery capacity—is by far the foremost challenge the Indian State is faced with today.

While stupendous successes have been recorded by the Indian Republic over the years at the macro level—on the broader socio-political plane, as noted above—dysfunctionalities of one kind or another abound at the level(s) at which the citizen encounters the organs of the State, including numerous appalling ones in municipal governance.

The positives are reflected in translation of the vision of political equality into reality and in the politics of ‘democratic accommodation’ (extension of

universal suffrage, enjoyment of fundamental rights by all citizens, ushering in of a normative order rejecting the iniquitous existential one inherited as historical legacy, affirmative action to correct for historical disadvantage, provision of space for accommodation of aspirations and the traditional way of life of religious and other minorities and so on). The downsides are manifested in failure to evolve an administrative apparatus capable of efficacious delivery of basic public services and development *desiderata*, despite a panoply of institutions spawned by a carefully crafted Constitution.

This dichotomy is unsurprising. The former (socio-political transformation) could be whisked in, so to say, through legislation—by outlawing outmoded and obscurantist traditional social norms with the stroke of a pen, as it were. No such ‘magic wand’ like instrumentality was available in respect of the latter (micro level managerial tasks of a routine nature) to bring about the desired results overnight (or even gradually). Efficacy in day-to-day functioning could neither be wished in nor be realised by fiat.

That (latter) *desideratum* required grappling with the nitty gritty of a century-old, colonially inherited administrative machinery, traditional work ethic, work practices and habits—all of which entailed engaging with deeply ingrained attitudes and values (or the lack of them). It wasn’t an easy task, by any stretch, as became evident over the years, several national and regional ‘Administrative Reforms Commissions’ later.

Low managerial effectiveness and poor accountability remain the Achilles’ heel of the Indian Republic, and that shortcoming is not limited to the ‘welfare’ and ‘development’ aspects of the State. It is basic, pervading its entire machinery.

If inefficiency, formalism, callousness, apathy, unresponsiveness and lack of a proactive service orientation in general are the bane of the urban face of the State, crude paternalism and manipulation and misappropriation of dues and deliveries on the strength of ignorance of citizenship rights compound the urban failures in rural areas.

Seen from a subaltern standpoint, especially that of the rural poor, the State cannot, by any stretch, be said to come out with flying colours. Woefully weak as its deliveries on basics (like health and education) are, its wheels grind slow, if at all—when not downright extortionist in the hands of its petty functionaries. The unholy trinity of the '*patwari*, *thanedar* and *nakedar*' constituting the oppressive image of the State during colonial rule may have receded somewhat in the wake of the paraphernalia of the development machinery in place in most parts of the country now, but that does not make for an efficacious 'developmental State'. Much less can it be said to have paved the way for a different, more sensitive and caring, 'can do' ('will help') face of the State.

The State's formidable institutional quiver is perceived by the populace as remote and inaccessible, a distant preserve of the well-endowed. It is also likely to be perceived as ineffectual against the raw deal the less fortunate get from traditional arrangements for economic exchange in their day-to-day existential struggles, even when the latter are not overtly exploitative. The stranglehold the moneylender has over the life of the small farmer even today, despite cooperative credit mechanisms and the like in place, for instance is a prime example of that harsh reality.

E-governance mechanisms introduced in recent years have no doubt made some difference, but only marginally because of low literacy, on the one hand, and unimaginative, user-unfriendly features of the websites and online services of most State organs, on the other. They would appear to have been introduced more for show than for cutting through red tape, bureaucracy and nepotism in earnest. There is a long distance to be traversed yet before the potential of digital technologies is brought into full play. The scope for utilising the integrative capacity of cyber systems in the service of super-fast and ultra-efficacious, truly 'faceless' (and therefore uncontingent upon the 'goodwill' of the *mai baap* State functionary), governance is almost infinite, and it has barely begun to be scratched.

The unruly traffic on roads, despite back-breaking speed-breakers strewn all over, is, likewise, a marker of what might be called an 'organisationally challenged' condition of the nation—its incapacity for self-regulation and ineptitude in getting organised (for smooth functioning). The country seems to be endowed with remarkable capacity for resigning to disorder as the natural order of things, going by the near total absence of dissonance at the chaotic conditions extant—at any level, public or private.

There is, at the same time, widespread disenchantment with the 'system', bordering on cynicism. The widely shared feeling of 'futility' of individuals seeking any kind of 'normative' action, be it a 'due' in crystal clear terms, because of a deep-seated shared belief among all segments and strata of society that the 'system' cannot be worked upon except by the 'connected'. And that nothing is going to change in any meaningful way by anything the ordinary citizen does or does not do.

Although that frustration and gap in expectations is more an educated elite phenomenon, articulated in terms of modern civic norms (the State 'rules but does not govern'), and international comparisons, it is also a popular sentiment, both urban and rural. At the latter level, it is framed intuitively, not cerebrally, in terms of deeply ingrained traditional norms of righteous conduct ('*dharma*' and/or '*raj dharma*').

Overall, it may be no exaggeration to aver that the Indian State would seem to be in some sort of a state of strategic 'stasis', in low 'exergy', high 'entropy' condition, lacking in 'entelechy', borrowing some concepts⁸ from thermodynamics and biology (which may not be as inapt both as they might appear at first sight, given the high preoccupation of both those disciplines with 'equilibrium' conditions).

The question that arises in this context is whether such 'low level equilibrium' reflects no more than bureaucratic/governance failures (human failings, at root), or is there something lacking, at a deeper level (in the structural features of the Republic or whatever) that makes it difficult—unthinkable, it would seem—for the State to overcome evident shortcomings in its functioning?

And, more generally, keeps it (the State) from 'going all out' in pursuit of its declared objectives, which are always unexceptionable in theory but somehow not realised commensurately in practice.

Also its corollary: could some (minor or major) tweaking/adjustments/alterations in the macro-structure of the Republic help in making it more 'purposeful'? Is there deficiency, for instance, in provisioning the State with functional (as opposed to formal) authority? If so, how—in what way? And where? Lack of authority and a mechanism—vehicle—for tackling the social factors (caste hierarchies) that have survived pioneering social engineering accomplished in the initial years of the State? Or is there, on the contrary, too little (meaningful) 'democracy' amidst excessive preoccupation with the trappings of electoral democracy—a form fetish, in other words, resulting in substantive 'democratic deficits' in practice? Or a combination of both—the former in some respects and the latter in others?

Or, to put it the other way around, can some structural deterrents not be devised and embedded in the 'system' to prevent misgovernance, malfeasance and/or unconcern taking things low beyond a point? To make the State a little bit 'bad governance proof', in other words.

This (going beyond striving for mere 'better governance' to a focus on structural reform) is important for checking the 'autocratic impulse' in Indian society—the widespread popular yearning for a 'strong leader' capable of 'fixing it' (the system). The genesis of that longing lies in the inefficacies of the State at the ground level, the brunt of which has to be borne by the common man routinely. For they breed the delusion of a benign dictator-like figure at the helm of affairs as a panacea for the nation's ailments. So also, at the other end, in the pervasiveness of an unruly, 'anything goes' political culture whereby organised interests resort to direct action (seen ever so often, most palpably, in demonstrations of 'street power') with scant regard for Constitutional provisos and norms, even of the law in many cases, unmindful of the ensuing disorder and opening of 'space for anarchy'.⁹

It must be clarified here that these are not same doubts the that Left-wing extremists and other 'anti-system' movements seem to have, whatever the superficial similarities; not at all. For theirs is a reductionist rejection of the democratic design of the post-independence Indian State and of the underlying Constitutional formalism lock, stock and barrel as sham, *a priori*, without offering a constructive alternative; a dogmatic disaffection for democratic institutions, deriving from a deterministic reading of Marxism, despite its having been proven inadequate.

Far from it, the posers set out above are proffered in a bid to secure the plural polity, always a work-in-progress anywhere and everywhere, against 'political practices of predation'¹⁰ by making it more functional within the framework of a mixed economy in which the Indian Republic has been conceived. (A mixed economy framework in moreover which the [corporate] private sector is [made to function] in the service of the democratic welfare/developmental State, not the other way around.)

2. *Odious Comparisons with China Pulling towards Emulation*

China is India's ideological rival and also its only peer in the comity of nations as the only other 'civilisational State' (albeit one without the diversity of religions, languages and ethnicities that sets India apart from all other nations in the world). Bracing itself up to not come out down and beaten in comparisons with that country, lest some fall in the country into the trap of seeking to emulate its (China's) retrograde authoritarian features, is another challenge facing the Indian State of late, after China's rise as a global economic powerhouse in recent decades.

China's resurgence has led to some serious perceptual anomalies to India's disadvantage. Simplistic comparisons made and facile conclusions drawn, often devoid of context or on the basis of dubious statistics, the Chinese Party State has begun to be looked upon with awe for having outperformed India, unmindful of the totalitarian political system of that country totally lacking in legitimacy. And with barely concealed admiration for the ruthless style of its statecraft for its 'decisiveness', with the lure of short-cuts to 'due process'

beckoning in the background. The absence of (direction by) a 'central political mind' in democratic polities, in particular, is contrasted enviously with the demonstrated capacity of China's politico-economic set-up for purposive action in pursuit of long-term strategic goals, once decisions are taken, with a certain impatience with prizing of openness, dissent and diversity so essential for democratic discourse.

This is particularly so in recent years, with the easy spread of ill-considered ideas and 'solutions' to serious national problems over social media, inherently incapable of in-depth inquiry, and the coincidental disarray in many Western liberal democracies during this period, the USA most of all.

Chinese themselves, traditionally defensive and reticent about their totalitarian political system and authoritarian political culture, have shed their sense of reserve in recent times and begun making uncharacteristically categorical assertions about the superiority of their political system derived, not from Western political theory prioritising individual liberty and deep distrust of power, but, from Leninism and Confucian ideas prizing obligations to authority and collectivities (family, society and State). They are unfazed by the fact that their 'constitution sans constitutionalism' based order is innocent of the notion of plurality embedded in the concept of separation of powers that is sacrosanct in any genuinely democratic set-up and is reflected in its myriad mechanisms for power sharing and multiple safeguards against absolute authority in the exercise of power.

There is quiet gloating in China now, in fact, at the albatross of '*ad-hocism*' and populism democracies are doomed to carry in consequence of their preoccupation with 'formalism' (prioritisation of due process over performance/outcomes) and short-term horizons linked to electoral cycles. And revelling, likewise, in the high systemic (politico-managerial) cost of democracies prioritising democracy as a way of life with inalienable space for civil society and civil liberties, fundamental political rights and judicial review of executive exercise of power held as sacrosanct values, regardless of their impact on the 'functionality' of the State.

This contestation may have gathered momentum since the sharp ‘ideological’ broadsides by the Trump Administration in the USA in the summer of 2020 and the political shenanigans in that country in the build up to, and immediately after, the November 2020 elections (and some in European countries too), but it has been an undercurrent all along, at least since the 2008–2009 financial crisis, which—it has become clear now—was an inflexion point in Chinese strategic calculus (andchutzpah). Chinese political analysts have, ever since, made no bones about labelling (and libelling) liberal democracies as ‘dysfunctional’. And being ‘on the back foot and in retreat’, in the context of the subterranean contest for ‘comprehensive national power’¹¹ that, in Chinese political discourse, is posited as being underway globally relentlessly, undeclared. To quote an editorial in the *Washington Post*, ‘Mr. Xi wants to convince the world that “the East is rising, while the West is in decline” and that China’s high-tech authoritarianism is the best model for the 21st century.’

It was also the impression US President Biden carried after his telephone conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping in March this year: ‘President Xi does not believe democracies can be sustained in the 21st century because things move so rapidly, technology is changing so much, democracies don’t have time to arrive at consensus. That’s why autocracies will succeed.’

That comparative political dimension—of China seeking to present its political system as a more efficacious one—is applicable to the India–China binary as much as to the China–USA one (though the Chinese leadership is loathe to being bracketed with India in any manner since, on the one hand, it regards the Chinese case to be *sui generis* and, on the other, India to be no equal of China in any respect, even on the purely academic plane). It bears mention, therefore, in the context of the present reflection.

The concern here is with the prospect of an enhancement of the insidious appeal of the authoritarian Chinese ‘model’ in the popular mind in the country, especially with the anticipated extension of China’s economic clout to the technological domain. More specifically, the temptation in the minds of many to favour a leaf being taken out of China’s playbook for abridging freedom

of speech and thought and quelling dissent in the public sphere (even if not yet daring to go to the extent of advocating control of mind-space through AI enabled harnessing of big data the way the Chinese Party State appears set to do). The danger of a ‘third wave of autocratisation’ (of liberal democracies) highlighted by the Swedish Institute V-Dem Project (Varieties of Democracy) in its Democracy Reports¹² to describe how 87 countries, home to 68 per cent of the world’s population, have reduced themselves to ‘electoral autocracies’, is noteworthy in this context.

The need to find effective answers to the asymmetrical advantage enjoyed by the Chinese (Communist) Party State over its Indian counterpart, without of course degrading itself by emulating the regressive features of its authoritarian rival, provides an exogenous spur to the endogenous imperative for drastic overhauling of the machinery of the democratic Indian State stemming from normative political considerations normal in a democracy.

3. *Climate Change and Fourth Generation Industrial Revolution*

Apart from the rather dire domestic political perspective proffered in the foregoing, there are two other, externally engendered, new imperatives that make for dispassionate pondering on the adequacy of existing organisational structures and institutional arrangements of the Indian Republic in step-back mode likewise.

One is the challenge of climate change, the enormity of which cannot be overstated. It dictates a stark perspective of a ‘binding constraint’ coming into play before long, constricting the room for roaming the development vista and setting limits to economic growth/development in the not-too-distant future (for all developing countries, not just India). The perspective of there being only so much exploitation ‘space’ left in the (atmospheric) global commons and other ecological domains for humanity to make do with because of the ‘developed’ (read industrialised) countries having already used up a good bit of the commons preemptively, thanks to their head start in the industrialisation game. In consequence, the developing world is confronted with a trade-off between overcoming the ‘development deficit’ (poverty alleviation) and

obviating an ‘environmental deficit’ (disturbance of the ecological balance in Nature), a Hobson’s choice that the industrialised world did not have to face in its formative period.

The challenge of shifting away from a preoccupation with economic growth, of any kind and at any cost, towards truly sustainable development, in other words. That is easier said than done, of course, as is evident from the state of play (worldwide, not just in India) in the last three decades or so since the notion of ‘sustainability’ came into vogue—of the walk being wholly incommensurate with the lofty talk that has come to be par for the course in development discourse.

This has obvious grave implications for the developing countries. They are left now with no more than a few decades to do whatever it is that they wish to do by way of ‘development’, due to the forbidding prospect of the tipping point of irreversible, and possibly catastrophic, environmental and ecological changes on a planetary scale setting in thereafter and putting stringent limits to economic growth. (Actually, no more than a dozen years, if the more desirable but already infeasible goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Centigrade over pre-industrialisation levels is taken as the reference point.)

The issue thus impinges intractably on the future of the Indian State (as indeed all other states) with somber existential implications. It places a heavy premium on efficacy in all economic activity—of the development machinery of the State, that in the corporate sector, in the world of the self-employed, small producer/service-provider—everywhere. A culture of climate/environment conservation and a (socio-technical) ‘syntax of sustainability’¹³ embedded in the DNA of governance and management structures becomes an urgent imperative, with adjustment of the economy to the (structural) constraints and compulsions of the ‘brown to green economy transition’ without any further delay.

The other is the equally formidable challenge of engaging with the highly creative, but at the same time hugely disruptive, technological advances of the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’ (Data Analytics and Machine Learning

[ML], Block Chain Technology, Industrial Internet of Things [IIOT], precision/additive manufacturing, robotics, nanomaterials and nano-biotechnology, genomics, etc.) that are in the offing, with most already on the anvil. Of actually embracing the emerging technologies, as opposed to tailing and trailing the leaders, which was all that was possible for India in the case of the first three industrial revolutions because of historically inherited limitations and legacies. For, the game-changing impact of these advances, in the security and military fields above all, is already pounding the politico-economic horizon with 'new (and hitherto unimaginable) normals' and mind-boggling socio-political and socio-economic implications.

Particular mention has to be made in this context of AI and ML, which are increasingly being recognised as not just another 'technology' but something with much wider ramifications, including, most notably, potential to rival, and even outsmart, the human species itself. As the Fourth Industrial Revolution is increasingly going to be—it already is—AI powered, the point needs no elaboration or labouring over in the context of a reflection on the adequacy of older structures for the coming times of radical change rife with 'known unknowns' and riddled by 'unknown unknowns'.

While there are many dimensions of AI and ML that call for high, highest, level attention in a strategic perspective, one—that of the veritable cornucopia it promises, of liberating humans from all kinds of physical drudgery and routine—merits special mention in the context of the present submission; its likely impact on manufacturing and industrial economics, in particular.

The high-cost economies of the industrialised world have been afflicted by the nightmare of 'de-industrialisation' (as a result of location neutralising 'flattening' of the global geo-economic landscape in the wake of the world-wide spread of production and supply chains that 'globalisation' has brought about in its wake). There is a variant of that nightmare (of 'de-industrialisation') which the developing world, yet not out of the woods of the world of want and struggling to industrialise to put an end to the curse of poverty, needs to be mindful of. It has implications for India as well, even though the Indian situation is *sui generis* and not that of the typical developing country.

The allusion is to the possibility of AI enabled manufactures and manufacturing mechanisms emanating from the industrialised world (and China) inundating the rest of the world once 'AIised' production systems have been fully developed and mainstreamed. (Most estimates put that tipping point, for intelligent machines to outperform the human mind all round, at no more than two decades from now; the process being well underway already.)

All-powerful, AI engineered algorithms driven 'black-boxes' are likely to be the alpha and omega of manufacturing in an 'AIised' world, which is predicted to be characterised by obsolescence of the 'scale economy' rationale that underlay mass production in the Second and Third Industrial Revolutions (due to the possibility of flexible and customised IIOT manufacturing tailored to the varying needs of a diverse clientele without significant cost enhancement opening up with mainstreaming of AI). There would be near complete replacement of repetitive (unskilled) jobs by AI driven routines that would bring down the requirement of labour (and share of labour costs in manufacturing) drastically, with gainful employment opportunities only for a few at the upper end of the education–training–skilling continuum.

There is the danger of the AI powered 'black boxes' taking over the productive process (all over the world) completely, in other words, by fulfilling the time-honoured task of meeting the material needs of society super-efficiently, at throw away price. And thwarting, in the process, the incipient efforts of developing countries to industrialise by outcompeting them by far—in all industries, including those in which the developing world enjoys a comparative advantage today because of a high proportion of the cost of manufacturing being labour. Developing countries may thus not have any indigenous productive capacity or agency left in the face of such a scenario materialising. Not even the wherewithal to service the (functioning of the) AI powered black-boxes, should anything go wrong, or to prolong the life of those manufactured products through 'frugal innovation', the way they are able to do at least in some degree today.

Thus, there is the likelihood of their (developing countries) being confronted with a piquant problem: the conundrum of their experiencing ‘freedom from want’ and other existential problems, their primary preoccupation so far and even getting a taste of problems of plentifulness such as gainful utilisation of ‘leisure’, even before graduating out of ‘developing’ country status in any meaningful sense of the term. For, that gain would be totally at the mercy of the knowledge rich economies of the industrialised world.

The (technological) ‘singularity’¹⁴ that Kurzweil optimistically predicts to be quite ‘near’—in overall terms, for humanity as a whole—may therefore not turn out to be benign for the developing world, which could be ‘AIsed’ passively, with loss of even such agency as it possesses today under the current State sovereignty based international order. Commercially secretive technologies capable of making customised products and services for daily needs at throw away prices could take away all meaningful ‘choices’ from the developing countries by providing standardised, ready-made ‘solutions’ developed in the industrialised world—in the realm of economics, in the first instance, but in other domains too not long after. That is likely to be accentuated further because of the hegemonic monopolistic power of Big Tech, which is undermining sovereign decision-making in nations already, growing manifold in an AI and digital (meta) data dominated economic paradigm.

Of course, there are many positive sides to an AI driven economy, such as its high potential for giving a huge fillip to MSME and traditional cottage industries (those under the Khadi and Village Industries Commissions and others in the agro-industry sector) that constitute the bulk of the Indian economy. It can enable them to migrate to ‘smart manufacturing’ and thence to integrating with global supply chains. India is, in any case, not a run-of-the-mill ‘developing country’ condemned to countenance such dire scenarios helplessly. It is an atypical case, in the sense that it has the wherewithal to partake of the ‘knowledge economy’ that is destined to be the heart of the productive process in an ‘AIsed’ world. However, it will be able to realise that potential only if it gears itself up to embrace the AI revolution right away, without losing time, and if it does so organisationally and institutionally—

i.e., with a nimble and supple R&D infrastructure adept at adaptation, improvisation and innovation in place. (And not merely through subsidies or other policy support extended to moribund organisations within managerial/administrative structures conceived in a bygone era.)

That *desideratum*—of structural change in the State set-up—is further underlined by digital technologies in general (and not just AI) transforming the relationship between the State and its citizenry anyway, by their very (inexorable) logic of their much more efficacious delivery of services also being easier to access directly, without going through the paraphernalia of State machinery or any other intermediary. That ‘openness’ tilts the scales further against the status-quoist, BAU approach to State functioning prevalent hitherto, and makes a strong case for a revamping of State machinery on the same lines, viz., pegged on the accessibility imperative (in addition to that of efficacy). That is something that will require intervention at a structural level; it would be beyond the ambit of mere governance reform, much less exhortation.

The predicament the State often finds itself in in engaging with social media (and even the new, digital offshoots of traditional visual media) provides a good illustration of that new, and tough, reality. Machine translation, improving in quality with quantum leaps in natural language processing capabilities day by day, is another, because of its potential for enabling life-long self-learning in the mother tongue.

That single development portends a churning of the socio-economic order by making short shrift of the ‘felicity in English’ requirement that has been an unstated *sine qua non* in the country for social advancement hitherto, and therefore a formidable barrier for the ‘subalterns’ to make it good in life. Elite capture of the professions, which cannot be denied to be the reigning ‘norm’ (due to hegemony of English in the medium of instruction in higher education and in the language of discourse in a postcolonial society like India), be it an indeliberate one, may thus soon become a thing of the past. Society might move ahead of the curve, in comparison to the State, if the State machinery fails to

‘upgrade’ itself and its functioning mode and norms in tune with the emerging trends.

While that (positive impact of technology on ‘agency’ of the populace at large) would not be a bad thing at all, it could have far-reaching implications for the legitimacy of the State. A State machinery that remains mired in rigid, Weberian, structures of yesteryears (because of its being in control of an English educated elite, essentially, despite avowed professions to the contrary) would be in danger of being rendered anachronistic. And run the risk of inviting rejection borne out of frustration and cynicism.

All in all, technology as the dominant driver of economic/social progress is a ‘no-brainer’, but considered reflection is called for to devise the ‘playbook’ (structural precursors) that will be required to be invoked, and stoked, as a prerequisite for that verity to make a smooth landing in a high inertia country like India.

IV. THE INESCAPABILITY OF STRUCTURAL REFORM

Raising the functionality—effectiveness—of the Indian State thus presents itself as a vital, if obvious, strategic interest of the nation from a variety of perspectives, both external and domestic, long term and immediate. It cannot but constitute the kernel of any putative ‘grand strategy’¹⁵ of the Indian Republic, whether explicit or inexplicit and unarticulated.

The logic of the burgeoning techno-ecological landscape clearly has such far-reaching implications that it would seem to require everything on the administrative/institutional front in the country—‘the design of organisations’,¹⁶ most of all—to be thought through *de novo* with an eye on excellence.¹⁷ (The Annexure attached gives some idea of possibilities in this regard.) It becomes imperative now to devise an overall politico-legal framework conducive for fostering flexible organisational structures and nimble management mechanisms capable of servicing the distinctive, and demanding, requirements of the emerging highly dynamic global environment characterised by a breathtaking pace of change.

The organisational models and mechanisms of the existing institutional machinery of the State have no rationale or logic other than historical legacy (and/or unthinking carry over into contemporary times). They are therefore in dire need of being attuned¹⁸ to the new challenges that can be seen to be looming on the horizon already, or advancing in the not-too-distant future.

More specifically, this will entail evolving administrative and institutional arrangements for meeting and servicing an entire gamut of requirements:

- Effecting fastest possible evolution of capital efficient business models that raise the ‘total factor productivity’ of the economy, of course, but with non-negotiable safeguards for ensuring sustainability in-built into the delivery mechanisms.
- The idea of a ‘mature, impact economy’¹⁹ capable of unleashing societal energy and setting in motion virtuous cycles of social change as externalities, which is being advanced as the template of the ‘circular’ green economy of the morrow.
- One whose structures are conducive to effecting the transformation of the economy to a carbon-neutral and water/climate positive digitalised one, which can safely be posited to be the key factor in the CNP contestation between major powers in the coming decades that bids fair to reshape the global geopolitical, geoeconomic and thence landscape.
- And, likewise, structures that are conducive to the evolution of an ‘entrepreneurial State’²⁰ adept at nurturing an ecosystem that can spawn institutional improvisation at the macro level and technological innovation at the micro level, grooming ‘entrepreneurial citizens’²¹ capable of serving as catalytic agents of social and societal change.
- With at least domestically mastered (even if not indigenously developed) and socially vetted, not commercially driven, AI as the engine of economic growth.
- And so on, other *desiderata* in the same vein.

That is, however, easier said than done. The distance between fixing objectives and goals in conceptual terms, as above, and evolving practical arrangements—mechanisms—at the ground level that enable translation of these lofty *desiderata* into practice is a long one. It is one of the prime reasons why the problem needs to be posed, it seems to the present analyst, in terms of an urgent need for a fundamental review and redesigning of existing ‘structures’—bureaucratic (administrative machinery), political (apportioning of authority between the Union and the States, States and Panchayats/local municipal bodies and, more generally, between State and society/market), corporate (regulatory mechanisms and governance environment) and scientific/technical (non-bureaucratic organisations of academic and research institutions). And not merely as one of governance reform, which is fine as far as it can be undertaken but no more.

Drawing upon professional management practices²² in the corporate sector can perhaps help in this regard, in the exploration of pathways for raising the effectiveness of the organs and institutions of the State by providing a reference point, if not a template, for structural reform of the State. Despite the several substantive differences between the cost cutting and profit maximising firm and the anything-but-optimising (‘satisficing’²³) unit that bureaucratic organisations invariably are or become, there may be value in looking at the former dispassionately.

V. STRUCTURAL REFORM: WHAT SHOULD/COULD/CAN BE DONE

Two recommendations regarding structural reform of the State machinery are made in the succeeding paragraphs:

- (i) A comprehensive ‘study-cum-research’ project to identify structural deficiencies in the State machinery that impede or imperil performance and to come up with recommendations for changes and measures to address the gaps and shortcomings.
- (ii) A ‘strategic dialogue’ between key stakeholders in the national polity to debate the desirability of the recommendations of the study being

presented to the political class for their deliberation and consideration, and to thrash out their feasibility and concomitant action(s) necessary before that is done.

These recommendations hold on a 'stand-alone' basis, i.e., on their own merits (delinked from the reflection in the preceding sections), as a vital interest of the State and a key dimension of statecraft. Even those who may not agree with the averments made in the foregoing Sections of this essay will, hopefully, not have difficulty in going along with these recommendations.

It is worth noting here that, historically, the genius of the Indic civilisation has lain in engendering resilience in society, not in strengthening the sinews of the State. It may be appropriate, therefore, for some attention to be given to mending that omission.

Recommendation I: A Comprehensive 'Study-cum-Research' Project

A comprehensive study-cum-research project, taking measure of the factors responsible for the underwhelming performance of the Indian State, is recommended.

It is submitted that this exploration of pathways conducive to rendering the institutions of the Republic more effective would have to aim at evolving a new 'grammar of democratic governance'²⁴—one suited to addressing challenges posed by riveting changes in the external environment on technological, ecological and geo-economic firmaments, no less.

That is proposed to be done through a critical examination of literature in the country and abroad to assess the 'performance' (delivery of outcomes) of the post-independence Indian State so far with a view to:

- (a) identifying the features in extant structures and statutory mechanisms that can be seen to hamper good performance—the sources of 'entropy', as it were, to continue the analogy from thermodynamics borrowed in Section III 1;

- (b) empowering the State for measuring up to the new challenges (of averting apocalyptic climate change and leapfrogging into Industry 4.0, above all) efficaciously, besides accomplishing unfinished tasks (eradication of absolute poverty, raising of living standards) and better addressing perennial ones (such as deepening of democracy and so on) in earnest; and
- (c) realising these ambitious, but no longer postponable, goals in the foreseeable future. The time left for the Republic to mark its centenary in 2050 offers a ready target date in this regard.

This schema is premised on the reading that good governance alone will not be enough, as mentioned earlier; structural reform, going beyond good governance, will be necessary for making a dent in the problem.

While a number of works, both Indian and foreign, have tried to evaluate the achievements and shortcomings of the Indian Republic, they are ideologically driven (from the perspective of the Left or the Right), embedded as they mostly are in analytical frameworks of individual theoretical disciplines (political economy, above all). And ‘static’ in their assessments, in the sense of being *ex-post facto* ones in judgemental mode.

Missing in that corpus, largely if not entirely, is an attempt to assess the record of flaws and failings, and strengths and successes, of the Republic in a managerial perspective, i.e., in a pragmatic, eclectic ‘systems’ framework drawing upon the ‘strategic management’ approach of the corporate sector but contextualised for the State as a whole, with the spotlight on ‘structure’, ‘process’ and ‘performance’ (as in Organisation Theory and Development, as outlined in the Annexure) in a ‘dynamic’ and forward-looking manner, i.e., in a kind of ‘strategic planning mode’.

That is precisely what the proposed Study would be tasked to do: review the ‘structuration and apparatuses’²⁵ of the State to assess their adequacy, and of the processes spawned by them, from the standpoint of highlighting those which merit reconsideration or reform in the light of experience, on the one

hand, and of the new (socio-economic, socio-political and technological) challenges, on the other.

Mechanisms and arrangements that have been, or can be, identified in literature to be hindering functionality (capacity for execution/delivery) would be identified and remedial measures suggested therein examined and collated, along with fresh ideas and alternative approaches, for evolving recommendations for reform.

This would translate, more specifically, into:

- (i) identifying infirmities and inadequacies in the institutional infrastructure of the Republic (and slack in the predominant practices and modes of functioning engendered by it);
- (ii) collating concrete corrective measures and suggestions for structural reform, abstracting from governance issues;
- (iii) evaluating ideas for structural reform (gathered in (ii) above, or garnered afresh from exploration of alternative approaches), for their inter-relationship and *inter-se* compatibility, trade-offs and possibilities of synergy; and
- (iv) throwing up questions/issues for further research and enquiry, taking off from the received wisdom of today.

The aim would be to bring out what the governmental and academic discourses in the public domain have to offer in respect of identification of slack and deficiencies in the *praxis* of national governance structures/institutions, and by way of remedial action/reform.

Hopefully, the recommendations help in evolving arrangements and mechanisms capable of evincing 'exercise of State power for State purposes' (as against for personal aggrandisement quite often, at present) and, at the same time, also of ensuring 'coherent synergy'²⁶ between different arms of the State (as against the right hand often not knowing what the left is doing at

present), so as to enhance their effectiveness (in a managerial sense, and not just politically).

Many perceptive insights are available in the Reports²⁷ of various expert committees/commissions on important issues set up by governments of the day from time to time, besides the works of individual scholars, analysts, activists, media professionals and other keen observers of the national scene. (Of course, both these categories of works focus more on governance aspects and/or policy innovation, not on structural reform, but implications for the latter can be gleaned from them all the same.)

Even more so in the practice—experimentation, successful or otherwise—of different States of the Indian Union over the years, especially in respect of the all-important question of local self-governance (post-73rd/74th amendments of the Constitution, but earlier too); a question that is bound to figure centre stage in any structural reform exploration exercise such as this one.

It is therefore proposed to limit the labours of the study to digesting, illumining and integrating the insights of these works, i.e., to critically reviewing available knowledge and understanding, eschewing fresh research *ab initio*—a few exceptions apart. This should help in avoiding expending time and energy trying to re-invent the wheel, as it were, and also in keeping the scope of the study exercise within manageable proportions.

The following areas suggest themselves in the context of the proposed critical review of national and international literature on the ‘state of the State’, as they form recurrent themes in policy discourse in the country and have been given sufficient attention in research and commentary. (They are indicative and illustrative and not, by any means, exhaustive.)

A. *State related:*

(i) *Electoral reform*, including statutory mechanisms for:

- utilisation of digital technologies for introduction of elements of direct/participatory democracy (such as referendums on policies/issues recall of elected representatives and others);

- introduction of some degree of proportional representation to balance anomalies in the ‘first-past-the-post’ system, *inter alia*, through run-off elections in the second round and reduction in the number of political parties allowed to contest elections; and,
 - curbing ‘money power’ and ‘patronage politics’ more effectively than existing ones.
- (ii) *Jurisprudence/judicial reform*, including exploration of:
- alternatives to the adversarial, common-law system;
 - restorative and reparative justice in lieu of the retributive one extant; and,
 - recommendations for amendment/repeal of anachronistic, colonial-era laws, once and for all.
- (iii) *Political reform* (for deepening of democracy and fostering/securing of a culture of constitutionalism, deliberation²⁸ and *assabiyah*—social cohesion) *inter alia*, through strengthening/smartening of the role of Constitutional institutions, including, in particular:
- evolving ‘bottom up’ structures in the existing ‘top down’ political architecture to enable greater public participation and more responsive governance;
 - amendatory mechanisms for strengthening of people’s rights and agency; and,
 - fostering of substantive democracy, *inter alia*, through norms for intra-party democracy and mechanisms for accommodation of non-party movements in the political process.
- (iv) *Reform of federal mechanisms*, including devolution through:
- establishment of empowered local governments in the third and fourth tiers below the national and provincial levels, with statutory

mechanisms for commensurate provisioning of human resources and fiscal transfers for those (local) levels to give teeth to the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution;

- separate governance architecture for urban conglomerates (100 cities); and,
 - aggregation of villages with a view to facilitation of PURA (provision of urban facilities in rural areas).
- (v) *Administrative reform, including statutory provisions* for realising professionalism and transparency in functioning of the civil services, *inter alia*, through:
- inviolable mechanisms for deterring ‘extra-Constitutional’ power centres (political pressures in transfers and postings and in day-to-day functioning—in policing, investigation and intelligence, above all); and,
 - extensive use of digital technology (for forestalling oral orders, real-time display of goings-on inside public offices on websites through a multitude of CCTV cameras, etc.);
 - preclusion of arbitrary exercise of power at all levels, that of coercion on behalf of the State (detention in police custody), above all; and,
 - effective municipal governance prioritising public interest over individual rights.
- (vi) *Institutional reform, including* ‘(re)designing of organisations’ to make them more accountable and responsive, *inter alia*, through provisos for:
- synergistic strengthening/‘smartening’ of the regulatory and oversight capacities of State organs in all areas, wherever possible through creation of apolitical watchdog mechanisms in the public domain; and,

- boosting State inclination to intercede in public interest, so as to avert dispersal/fragmentation of authority and consequent weakening of accountability;
- technology-aided social audit for enhancing accountability in a transparent manner in both public and corporate governance, and for taming trespasses of technology into the human domain;
- Ombudsman mechanisms in all fields for effective deterrence of malfeasance.

(vii) *National security management reform*, including statutory provisions for:

- special dispensation for governance of border districts and areas rife with alienation directly under the remit of the Union Government (such as J&K, LWE-affected areas and some north-eastern states, taking into account the success stories of Tamil Nadu, Mizoram and Punjab);
- better Union–State coordination mechanisms, *inter alia* through establishment of pan-India legal and logistical frameworks for enabling the timely sharing of intelligence; and,
- unified Union–State approach for management of disasters, cyber and other pan-India threats.

B. *Economy, environment and technological development related:*

(viii) *Regulatory and eco-system for protection of the environment.*

(ix) *Regulatory and eco-system for promoting sustainable, and more participatory, development.*

(x) *Eco-system for fostering technological innovation (the S&T R&D establishment).*

The study-cum-research project is envisaged to be undertaken by (task forces of) domain experts in a variety of fields, those mentioned above and others

identified later. Each task force would be guided jointly by duos of eminent practitioners and thought leaders—pairs of polyglots, one drawn from amongst experienced apex level (bureaucratic/technical/military) State and corporate functionaries (to keep the exploration grounded on *terra firma*) and the other from the scholarly stream or media (to provoke and push the envelope for innovative ideas and possibilities and tap into the world of bold new ‘imaginaries’ inhabited by original thinkers).

Recommendation IIA: A ‘strategic dialogue’ between key stakeholders in the national polity.

It is proposed that the recommendations of the study regarding possibilities of structural reform of the State machinery be debated in the public sphere before they are taken to the political domain for deliberation/consideration by the political class. Further, that this be done through an open, and no-holds-barred, conversation between representatives of three key stakeholders in the national polity—namely:

- (genuine) activists/civil society organisations (CSOs) at the grassroots level at one end;
- (retired) apex level State and corporate functionaries at the other; and
- analyst-academic-scholar-media ‘commentariat’ and knowledgeable observers from other walks of life not falling in either of the two categories listed above as the third grouping (to mediate the dialogue between the first two groups).

The first group’s (activists/CSOs) claim to a seat in such a conversation lies in its grasp of ground realities, especially those pertaining to the marginalised, better than any other. (That understanding is often very localised, however, and rooted in specific micro perspectives, and therefore may not always be appropriate for generalisation. So, a word of caution is called for here.)

The second (apex level State/corporate functionaries) need to be included because they alone have the macro picture—i.e., first-hand appreciation of

the strivings and constraints of the ‘system’ as a whole; both normatively, as they ought to be, and existentially, as they usually are.

And the third (analysts/academics/media persons, etc.), straddling both these sections of society, are indispensable in any such interaction because they are the natural custodians of the existing discourse. It is a grouping which is enjoined, at least in theory, by the very self-conception of the scholar and the dispassionate public intellectual/observer, to discharge a disinterested and bipartisan role stemming from normative considerations, without being detained unduly either by *raison d’état* in a narrow sense or getting carried away, on the other hand, by higher harmonics of human rights, ‘community’ gains, individual choice, etc., to the detriment of the larger, and more basic, public order and developmental imperative.

There is great need for such a dialogue between these three constituencies, often worlds apart. The first two are more or less completely disconnected from each other in the mainstream discourse on national affairs. Even the third grouping is not so well networked with the first, though some structured interaction does take place every now and then, thanks to some politically alert and socially sensitive scholars. The second and the third categories are the most well-connected, but only in relative terms, in comparison to the others—even those links could do with a huge fillip.

The first two categories of stakeholders are likely to have a hugely different take on the record of the Republic. Hence, the idea of mediation of the dialogue by the academic/analyst—for ensuring that the enquiry remains rigorously ‘evidence based’ and does not degenerate into an impressionistic or anecdotal exchange, as unstructured conversations are prone to do frequently (or worse, into blows!).

Such an interaction within the national polity, a first of its kind, would be a domestic ‘strategic dialogue’, really, though that term is commonly (but incorrectly) restricted to describe closed door pow-wows between nations, that too in an unduly militarised sense. A moment’s reflection would show that

the proposed three-way conversation would eminently qualify to be termed as a 'strategic dialogue', in every sense of the term.

Recommendation IIB: Strategic Dialogue to be held in a framework of 'Grand Strategy'

Further to the recommendation above, it is proposed that the strategic dialogue suggested above be held through a series of seminars in the following manner.

First, that the discussion abstracts from governance or political policy issues of the day (policy innovation, human failings or party failures in making good use of the existing State structure and the like). For, these can easily turn partisan and are, in any case, quite heavily focused upon already. It restricts itself to a consideration of the more intractable structural aspects underlying the dynamics of the *development problematique* in a modern welfare/developmental State, especially a 'soft'²⁹ State like India (where traditionally strong social structures make for defiance, even capture, by entrenched interests), in the light of experience, on the one hand, and impending challenges, on the other.

Secondly, that the first of these seminars be held in an overall politico-strategic setting of what, in strategic analysis and discourse, is termed as the 'grand strategy'³⁰ of the State.

The idea of doing so in the opening seminar is to provide an overarching strategic perspective focusing on the overall, big picture for guiding subsequent seminars, which would be sector-specific, to situate themselves in. The latter would each address the state of play in specific sectors, such as electoral reform, judicial reform, local self-government, sustainable development, eco-system for technological innovation and 'advanced technology products', national security, etc. The outcomes of the discussions in these sectoral seminars would then be woven together at a concluding seminar, which would be held in the same politico-strategic setting of 'grand strategy' of the State as the first one, into a set of crisp recommendations ripe for follow-up action on the political plane.

Thirdly, that these confabulations be an ‘evidence-based enquiry’, and not free-wheeling ones. The appraisal of the record of the Republic in the study-cum-research project (based on a comprehensive and critical survey of literature on the ‘state of the State’) could serve as default hypotheses for debate and deliberation at the series of tripartite conclaves.

And lastly, that they be designed to be cross-generational.

In this way, the seminars/strategic dialogue could serve as a vehicle for in-depth deliberation on ‘polity management’ in the public sphere, in light of the recommendations of the Study, for revving up, rekindling and, where necessary, redesigning the State institutions with a view to enhancing their efficacy and delivery capacity.

The main point of the suggestion for a tripartite conversation (unorthodox though it is) is to strengthen the relevance and legitimacy of this project. By referring the intellectual labours of its first part (study/research) to those familiar with ground realities, it would, at one stroke, lift them out of the ivory tower and subject them to ‘field tests’, so to say. Thereby bringing about a meeting, hopefully, of the normative with the existential.

The tangible gain that can be expected from thrashing out ideas that the strategic dialogue would enable is reduction in internal friction and consequent smoother functioning of the national polity. Through the evolution of a consensus, hopefully, on effective—strong but also practicable—disincentives to deter deviation from norms being built into a recalibrated institutional architecture of the Republic. So that they kick in automatically on a non-discretionary basis, thereby cutting at the root of the bane of traditional Indian society—namely, nepotism (which is the obverse side of its resilience and strength stemming from close family and community—read caste—ties).

VI. TOWARDS AN INVIGORATED STATE APPARATUS

At the heart of the proposed intellection on a reset of the Republic, it can safely be surmised in anticipation, will be the idea of ‘decentering’³¹ of the

national polity, which is coming to be foregrounded, slowly but surely, in the discourses on development and deepening of democracy.

That understanding has come out of the realisation, evident for some time now, that the solutions to development issues are mostly local, with few pan-India answers. It is a cogitation that will call for a fundamental review of all existing political and economic arrangements in a context quite different from the existing 'Centre (Union) driven' national polity we are familiar with. This will surely be the foremost issue that the proposed project for revisiting the existing institutional governance architecture of the Republic would be required to grapple with.

So also, a dispassionate and radical rethink of the politico-legal basis of the various statutory provisions of the Republic governing distribution and sharing of economic resources between different levels in the country, rural-urban financial transfers, above all—something that has the potential, obviously, to shake the very foundations of the present order but which cannot be shunned, *a priori*, just for that reason.

There are other (strategic) challenges that are also critical to the prospects of the Indian Republic 'making it' in the decades to come (apart from those of remaining on the right side of the ecology and technology dynamics, and changing economic logic, of course), such as:

- the limited time for which the presently favourable demographic profile of India, with a bulge in the proportion of the population that is working as compared to the dependent sections, is likely to obtain (until 2055 only);
- preparedness for dealing with trans-border pandemics, which are likely to be a recurring feature; crippling cyber-attacks that may remain unattributable and therefore impossible to deter; and,
- intractable nuclear issues, both civil and military (whose dangers/risks are, at the other extreme, of a long, very long-term nature, extending well into the unforeseeable future).

But they are governance issues, essentially, that can be tackled through appropriate policy measures; they are not structural issues, so not included in the present submission.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The avowedly apolitical, techno-managerial approach taken in the foregoing, even though the problem, few would dispute, is really a political one, is because of the absence of any leads from the political square. The political discourse in the country is quite barren, intellectually (it has to be said with due apologies for immodesty), with little on offer as regards the dilemmas and trade-offs involved in grappling with the *development problematique* in a technicised, Big Tech dominated globalised world economy about to shut down the growth *mantra*, as it were, in the wake of climate change. The very fact that there is no serious engagement with the question of poverty removal, let alone advance towards the formulation of a strategy and/or declaration of a timeline towards that much desired, but eerily elusive, end, in the political discourse in the country speaks volumes. Neither the ruling nor the opposition parties in the country have a perspective of their own to proffer in this regard. All we have are election time or election targeted palliatives driven by competitive populism and gimmickry.

The ‘re-engineering’ of the State system that is being advocated is for the purpose of making the State more functional, it should be clarified; not out of a fascination for pursuit of perfection based on any preconceived notions of the ideal or a fancy for playing ‘grandmasters of governance’. It is to enable the Indian State to hold its own in the comity of nations, where it has to reckon with formidable peer States—the Chinese (Communist) Party State, above all. In recognition of the fact that the real challenge from the latter stems from its formidable capacity for getting organised, not from its professed ideology, as is sometimes assumed to be the case.

Historically, society has been strong (resilient) in the Indian subcontinent, not the State. It may be appropriate therefore for attention to be accorded to strengthening the latter in a contemporaneous setting.

The original Constitutional provisions homed in very well on laying the foundations of an enlightened democratic structure for the national polity. It may be time now to fine-tune them by shifting gear from the ‘set-up’ mode that marks the existing Republic to a more mature, ‘maintenance’ mode prioritising functionality and efficacy over mere initiation and norm setting. The Indian State deserves better than to forever being condemned to be described as a ‘functioning anarchy’; the epithet it earns should be not of a ‘flailing’ State, but of one endowed with the capacity to reap ‘democracy dividends’, by way of realising more resilient outcomes and more robust systemic performance than is possible alternatively.

This daunting task has to be undertaken on an emergency footing, moreover, given the extremely small window of opportunity of no more than a few decades left at the nation’s disposal in light of the new challenges posed by momentous advancements/regressions on the technological/ecological firmaments, on the one hand, and the anticipated reversal of favourable demographics from 2055 onwards, on the other.

Formulaic invocation of the classical democratic premises of ‘due process’ and ‘means above ends’ under these circumstances, without commensurate regard for functionality and delivery/outcomes, will run the risk of turning it (the democratic ideal) into a dogma undermining its own rationale and appeal. That is a risk no less pressing than those of ‘backsliding of democracy’ and ‘democratic decline’ that are routinely reiterated in liberal political discourse (rightly, of course), which well-wishers and putative guardians of democracy suffering from ‘democratic anxiety’ need to be mindful of.

If successful in delineating a trajectory for structural reform of the ship of State, this ‘mega-project’ on State-building (a ‘policy-oriented’ output in the highest policy domain, of statecraft, *par excellence*) would have paved the way for a grand ‘turn-around strategy’ for renewal and rejuvenation of the Indian Republic in good time for its centenary in 2050—a *denouement* that would be eminently worthy of the occasion.

The Constitution begins with an allusion to ‘India, that is Bharat’, taking the two to be synonymous, obviously. The harsh truth today, however, is that the phrase ironically depicts the reality of two nations subsisting within the same Republic, two ‘Indias’ within ‘India’. A runaway dualism between them haunts the Indian scene now, which makes mincemeat of the essence of the Constitutional charter encapsulated in the simple Gandhian enunciation, ‘*Sarvodaya through Antyodaya*’. This dualism should fall in the category of the ‘unacceptable’ for all, of whatever political persuasion.

That makes it imperative for the strategic establishment in the country to sit up and ‘think on, or from, all sides’ on ways of perking up the functionality of the Indian State. For, only a strategically competitive ‘India’ can serve as the engine of the Indian Republic and pull its hinterland, ‘Bharat’, along with it; not a ‘functioning anarchy’ that is mired in muddling through.

Whatever that might take—no more than smart synergising and improvisation of its institutions and promotional/regulatory capacities or more radical measures, entailing major adjustments in the mechanisms of the Republic through Constitutional amendments and/or restructuring of the national polity in ways not contemplated hitherto.

Embarking on such an overly ambitious exercise, that too unmandated (by any higher authority), needs good justification. That justification lies, it is submitted, in the pertinence of the task—it is difficult to think of a theme with greater salience at the current juncture in the political life of the nation, when fundamental questions about ‘Indianness’ have risen to the fore, rightly or wrongly it is difficult to say. The Indian State is at an *impasse* in more ways than one; in a ‘crisis’ actually, in the sense of the etymology of the word in Chinese—of a situation of ‘danger peppered with latent opportunity’.

(A second justification for contemplating such an ambitious exercise, a purely intellectual one, lies in its enabling engagement with a first-rate cognitive challenge—the challenge of correctly comprehending the complex, and complicated, Indian reality.)

It is the *raison d'être* of scholarly/intellectual activity, the collective conscience of society, to address itself to such challenges—of conceptualisation (and continual re-conceptualisation) of the 'State as the embodiment of a rationally ordered society' in the light of experience and changing conditions, both external and internal, stepping back from day-to-day issues (of governance, etc.), and dwelling on the deeper currents and under-currents shaping longer term scenarios and outcomes instead. For it is the nature of the latent compact between State and society which is, in the ultimate analysis, the critical determinant of the contours of the political processes at play overtly in any polity.

Also, it is the responsibility of the intelligentsia to cogitate and come up with appropriate insights and perspectives for improving the State system, which is always a 'work-in-progress'—anywhere and everywhere, but especially so in the case of a fledgling democratic State in the developing world. Somewhat akin to the historical function Chinese intellectuals can be said to have performed in the opening years of the twentieth century, when confronted with the unprecedented challenge of Western technological superiority—of proffering the '*ti-yong*' approach³² (borrowing from the West what was useful (*yong*) without losing the essence (*ti*) of Chinese values) for coming to terms with modernity. No matter that that is easier said than done!

The vast scope of the project would naturally entail extensive exchanges and cooperation between analysts and practitioners, cutting across boundaries of traditional disciplines and domains of expertise and experience. So also, wide-ranging inter-institutional collaboration, both formal and informal. A tall order, no question about that; especially so in an essentially passive strategic culture used to striving for excellence in silos, rather than working in concert with others.

The magnitude of the challenges faced by the nation at the current juncture makes the aspiration/ambition for such a high benchmark inescapable. Hopefully, the close cooperation, far-reaching partnerships and far-sighted forbearance and tolerance of differing viewpoints that are called for will be

forthcoming in the service of the ‘national vector’, a daunting task though that would be. At least from leaders of public opinion in the first instance, whatever be the ultimate outcome of the exercise on the political plane.

VIII. THE WAY FORWARD

An Action Plan for taking the recommendations in Section V forward is being drawn up. It would be a collaborative, inter-institutional one.

Meanwhile, it is proposed to organise a stand-alone Workshop to brainstorm on the nitty gritty aspects of the Study (on structural changes that could help in enhancing the delivery capacity of the State machinery) and pool ideas on how it is to be undertaken.

The Workshop would be open to those who concur with the suggestion for a 360-degree perspective Study drawing upon the discourses in the fields of management, current political/international affairs and strategic analysis, and would be willing to contribute to it in one or the other areas listed on pages 30 to 33 on the basis of their expertise and experience, as in Section V.

Needless to add, such endorsement of the proposed comprehensive Study ‘in-principle’ would be without prejudice to the broader political perspective of the reader. There is no requirement of concurrence with everything averred in the diagnostic remarks in the Sections preceding the operative part in Section V, or in the prognostication and perspective proffered in conclusion in Sections VI and VII. Broad backing for the idea of identifying slack and gaps in the delivery capacity of the State machinery to improve the record of performance of the Indian Republic should be an adequate basis for a widest possible joining of hands in this endeavour.

Comments and feedback, most welcome, can be sent to saurabhkumar1610@gmail.com.

NOTES/REFERENCES

1. A brief write-up on the 'Strategic Management' approach of the corporate sector, as taught in Business Schools, can be seen in the attached Annexure. Very kindly prepared by Professors S. Manikutty, IIM, Ahmedabad and Keith D'Souza, S.P. Jain Institute of Management, Mumbai at the request of the author, it undergirds the recommendation in this essay for a critical appraisal of the State machinery in the framework of that approach, and of the insights of Organisational Theory (OT) and Organisational Development (OD).
2. A concept commonly encountered in Chinese political lexicon, akin to the Western construct of 'national power' framed in terms of resources, ability and outcomes. A nation's 'comprehensive national power' (CNP) is believed to comprise of not just its hard, military, economic and technological strength and prowess, but also of ability—political and organisational/managerial capacity—to mobilise these strategic strengths in a focused manner in the service of overarching, long term national goals.

Chinese political discourse posits a continual, subterranean (i.e., latent or undeclared but on-going) and antagonistic contest between states for improving their relative standing in CNP vis-à-vis other peer states.
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Annexure

Strategic Management: A Bird's Eye View

'The practice of strategy is absolutely critical to successful statecraft' (C. Dale Walton).

'Strategy (can be viewed) as theory for practice' (Colin Gray).

Courses on Strategic Management (of the corporate firm), Organisational Theory (OT) and Organisational Development (OD) are today *de rigueur* in every reputed MBA curriculum. This Annexure attempts to briefly traverse that domain in the background of the suggestion in this essay—'Galvanising the Ship of the Indian State'—for the utilisation of these approaches in statecraft.

Strategy: The practice of exposing MBA aspirants to case studies on strategic management of a company hinges on the concept of 'strategy' in business operations that came into vogue not long after the emergence of professional business administration/management in the industrialised economies of the West during their recovery phase, post-World War II, as a means of enhancing competitive strength and gaining advantage over rival companies. Extrapolated from its military origins, the term came to be applied to the overall approach of the corporation as a whole (in contradistinction to particular questions such as those about pricing or optimum design of a production layout, etc., commonly addressed by individual vectors of the firm in day-to-day decision-making) to define its core methodology and line of attack—i.e., 'distinctiveness'—as a tool for performing better.

As developed by Harvard Business School scholars such as Edmond Learned, Kenneth Andrews and Roland Christensen, the concept of strategy referred to articulation of an approach defining the character of a corporation, its purpose and the direction in which it would like to go (Richard Irwin, *The Concept of*

Corporate Strategy, 1971). For this, the firm needed to define its vision (what it wants to become), its mission (what its objectives are), and what it seeks to do to get there, i.e. the specific action plans.

Since business organisations have different functions such as marketing, production, finance, human resources, etc., they each need to have their own functional strategies flowing from the overall strategy of the firm, and those functional strategies need to be consistent, *inter se*, and coherent, collectively, in order to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Strategic management: Strategic management is the striving, the conscious steps, on the part of the top management to bring about coherence between the actions and activities of different wings of the firm i.e., mindful orchestration of congruence in the functioning of the company. It is as much an art, based on hunches and intuition, as a science, relying as the right side of the brain does on the hard data it is fed by the analytical lesser half on its left. As curious a mix of the objective and the subjective as there can possibly be. Or perhaps it could be said to be as fascinating a mixture of the two as life itself is!

In India, Samuel Paul applied these basic concepts in the context of public management. In his landmark book (*Management of Development Programmes: Lessons of Success*, 1982. West View Press), he studied six successful public programmes involving government intervention—namely, the National Dairy Development Programme of India, the Philippines Rice Development Programme, Kenya's Small Holder Tea Development Programme, the Indonesian Population Programme, the Public Health Programme of China and Mexico's Rural Development Programme. Comparing the success factors of these programmes, Paul showed how they had all basically succeeded in orchestrating a winning combination of different elements of a carefully crafted strategy, similar to that found in the literature on business management.

He found that the essential concept of strategic management of the business firm was equally applicable in management of public programmes as well, even though none of these programmes were directed towards profits at all, but rather to bringing about social change.

C.K. Prahalad in his book (*The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*, 2006) studied some remarkable organisations that served the poor, sometimes the poorest of the poor, and yet were highly profitable. He researched a number of organisations and programmes, some of which were traditional ‘for profit’ companies, and others more in the nature of social interventions. For example, he studied Aravind Eye Care of India, the ‘Jaipur Foot’ programme of India and Cemex’s house building programme in Mexico, among others. Here again, it was the orchestration of congruence between different constituent aspects of the programmes, such as precise identification of beneficiaries, their needs, the prices they could afford to pay, and designing of product parameters around these factors that emerged as the secret of success.

Michael Porter, the author of the celebrated text *Competitive Strategy* prescribed in MBA courses on ‘Strategic Management’, applied the concepts of strategy and strategic management to health care systems in the USA. His idea was to reorient the system towards enhancing value delivered to the patients and the overall effectiveness of health care. His landmark book (*Redefining Health Care: Creating Value-Based Competition on Results*, 2006) co-authored with Elizabeth Teisberg and published after 10 years of research, looked into why the US health care industry did not conform to the principles of competition seen in all other sectors of the economy. They described how health care in that country had fallen into a pattern of dysfunctional competition, where providers were competing on the wrong things at the wrong level. The result was that the US health care system was spending more per citizen on health care than any other nation and yet, getting worse outcomes in important areas like (new-born) infant mortality.

There are many more studies that point to the applicability of management concepts, the ‘strategic management’ approach above all, to management of public systems engaged in the delivery of public services.

Other determinants of organisational performance: Business ‘strategy’ is, however, not the only instrument or ‘variable’ available to top management to play on for improving performance of the firm. ‘Structure’ (of the organisation)

also is; certainly so when there is no heavy baggage of history (as in a ‘start up’, for example), but also in older organisations with a long history, often as part of the overall strategy for the firm evolved by top management.

Organisational Theory (OT): OT, taking a more composite and comprehensive view of factors affecting an organisation’s performance (naturally, as any academic approach can be expected to), posits an important role for ‘structure’ and ‘process’ too as determinants of organisational performance (in addition to ‘strategy’, as outlined above).

So also for ‘behavioural factors’ (motivation and morale of employees, their work ethic, loyalty and degree of commitment, etc.), as well as for the underlying ‘situational factors’ (such as historical legacies, other initial/founding conditions, the external environment within which the organisation functions and other ‘boundary conditions’), which are a given, more or less, for every organisation.

These four sets of factors or ‘variables’, as they are termed in OT—situational, strategic, structural, and behavioural—are brought together in an interactive framework in the Contingency Model (CM) of organisational functioning proffered by Khandwalla (*The Design of Organisations*, 1977), which postulates that they jointly determine the performance of an organisation, individually (directly) and severally (indirectly) through their influence on each other. Figure 1 is a basic version of the CM.

Some examples of each category of variables are as follows:

Situational: The initial conditions under which the organisation was established, the subsequent history of the organisation, the external environment in which the organisation functions (regulatory, competitive, technological, etc.).

Strategic: The strategy of an organisation formulated by its top management, the leadership style, and vision and values of top management.

(These are termed ‘strategic’—i.e., considered to be of strategic importance—because they have a profound, organisation wide and long term impact on

the other internal organisational variables [structural, behavioural and performance] and can sometimes even impact the situational variables, which are normally a given (such as size, location, external social, political and economic context, etc.), if they are powerful enough (as in the case of very large corporations that are known to not fight shy of ‘managing’ their contexts/external environment.)

Structural: The (kind of) hierarchy and workflow mechanisms, career advancement practices and rewards/punishments for good/poor performance and overall work culture in the organisation.

Behavioural: Motivation and morale of employees, their work ethic, loyalty to the organisation, degree of commitment, etc.

Performance: This too is, invariably, multi-dimensional, and encapsulated likewise in a set of performance indices. These (performance variables) would vary from firm to firm but profit, customer satisfaction, enhancement of brand value and such parameters would be common to all.

The first four categories of factors or variables are not independent of, or unconnected to, each other. They are all of the ‘each influencing the other kind’, with the first (situational variables) being primary, in the sense that—at the start, at least—they are a given. The other three are secondary, in the sense that—at the start, at least, again—they flow from the situational factors, i.e., are strongly conditioned by the situational factors, and they also influence each other.

The arrows depict the main direction of influence (net)—it being understood that the influence of each of the secondary set of variables on the others is a two-way process, not unidirectional.

All four sets of variables affect performance, directly and indirectly through their influence on each other, as indicated by the arrows in Figure 1.

Thus, for instance,

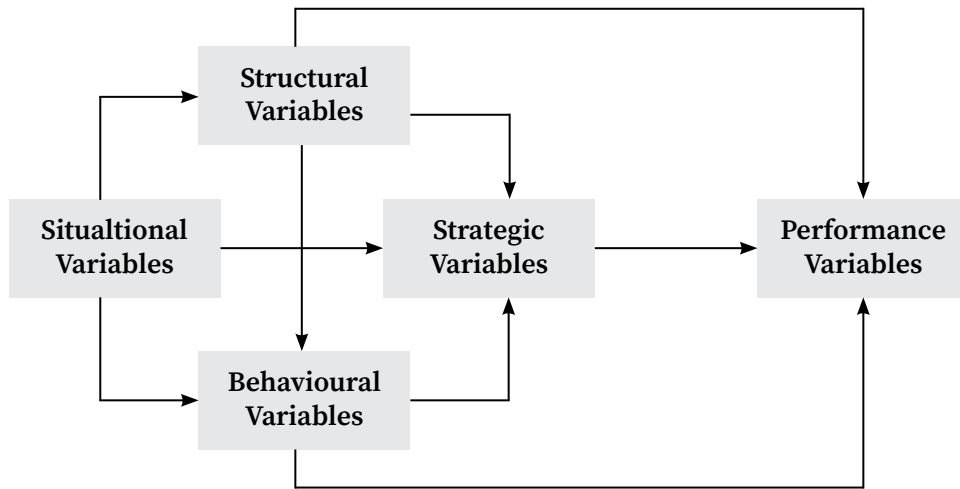


Figure 1

- Strategy, while it is determined in large measure by the vision, values and goals of the top leadership, is constrained—at the start, at least—by the structural variables, both in its formulation and execution stages. (The structure of the organisation extant at any given time has naturally to be taken into account by the top leadership while formulating and implementing strategy.)
- At the same time, strategy has the potential to influence (alter) structure, if so desired by top management and if that is made an avowed objective of the chosen strategy. Dynamic, transformational leadership can reverse almost all lines of influence, and strategy has therefore been emphasised as the primary determinant of performance by some theorists.
- The structure of the organisation, which is itself usually strongly influenced in the initial stages by situational factors such as the age, size, ownership, historical conditions under which the organisation was founded and the external environment, has a strong influence on the behaviour of employees in the organisation (how hierarchical and bureaucratic or open

and informal it is, what the work culture is, what the compensation norms and incentive mechanisms are, and so on). And through that mediation, it has a strong influence on the performance of the organisation.

- But structure is by no means a constant or a 'given' for all time to come. The contingency approach contends that strategic variables profoundly influence the structural variables— the form of the organisation, including the hierarchy, structural mechanisms, control and information systems, standard operating procedures, etc., which comprise the steel frame that ensures the uniformity, predictability and controllability of the employees that top management seeks to ensure.
- Once the structure is established and becomes ossified over time, however, it tends to become a constraint indirectly influencing the strategic factors by moulding them (leadership thinking, style, policies, etc.) in accordance with the limitations of the prevailing structure. (Witness, for instance, how successive attempts on the part of the political leadership in India to radically reform the government bureaucracy, have met with failure.)
- Likewise, for behavioural variables, which obviously determine performance directly. They too constrain 'strategy' in the short run (basic behavioural traits are a given, akin to an exogenously set constant). But, like structure, behaviour can be changed over time by strategy, if that be taken up as an avowed objective of the chosen strategy of top management.
- Strategy is thus the key factor impacting performance, mostly directly (the outcome of execution of the chosen strategy) but also interactively, through its impact on structural and behavioural variables.
- Similarly, there are other inter-linkages between all four set of factors, each influencing and constraining the other in both directions of the cause–effect conundrum. These will vary from case to case.

Note: There are no verities here. The management guru, Peter Drucker, had famously observed that ‘culture—organisational culture, out and out a behavioural variable—has strategy for breakfast’! It is as if the three sets of variables were constantly jostling to gain the upper hand.

The above is a basic representation of the Khandwalla CM. In the complete CM, the performance of an organisation is posited to be affected significantly by the degree of congruence between the four sets of variables. This is captured in the complete CM through ‘pattern variables’ that are recognised to be intermediating the performance of the organisation (see shaded box in Figure 2).

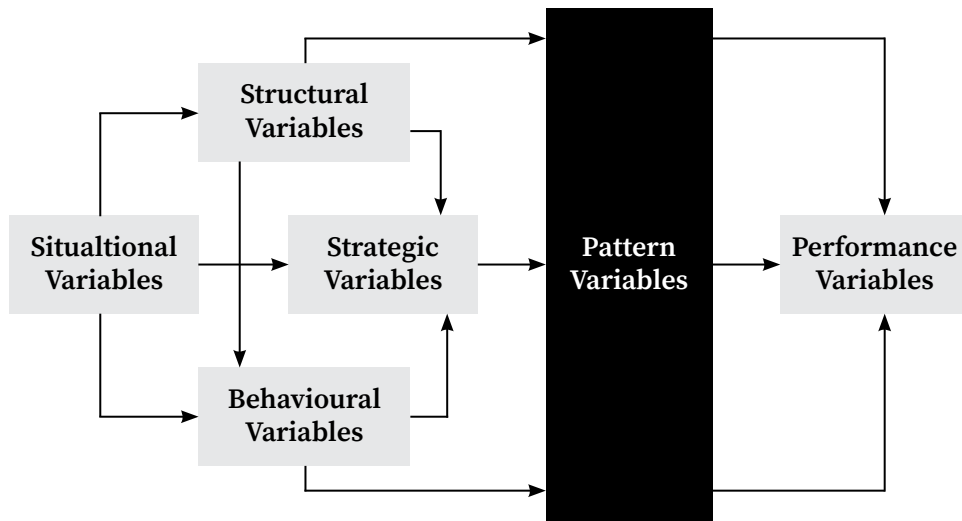


Figure 2

For instance, how much of a congruence or match there is between the goals and ideals that the top leadership espouses, and the administrative structures and systems that exist in the organisation, will determine to what extent the top leadership's vision is translated into action.

Likewise, for the degree of congruence between structural factors and behavioural factors, and behavioural and strategic ones.

This, in essence, is the 'systems' approach/framework—viewing the organisation/firm as a composite 'system', as a whole greater than the sum of its parts as it were, and cognisant of the need for ensuring congruence between the different sub-systems of the organisation.

Organisational Change and Organisational Development (OD): OD seeks to build upon the insights of OT and move on to the next question: what can be done (by top management) to optimise, or at least improve, outcomes?

The contingency perspective of OD is premised on the averment that there is no one best way to organise or lead an organisation, and that the optimal way to do so is contingent on a variety of factors stemming from the situation and the context within which the organisation operates. The performance or outcomes that result depend on a number of inter-related factors which are germane at any given time.

OD has been defined as a 'system-wide process of planned change aimed at improving overall organisational effectiveness through enhanced congruence between such key organisation dimensions as external environment, mission, strategy, leadership, culture, structure, information and reward systems, and work policies and procedures' (W. Burke and D. Bradford, eds, *Reinventing Organisation Development*, 2005).

OD interventions are 'a set of sequenced planned actions or events intended to help the organisation (system) increase its effectiveness. Interventions purposely disrupt the status-quo; they are deliberate attempts to change an organisation or subunit toward a different and more effective state' (Thomas G. Cummings and Christopher G. Worley, *Theory of Organisational Development and Change*, 2009).

Typically, this takes place in three phases:

- (i) recognition, understanding and analysis of the problems or issues that impede effectiveness (this is the OD phase of *Diagnosis*);
- (ii) introducing change interventions in the appropriate subsystems—strategic, structural and behavioural (and sometimes those aspects of the situational variables that may be amenable to change)—in order to effect desired outcomes in the performance variables (this is the *Action/Intervention* phase); and subsequently
- (iii) sustaining and stabilising the changes brought by appropriate programme management (this is the process maintenance or *Stabilisation* phase).

OD interventions can range from short-duration events such as team building workshops or educational programmes, to long-drawn-out programmes that could stretch over several years, such as organisational transformation programmes that involve revisiting the vision, mission and goals, making commensurate changes in the structure, and fostering change in the behavioural patterns prevalent in the organisation. They could focus on bringing about change in the entire organisation or system, or on bringing about change in one or more units or sub-systems of the organisation or system.

They could be ‘soft’, consensual processes or hard, top-down ones effecting a drastic shake-up and/or overhauling of the structure of the organisation. Traditionally, the former kind of interventions are regarded as OD, while the latter kind of restructuring is said to fall under the category of (structural) ‘organisational change’.

Instances of the latter are, however, few and far between. Typically, top managements first try to change the system by changing the behaviour of employees—through exhortation, training, indoctrination processes, and other persuasive methods. But since behavioural change is often short-lived if the context/environment in which employees function remains unchanged,

changes in the structural variables also in parallel are invariably necessary. Changes in hierarchy, roles, regulations, standard operating procedures, control and information mechanisms, and reward and punishment systems, are all means by which structure is moulded or redesigned, in order to elicit the desired changes in behavioural patterns.

As might be expected, OD interventions leveraging on structural variables are not so common. Some experimentation has been done to evolve structures conducive for the success of the strategy preferred by top management. Rigid, hierarchical structuring of the older, bureaucratic kind has given way in many an organisation to flexible and more accommodative, laterally networked, ones. In contradistinction to vertical, 'mono' level links (with the supervisor above and subordinates below) in linearly organised structures, these multiple laterally networked ones facilitate fostering of an open and collegial culture in the organisation conducive for creativity and innovation. Matrixed structures cutting across hierarchies on the basis of functional needs, and devised for accomplishment of specific tasks/projects by teams set up for specific periods on an *ad hoc* basis, have been found to be particularly effective.

Over time, both structural and behavioural variables can change, or be changed—any respectable overall strategy would, in fact, aim at altering both the structure of the organisation and the behaviour of its employees in desired directions over a period of time to make them more amenable to the purposes and requirements of the chosen strategy, chipping away gradually at long-standing habits and traits as well as at time-honoured verities in the structural features of the organisation.

The top leadership can thus bring about changes in the equations between the different sets of variables in the design of the organisation, including in even the situational variables at times (as e.g. during revolutions). Any change in one direction has a ripple effect on the rest of the variables in the system in some degree or the other, in the short, medium, or long term. The objective of strategic OD interventions is to bring about changes in those equations which would have maximum impact on the rest of the system, and thence on the success of the overall strategy of the firm.

Strategic Management and OD Interventions in Government Functioning: There has been no application as yet (so far as we know) of the ‘systems’ framework of OT and ‘strategic management’ as practised in the corporate world to governance of a country as a whole. Nor of strategic OD interventions. (The introduction of Annual Plans and mid-career training for senior bureaucrats under the late PM Rajiv Gandhi’s leadership could be termed as a one-off attempt at OD, at the level of ‘structure’ and ‘behaviour’ respectively.)

Several features, inherent in the very nature of government (though not of governance, it may be noted in passing), could possibly account for this omission, apart from the fact of the two professions—managerial and bureaucratic—choosing to look away from each other in disdain and beratement, in Kipling’s ‘East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet’ vein:

- absence of an incontrovertible and tangible ‘bottom-line’ in government functioning (profit in case of the firm), which is to be maximised;
- the open-ended nature of the range of responsibilities of Government (as compared to the finite and bounded remit of the firm), which detracts from crisp outlining of a Mission Statement (to serve as the ‘mother statement’ for all other purposes of formulation of organisational strategy etc.);
- the diffused nature of ‘ownership’ of government, with no clearly identified equivalent of ‘top management’ of a firm;
- the absence of goals articulated in clear, operationalisable language understandable at the ground level due to the political nature of governments;
- the sheer vastness—size/number of employees, which adds to inertia.

The key difference between the functioning of a business firm and a government department lies in the first of the factors listed above—the absence of a measurable ‘bottom-line’ in government functioning. That results in the watchword in the latter not being ‘optimisation’ but what has been termed as

‘satisficing’—getting by with the minimum effort required for keeping out of trouble i.e. a negative orientation instead of a positive one, against which the utility of all activity in the organisation can be weighed.

However, once we recognise that in the ultimate analysis, a country is, in addition to being a political unit, a socio-economic system, which seeks to deliver higher standards of living and satisfaction to its citizens, steering the ‘ship of state’ also becomes a case of ‘strategic management’ of an entity, be it an omnibus one such as the State itself—setting a direction for the nation, defining what sort of a society we are seeking to establish, anticipating the likely storms that could be encountered and the options available in the light of external conditions and constraints prevalent and so on.

Just as in management of a ‘for profit’ organisation, here in government organisations also there is need to ensure that its different constituents do not work at cross purposes to one another. They must (be made to) reinforce each other. It is the job and responsibility of the leadership to maintain the right pattern of congruence between the various variables affecting performance and design the system so as to achieve positive material and non-material outcomes.

With some adaptation to account for the very different contexts and *raison d’être* of the corporation and the State, the ‘strategic management’ approach based on insights of OT and OD might thus be applied to government functioning as well. At least to the extent of foregrounding the success factors identified in corporate functioning, to whatever degree that be feasible in any particular case at any given point of time.

The contingency perspective of OD, in particular, should be able to provide a useful reference point for an exploration of possibilities of cutting through Gordian knots for improving the performance and delivery of government systems.

One has, however, to guard against expectations of quick successes, of a hurried, instrumental, approach of mechanical copying of *praxis* in the corporate sector being all that is required for invocation of the 'strategic management' approach in statecraft. Any serious endeavour would need to begin with a full-fledged research project for examining the applicability of the insights of OT, the Contingency Model of organisational functioning in particular, to government organisations in earnest. With a view to evolving a more sophisticated version, or variants, of the Model that can capture the features and activity profile of different government organisations aptly and accurately. That in itself would constitute an important step towards the objective of utilisation of the 'strategic management' approach and systems framework of OT/OD for structural reform of the government machinery.

The important lesson from the discourse on corporate strategic management and OT/OD is that successful orchestration of the inter-linked elements does not happen on its own; a conscious effort towards synergisation is required, and this essay-cum- proposal on 'Galvanising of the Ship of the Indian State' calls for such an effort.

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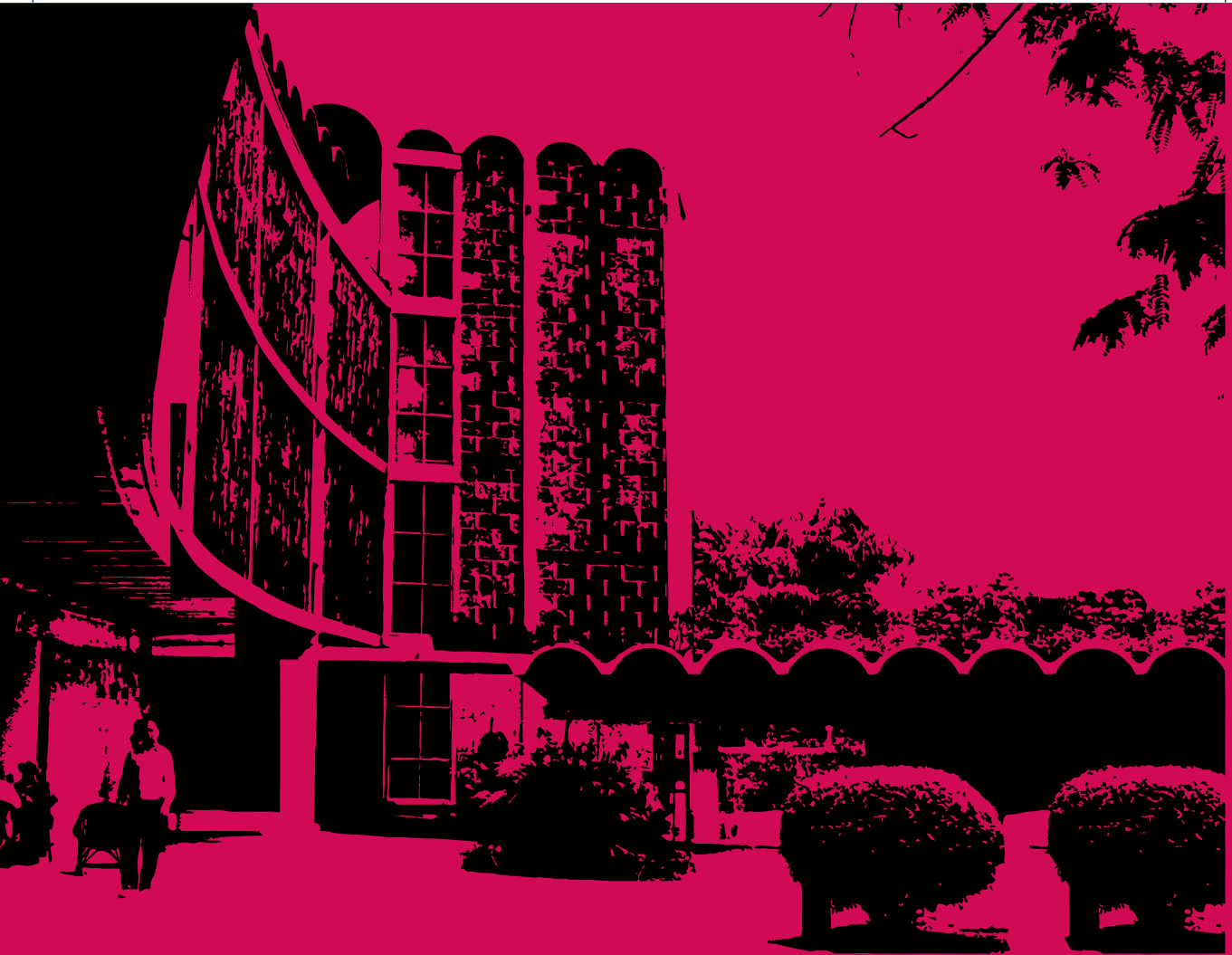
About the Author

A student of strategy and China, as he describes himself, **AMBASSADOR SAURABH KUMAR** was T.V. Raman Pai Chair Professor and Adjunct Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore during 2010-2020, after retirement from the Indian Foreign Service as the Indian Ambassador to the IAEA, UNIDO and the UN Offices in Vienna and to Austria. Prior to that, he served as the Ambassador of India to Ireland and Vietnam and in the Cabinet Secretariat, besides the Ministry of External Affairs.

He draws upon his experience of serving in the Cabinet Secretariat as Secretary (East) of its Joint Intelligence Committee in the late nineties, entailing spade work for evolving strategies for the political leadership for dealing with turbulence in India's external strategic security environment of the day in an 'all of Government' framework—the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty conundrum, fall out of Pokhran 1998, first stirrings of fluidity in the India-China-USA triangle, Technology Control Regimes, Taliban's first victory and others—in his current vocation as a strategic analyst.

Ambassador Saurabh Kumar began his diplomatic career in Beijing in the late seventies; a circumstance he regards as extremely fortunate for his education because of the timing, with the curtain being drawn on the Cultural Revolution, and a radical change of course being charted, in that country at that time following the passing away of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in 1976.

He has a background in management too, acquired fortuitously he maintains, as a doctoral candidate at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (1981-84); a position where he took himself to on return from Beijing, as he puts it, 'in a state of high cognitive dissonance at not having a handle on the drivers of the system-wide structural reforms launched by the late Deng Xioping in 1978-79 despite being witness to those paradigmatic changes in real time'.



The India International Centre was founded with a vision for India, and its place in the world: to initiate dialogue in a new climate of amity, understanding and the sharing of human values. It is a non-government institution, designed, in the words of its founder president, Dr. C.D. Deshmukh, to be a place where various currents of intellectual, political and economic thought could meet freely. 'In its objectives, the Centre declares its purpose as being that of society to 'promote understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or exchanging knowledge thereof, and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal appreciation.'

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