

Publication: The Hindu - MetroPlus Weekend

Date: 14 Mar, 2014

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Pursuing path makers

CHAT Author and business leader Subroto Bagchi tells SANGEETA BAROOAH PISHAROTY that his latest, *Zen Garden*, tries to understand what makes trail blazers in a resurgent India

NEED TO LEAD Subroto Bagchi

Success is as much an individual feat as it is not. Simply because success is also a lesson, a means of opening a path, an example, for others – to learn from, to take on from there. Well-known author of business books and corporate leader Subroto Bagchi's latest rollout *Zen Garden* chases this very point throughout its pages with precision, also with an added inference.

A prolific writer and a sharp thinker, Bagchi highlights that at a time when many in India are "struggling with what it means to be an Indian," there is a greater need to have path-makers among us, and therefore the need to know what it takes to become one. The chairman of IT solutions company Mindtree Ltd. builds on the idea by engaging in conversations with a gallery of game changers drawn largely from the Indian-scape plucking out in the process what drove them to tread the paths they did.

The chapters in *Zen Garden* (Penguin India), formatted as conversations which first appeared as part of a column in *Forbes India* under the same name, are resplendent with nuggets of success mantras, fresh thinking and brainwaves. Put under 12 "distinct, defining qualities", the conversations engage nearly every big path-maker you can think of in India today. Excerpts from an email interview with Bagchi:

What is the motive behind the book? How significant are these success stories, these path-makers, for India today?

Growing up as a young professional, I was always fascinated by leadership. But I also found that most leaders, particularly inside our organisations, feel very remote from the average person. Beyond the command-and-control relationship, the average person in an organisation doesn't know how a leader's mind works; how the individual takes critical decisions; what are the drivers, the struggles, the insecurities. I felt that there is a lot of valuable stuff in there; harvesting that inner-self could hugely benefit countless people both inside and outside the organisation. I told myself, someday, I must attempt it. I must meet unusual people and make them come closer to everyone.

Turning to India, there is no question that we are a nation at a point of inflection. We are struggling with what it means to be Indian. The idea of India has become fractious. What is very disturbing is that there is a pervasive urge to trivialise issues, trivialise India. Hence, at a social and political level, we need path-makers like never before. Path-making in the socio-political world is way more complex than path-making in the world of business and entrepreneurship.

Have any of these conversations led you to unlearn something, see something with a fresh gaze?

Whenever I have come in proximity of unusual people, I have approached them with simple fascination. As a result, after each meeting, rather than being electrified with a particular stroke of brilliant

thinking, I have just trusted that I will be able to learn and unlearn and see things with a fresh perspective. But I have left it to subtlety; sometimes it is so subtle even I can't find it. We have to trust that subtle process.

You asked one of your interviewees "Is Government dying?" – a question many on the street are asking. What would be your response to the question?

In its current form, there is a real risk to government as an institution. However, all of us need governance; we need a collective process that must have some form of regulation. In India, we need to step back and think of our great grandchildren, we need to ask ourselves, would they be better off because we were there before them? We need to work backwards from that sense of a timeline and make some far reaching changes. These changes can't be done on the streets. They can't be done in anger. Anger is a bad emotion, it is meant for dealing with fleeting risks, not for architecting generational change.

What do you believe in?

We need to have a sense of legacy. We must believe that ordinary people can do extra-ordinary things. We must combine power with wisdom so that we give more to life than take out of it.

What next?

I am working on a book on the tendency to trivialise India, for Hachette. It is due for publishing somewhere in the second half of the year.