



Mr. Arun Jaitley
Hon'ble Minister of Finance & Corporate Affairs of India
Chief Guest-2017

Justice Dharmadhikari, Mr. Rahul Bajaj, Trustees of the Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation, distinguished members of the selection panel which selected the awardees this year and the awardees who have been honored with the award this year, ladies and gentlemen, let me at the very outset thank the Foundation for having invited me for this annual function and to associate me in honoring four persons who have been -- one of which is an organization really which has been working in different fields and has left their footprints in the area in which they work. These awards are in the memory of the Late Shri Jamnalal Bajaj about whom some mention has been made in the speeches particularly the one by Mr. Rahul Bajaj.

The power of freedom struggle and Gandhiji was such that it inspired people from almost every section of society to join it. Ordinarily, one would consider that leaders of industry would play it safe. Political activists can jump in, social activists can jump in. But, those who have large businesses, wealth and industry to defend, in fact to protect, would normally as per human instincts have been reluctant.

So, this was one relationship where a business leader almost put everything at stake and sacrificed everything. Not merely sacrificed everything, most members of his family became activists in the freedom struggle. Many of them landed up in prisons. And then that relationship between the freedom movement, essentially a political movement and a business leader where honest, honourable, transparent relationship which continued, you had very few examples of this kind.

Today if political leaders and businesses were to so intrinsically relate themselves, it might raise many eyebrows. But, that is different times. As Justice Dharmadhikari was reading from the text that Gandhiji himself had said that every rupee that Jamnalalji had earned was through honest and honourable means and he held it in his hands as a trustee for others itself. Examples like this are very rare.

And of course, you had cases of people involved in businesses and industry associating with public affairs. But over the years, the experience has been a varied one. Rahulji mentioned his brief tenure in the Rajya Sabha. He, of course, was one of the fortunate ones who had entered the Rajya Sabha after effectively retiring from business. So he used to very proudly tell us that I have handed over everything to other members of family, and therefore I have no other active business interest left.

Now ordinarily, one would have normally thought that it's an important area which contributed to the generation of wealth in the society. And therefore, where policies formulated, law is legislated, why should some voices of this group not be there? I don't think the final jury is still out, but even he would agree with me that experiences of late in this regard have been somewhat mixed. And therefore, we are waiting for that more honourable, that more transparent relationship to become evident. But then, I think times have changed. We were then in a freedom struggle which inspired people to almost give up everything. The struggle itself had a lot of moral force behind it.

The moral force and its power were so high that when historians ask the question that is it a fact that Gandhiji actually managed to push the British out of India. But then they answer it by saying, he actually did not push them out of India, he created a circumstance that the British found it morally to impossible to continue to stay in India, and that was the strength of that movement which he had created. And I am sure if this kind of a transparent relationship between those in public affairs and those in industry can be recreated, probably its ability to inspire and its ability to contribute would be itself much higher.

One basic question which has arisen from a string of the thanks giving speeches and the introductory speeches which have been made is how does one fight poverty and suffering as far as the society is concerned. And we in India have always been struggling for an answer. The individuals and the organizations which have been honored have indeed been working in various fields.

It goes to their credit that those who work in the civil society in these remote areas, the doctors from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences going to the tribal areas of Chhattisgarh which are some of the most deprived areas or the citizens of Delhi forming an organization to look after the street children in Delhi or the farmers in Uttar Pradesh. Now it goes to the credit of each one of them because each one of them has picked up an area which is extremely difficult, which is challenging where most people will be scared or reluctant to venture into, but they have ventured into those areas.

And these are those individuals, had they not been honoured today, most of us in this room would never have recognized them. We may never even have heard of them. It is these people who start as very marginal people -- marginal men and women, who don't do it for the *samaan* that they have got today, who don't do it for any monetary consideration, who don't even do it for any fame, and the honour they have incidentally been bestowed on them.

They do it out of the great sense of social commitment and get into those areas which are extremely difficult to venture into and leave great footprints behind in those areas. And therefore, their contribution varies amongst one of the most remarkable ones. But, the fundamental question of how do you fight poverty in India? I think the first element you have to fight poverty in India is that the society must have resources to fight poverty.

You need a high level of growth. Growth brings resources. So the policy of the state which achieves a higher level of growth is absolutely necessary. But will that growth itself alone remove poverty? The answer obviously is no. If growth alone won't remove poverty, the benefits of that additional resource, which the state has, then has to get transferred through various poverty alleviation schemes to the areas which are deprived.

And then, you require the social activism of these people to continue to flack the plight of those people to work in those areas, to knock at the heads of the policymakers and bring these people into the forefront. And then after effort of years and decades, we are actually able to pull them out of their present conditions of destitution. And I think whether it's governments, center or states, or its civil society, let us all resolve to work in this direction. And I am sure, we can then ensure that India itself would be a much better place to live in.

Thank you very much once again for having invited me.



