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Freedom Team of India

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Come on, liberals: Let's change India!

[Sanjeev Sabhlok](#)

Let me begin by acknowledging my gratitude to Mr S. V. Raju for offering me this valuable real estate each month to make my pitch on any subject of my choice.

My message is going to remain extremely simple, though. I want *you!* I want you to change the bad policy and corruption rampant in India. I want you to join politics. But I don't want you to join politics alone. There is no point in doing that. We need a well-orchestrated and well-coordinated strategy.

India is fast becoming ungovernable as a result of six decades of bad policies and corruption. Corrupt Nehruvian socialists who have ruined India for sixty years are now besieged by rabid communal forces from within and without. The BJP, an offspring of Jan Sangh, which was an offshoot of the Hindu Mahasabha, is determined to impose an intolerant *Hindutva* upon us and take us back 2000 years. We are getting sick and tired of this corruption and hatred. We want peace and prosperity. We want to live as *plain vanilla Indians*, not as Brahmins, Christians, or Maharashtrians.

The full expression of India's potential needs a strong liberal voice at its helm. But liberals have remained in the political wilderness after the Swatantra Party disbanded in 1973. Today, the concept of freedom has no proponent at the national level even as the policies of the erstwhile Swatantra Party are being stolen by both major political groups. But these political groups aren't liberals; they don't understand freedom. Economic liberalization is not going to work without a *suite* of liberal policies. We need law and order, infrastructure, and equality of opportunity. Without these we will only get increased corruption and continuing poverty.

India was lucky to get a liberal Constitution. Subsequently, Nehru's advocacy of democracy – even as he dismantled significant parts of the Constitution – built for us the semblance of a liberal democracy. But we are fast becoming an illiberal democracy. Liberal democracies need liberals but Indian liberals are missing from the scene! We must challenge this drift into chaos. We must gain the people's mandate to govern India.

I appreciate that it has been a hard grind for liberalism in the last sixty years, given Nehru's advocacy of socialism. As a result, liberals today are a disheartened lot and can't seem to summon the will-power even to try to lead. But freedom never came to anyone on a silver platter. It has always had to be fought for and won by *each* generation. Today it is our turn to fight, irrespective of whether we win or lose.

* * *

I'd like to introduce myself at this stage. I was an Indian bureaucrat from 1982 to January 2001. Now I am an Australian bureaucrat. I had a science background before joining public administration which means I had no understanding of economics, political science or political philosophy. I therefore faced a steep learning curve when I started working. Corruption and decadence, inefficiency and waste, sloth and incompetence met me everywhere. I found that governments in India are designed to burn public money and destroy entrepreneurship.

My head started spinning! I asked: Is this what I had signed up to do – to burn your money? Was there a science to government or must we have a free-for-all? Is there a choice between success or failure or must India necessarily go down the gurgler? I sought answers through academic study. During these studies a bulb went off in my head!

It dawned on me that reform had to start from the top; it had to be political. It also dawned on me that I had to stop pointing fingers at my corrupt bosses and start taking responsibility for myself. The shame of living in a totally corrupt India and not doing my best to change things would haunt my ghost for eternity! Therefore, I, a layman of limited ability, had to try to do uncommon things, irrespective of whether I succeeded or not. Leading the nation, it struck me, is actually an *ordinary* duty of *each* citizen in a democracy. We must all become leaders if we are not to become dung beetles, fit only to bury our faces in cow-dung at the end of our lives.

I met many Indians in 1999 and 2000 to advance this idea but found a lot of cynicism. We are so smart that we give up even before the fight begins! We seem to *know* in advance that nothing will ever change. I had absolutely no use for such useless cowards. I ask you: what good is all our learning if at the end of it we lose our spine? Creeping invertebrates.

But political reform was not a task to be attempted alone. I began looking into medium-term strategies. I moved to Australia in December 2000 and resigned from the IAS a month later. In 2004 I facilitated a week-long workshop of eminent liberals in Delhi. We agreed to support Sharad Joshi's Swatantra Bharat Party. I joined this party but left it in mid-2005 due to strategic differences. And so I started looking at the longer term, not in years but decades. We have to find hundreds of excellent people, else nothing will change. I started writing books. The first of these, [*Breaking Free of Nehru*](#), will reach bookshops in a few months. The other one, [*The Discovery of Freedom*](#), is an early draft. Please go to <http://sanjeev.sabhlokcity.com/>.

I still retain the fond hope that we actually do have sufficient good people in India today and therefore these books are redundant. I suggest that if we stop making useless excuses and start fulfilling our duty to India we will find enough people to change things. Since early 2008 I have started asking high caliber liberals with significant knowledge of good governance and a desire to contest elections to start assembling. At least three committed leaders per Lok Sabha constituency are needed, around 1500 in all.

To help these leaders assemble, I have started the **Freedom Team of India** at a temporary website: <http://freedomteam.in/>. To join this team you must be a team

player and possess infinite patience and regard for others. After the leaders assemble, we will work out a common platform, action plan, and leadership team. We won't organize before that. No point in making half-baked attempts.

A three-year campaign will then follow, spreading the message of freedom countrywide. People will be shown why liberals are good for them. Liberals do not allow power to go to their head and are not afraid to challenge anyone who is corrupt. Further, liberals are tolerant of differences in belief, they are humble and respectful of others, and their policies will banish poverty in three years. These are powerful messages to take to the people. Only after all this homework is done will the Team contest elections. If despite that it fails to form government it will learn from the experience and try again until it succeeds. India's future is too important for anyone to give up.

In the coming months I will discuss a range of issues and respond to questions and comments. I look forward to working with you.

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