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Chief Guest -2001

These days one hears a great deal about governance including corporate governance and the responsibility of the business to all the stakeholders. But long before our times, Shri Jamnalal Bajaj set a great example of the highest standard integrity that business ought to be conducted on the basis of truth and honesty. For him wealth was only a means to promote the cause of philanthropy. While like political power, wealth was also to be considered as a trust to be used for the good of society. Both cease today to perform their function and it is a mother of deep regret to all of us that these values of honesty and integrity today are at a discount, both in our political life as well as in our business dealings. The life of Shri Jamnalal Bajaj characterized a very strong feeling of renunciation going beyond his feelings of charity. In all his activities, he was greatly assisted by his noble wife Shrimati Jankidevi who was also a notable freedom fighter. His sons, Shri Kamalnayan Bajaj and Shri Ramkrishna Bajaj, both firmly committed to the Gandhian value system carried forward with great devotion their father's noble, social and philanthropic work. I had the privilege of knowing Shri Ramkrishna Bajaj who laid great emphasis on ethical business conduct and was responsible for the establishment of the council for fair business practices. I shall always cherish the memory of my association with Shri Ramkrishna Bajaj whose life and work, like his illustrious father will continue to inspire our coming generations. The current Chairman of the Foundation Shri Rahul Bajaj, another very good friend of mine, has carried forward the work of the Foundation with commendable zeal. In him, our country has a great captain of industry in view with a high sense of dynamism and deep commitment to the twin goals of excellence and social equity. Despite significant industrialization even today, the proportion of our people dependent on the agriculture has declined only marginally since independence. At the same time, the share of the agriculture in our national income has declined drastically from 50% at the time of independence to less than 25% now. As a result the gap in per capita income and living standards between rural India and urban India has greatly widened, giving rise to increasing social tensions as well as violence in many parts of our country. We need, therefore a multi faceted strategy to address this major societal issue of our times. First, we must adopt credible strategies to raise incomes and productivity of our farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers and in particular those living under conditions of dry land and draught prone agriculture. Simultaneously, through adequate provision of basic needs and social services in our villages we must create an environment where people will not be tempted to prematurely rush to our towns and metropolitan areas. One of the great Nobel laureates, Sir Arthur Louise used to say, that the ways to beautify a country's towns and cities is to start by beautifying its villages. I feel using the tools of modern science and technology we must create opportunities of farm productive employment close to our villages. In the long run, we must lay adequate emphasis on a pattern of industrialization which is labour intensive, which is environment friendly so that we can reduce the pressure of the population on land, which is becoming oppressive in many parts of our country. But given modern technological trends the scope for creating large-scale jobs through industrialization of the classical type may not be as large as sometimes believed. All this then serves to emphasise the centrality of paying adequate attention to the promotion of integrated rural development on holistic basis. The economic reforms that we launched in 1991, had one of the principal objectives to get government out of activities which governments are not good at doing and get governments more actively involved in doing things which governments alone can do and rural development, agricultural development, infrastructure, these are the activities which at the present stage of development government have to be more actively involved with. But I also recognize that the development is something which cannot be left only to governments. For this government, the business community, the cooperative sector and the NGOs must pool all their knowledge, wisdom and experience. It goes without saying that any viable strategy of rural development has to be location-specific paying special attention to the aspirations of the local people and the resource endowment of the area concerned.

There has to be active and full involvement of local communities in the true spirit of the mutual help as self-reliance as emphasized by Gandhiji. I am very happy to know about the involvement of the Jannalal Bajaj Foundation in the field of rural development. I am told that the activities of the Foundation in this area are spread over several states and these are conducted by the Bajaj Group of Companies and voluntary organizations sponsored or supported by them. I sincerely hope that these activities will further grow in years to come and that they will induce other business houses also to get more actively involved in the promotion of the rural development. Equally important for the promotion of sustainable and equitable social and economic development through constructive work is the encouragement that this foundation gives to innovative, creative work by honoring every year four distinguished practitioners of the Gandhian value system for societal transformation. It is now obvious that a blind pursuit of western consumerist patterns of living is inconsistent with the resource and dumping of a poor country like India. Persistence in this path can lead only to serve the environmental degradation and further degradation of India's land, Water and air resources. Moreover, it will be associated with an unacceptable increase in social and economic disparities often leading to increased violence in our society. Therefore we need a new concept of monetization which does not reject the use of modern science and technology but seeks to harness its enormous potential to meet the basic needs of our people and to get rid of chronic poverty, ignorance and disease which still afflicts millions and millions of our people without waiting for the western levels of per capita national income which we will probably never achieve.

Looked this way the Gandhian ideals of promoting a development pattern which caters to the people's basic needs rather than pandering to human greed and which looks upon the owner's wealth as trustees for the society assumes great relevance. We need therefore a new synthesis of the role of competition and cooperation of the state and the market and the state and the civil society, security of state and concern for fundamental human rights. By honoring outstanding contributors in the field of constructive work and the application of science and technology for the rural development, uplift and welfare of our women and children and those other than Indian citizens who have contributed to the promotion of Gandhian values outside India, the Jannalal Bajaj Foundation seeks to act as a catalyst for promoting innovative, creative and constructive work in these areas of high social priority. All the four distinguished winners of awards of this year Shri Shishir Sanyal, Shri Anil K. Rajvanshi, Smt. Rahamat Sultan Fazalbhoy, Dr. Kumar are outstanding practitioners of Gandhian way of life. Their achievements in improving the human condition in the area of their chosen field are truly phenomenal. Their life and work are a shining example of striving for human spirit under heavy odds. Their lives are truly of life of people with great moral courage. They provide us a living proof that Gandhiji's ideals and ideas are not utopian, that given sustained effort, they can be a powerful instrument of the emancipation of the poor and downtrodden people that they provide us the guidance for waging a successful struggle against violence and growing social and economic disparity. The experiment conducted by our distinguished awardees for peaceful societal transformation show us new pathways to promote a new style and pattern of development which will not further accentuate the alienation of the marginalized people but will instead strengthen the banks of the social cohesion and promote true integration.

Ladies and gentlemen, peace and prosperity have been often described as indivisible in this one world that we live in. the environmental disaster awaits us if we do not wake in time to yet another indication of growing interdependent of nations and people of the world. After the tragic events of the 11th September 2001 in the as even terrorism has acquired global dimensions. But meeting violence by counter violence can have only limited effectiveness. We need new thought processes and action agenda to deal with the basic causes of growing violence and growing alienation of people in various parts of the world. The world clearly needs new pathways for bridging the yawning gap that now divides a small affluent minority and the vast majority of the world's population who lives under deplorable social and economic conditions. Those who preach and practice violence have to be persuaded about the futility of their path. This requires the quest for a more secured world must also include the search for a more just and more inclusive societies worldwide. Gandhiji's ideals, his philosophy and the Gandhian way of life constitute a powerful

lighthouse to lead us from the massive darkness that surrounds us today to bright daylight of Sunshine. Blessed are those who spent all their life practicing Gandhiji's teachings. In this respect the distinguished recipients of the awards this evening constitute powerful role models for our troubled worlds. They are unique blend of spirituality and social commitment. Like the great Shri Jannalal Bajaj they are the true karmayogis in tune with the spirit of Nishkam Seva. I salute them and invoke God's blessings for them as well as for the trustees of this Foundation so that they can all carry forward their noble work with still more effectiveness and dedication in years to come.

