

## Economy in India 2047 | Text Transcript | CIRCLE

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This is a text transcript for the recorded event “Economy in India 2047” presented by the Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Guelph. The event was recorded on November 23, 2021 and was moderated by Arjan de Haan. The guest speakers were Amitabh Behar, Sudha Narayanan, and Yamini Aiyar.

Transcript:

**Arjan de Haan:**

Welcome everybody, welcome to the CIRCLE panel discussion on India 2047. It's great that you could all join, I hope everyone is well, wherever you are. My name is Arjan de Haan. I've worked for 10 years at Canada's international development research center. And thank you Sharada, and the University of Guelph, and CIRCLE to invite me to moderate this event for you.

It's a great pleasure and honour. I'm based in Ottawa, like I said, I work for IDRC based in Ottawa which is on the unceded territory, and I speak to you from the unceded territory of the Algonquin peoples.

This event, on India 2047, is hosted by CIRCLE at the University of Guelph, CIRCLE was established in February 2020. CIRCLE is the Canada India Research Center for Learning and Engagement, and I think Sharada Srinivasan and colleagues have done a tremendous job to renew the interest in working on and working with India, out of Canada.

So CIRCLE aims to be an interdisciplinary nucleus for cutting research on India and with the Indian diaspora to showcase, advocate and catalyse, foster an equitable, respectful, and sustained exchange of knowledge between Canadian and Indian scholars. And again, it's such a privilege to be part of this and hosting this event for you.

Before I tell you what the event is about and I introduce the fantastic panel that we have, a few logistical comments. I think everybody after 19 months is very familiar with how zoom meeting work, but let me go through them nonetheless.

Of course, we try to establish a respectful platform here, where everybody has an opportunity to share ideas, and with that to facilitate the logistics.

Please make sure that you remain on mute, I understand that everybody has the opportunity or to open a mic, and that may come, you may have the opportunity later But please stay on mute and please, for the interest of clear pictures and so on, keep the video off.

We will come to the Q and A session after the three presentations of course. In the meantime, there is a chat function of course, where you can post your questions throughout and at the end in the Q and A session, I will either take interventions by people or read out the questions that you post.

Please do put your questions in the chat function rather, at any point of time and I will read those out. The event is being recorded so that we hope it can be made available later, with time zones and all on availability of people this is a great opportunity and by participating, we understand that you agree that this will be recorded.

So that's it for the logistics, there's a chat function in case you have questions, concerns do let us know. The topic of today is and of the series is India 2047. We're at the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of India as a nation and this is a great time to think about what the last 75 or 25 years have looked like. And what the next 25 may have looked like.

India, of course, has been since independence at the forefront of a development model of a democratic nation that has promoted economic growth and human development. Probably not as fast as many would aspire, inequalities have remained large but it has that distinct development model.

Of course, the pandemic has thrown up many, many questions. India has been particularly badly affected, then again this is an important moment to reflect on what this means for its development model and what's happening, what may be happening, what visions exist for the next 25 years.

And of course, I know many of the speakers will come to that of course. The last decade or so also, many questions about its political system, its system of governance and democracy, there's many, many issues that have come up, The global environment has changed, many questions have come up against what they did with the original plans.

So we've got three fantastic speakers to think with us about this., about where India is at that 75 mark, and what the vision is for the next 25 years and it's my great privilege to start, I will introduce all the speakers, but I'll do that when they start speaking, rather than at the beginning.

Our first speaker of today, thank you Amitabh so much for joining us, is Mr. Amitabh Behar, who is currently the Chief Executive officer at Oxfam India. He's also the president of Yuva. Amitabh, in your introduction, feel free to say anything about the role as it's relevant to this topic of course. And his dedication has been throughout his career to promote stronger governance and civil society in India, and globally.

He's advocating for that in his current role and he has written about this extensively. So again, Amitabh it's a great honour that you can join us, that you kick off this debate, and we look forward to hearing about your vision for, as we said, you know, the vision of India for the next 25 years.

All the speakers have 15 minutes, and I will try to keep us to time in the interest of having a good discussion at the end of the three contributions. Amitabh, thank you so much, over to you.

## Amitabh Behar:

Thank you Arjan and thank you Sharada for inviting me. I must say that I'm really delighted to be part of this conversation. Though I'm not very sure if this is a good moment to talk about 2047. It is a fairly gloomy moment and I do not have much optimism to offer. But that's how the story is.

Let me still try and do this in two parts. The first is to try and talk about how I look at India at the moment and what could be the possible pathways for a more optimistic future. But the silver lining is probably what we heard three days ago in terms of the announcement of the repeal of the farm laws.

It does tell us that people's power still works and Indian democracy still has some teeth left in it. So just wanted to start with that. But I was saying it's really a pessimistic time because I did lose not one, two friends during COVID's second wave, waiting for just an oxygen cylinder at the reception of hospitals. Everybody saw those very, very, you know, tragic pictures of dead bodies floating in Ganga.

So that's the context. But let me just say that COVID obviously was external, but the health system is something that we have created and what we saw was a health system which was completely crumbling.

Remarkable work done by the paramedics, the nurses, the doctors, but the health system was certainly completely, it had collapsed. And you know, just to give you this picture why I say I'm fairly down and pretty much heartbroken with this experience, but also with what's happening. Let me give you just one data point on this, that in India in 2010 we had 10 beds per thousand in Indian hospitals, which has actually come down according to the HDR to five beds per thousand in 2020. So, you're actually looking at shrinking of the health system and that's something that we have done through our policy design.

Let me just, you know, talk of couple of things. For a group of this kind, I'm not going to go into a lot of details, but I'm fairly sure everybody knows that one-third of the global poor live in this country, one-third of the globally malnourished children are in this country. The numbers can be contested, it could be slightly higher and this grim scenario is happening in the context of growing inequality.

And I just want to know of, you know, flag those different faces of inequality that we encounter on a daily basis. And I'll just take you back to our report two years ago, the Oxfam India Inequality Report and I think you know, one of those powerful killer stats that we had which said that literally nine people, nine people and all men, no surprises, had more wealth, two years ago than fifty percent of the Indian population. So, that's almost like nine people more wealthy than say 650 million people.

That's the level of inequality we are looking at. You know, I just want to continue building on this inequality piece or by giving you a couple of other examples. To talk about the different dimensions and the faces of inequality.

A few years ago, I was in Marathwada for drought relief. And it was a very very tiring day, tiring physically but mentally also exhausting to actually see people walk kilometres and kilometers for water, livestock; literally dying.

And then I drove back to Pune, and I was supposed to drive back to Mumbai to take a flight. Between Pune and Mumbai, they were hoarding every five kilometres. Mind you, I'm coming from Barwani after this tough day. Every five kilometres there were hoardings, talking about flats with independent swimming pools and there were pictures of that in Mumbai, flats were being sold with independent swimming pools. And I just couldn't, you know, take that coming from Barwani and then eventually seeing those.

And this was being advertised in the country. This morning in fact, I was in a meeting. It's a coalition which is called "Girls Count" and we work on declining child sex ratio. And I think it's absolutely devastating that in 2011, we don't have the numbers now, but the last count that we had, 2011, we had only 916 girls in zero to six for thousand boys.

And if nature has its way, it should be thousand for thousand-five, that's the level of inequality we are seeing in terms of gender, but this is way more tragic and Amartya Sen talks of the missing millions. So, for every thousand we are missing almost 84 girls, for every thousand, in a country of 1.3 billion.

That's what we're looking at gender. And just to give you one more data point: in 2007, I worked with a group called Safai Karmachari Andolan, and they work with manual scavengers. And they came out with this devastating report, that in 2017, in just the NCR - which is Delhi and the satellite towns around Delhi - there were seven deaths every 15 days of people who went inside the gutters of Delhi just cleaning the sewage lines.

And I am particularly highlighting this, you know, the tragedy of losing people is obviously extremely sad, but all these people, every 15 days seven people dying, they were all from just one particular caste. So the realities of gender discrimination, of caste discrimination continue.

And in some cases, they've just got amplified. And let me, you know, what really aches my heart today, is the story of what's happening with the Indian Muslims and the lynchings that we have seen starting from Akhlaq to Junaid to now. What we are seeing is a systematic assault even on the livelihood of Muslims, people who just do small carts and who earn daily wages.

So that's the scenario we are in. How do you deal with it? You know I'm trying to now look at the brighter side, I hope there is a brighter side, but let me just say that I do feel very, very worried with what's happening in the country at the moment.

So, it's a tough one to talk of 2047. But let me specifically talk of five things which hopefully can give us a pathway. According to me this is a pathway. It's not going to be very innovative, I'm not going to talk of new things, if somebody just tells me go back to 1947 and go back to the dreams of 1947, I would probably be happy to just take those dreams and work with those dreams. But let me specifically talk of five things that I have thought of.

The first one I think we need to have a very serious discussion about the role of the Indian state. We've seen the journey of Indian state from being a welfare state to post 1991, we heard it had become a regulatory state, but what we are seeing now is a predatory state.

We've seen how it is siding with corporate interests, few corporate interests, few individuals, and how it is actually converting public resources into private profits. So, the crony capitalism that we're looking at is something which has become real, and it's certainly not going to take us to a just and equal, sustainable society. If that's the objective, we need to be going back to the idea of the welfare state.

The second, I would say, very real and serious investments in the idea of human rights and let me say two things on this. The first as many of us, I certainly know at least Yamini and I have been working on economic rights, social rights for a long time. And just to give you data on health because I was talking about health, we have just been investing 1.25 percent of the GDP on health, which is way below other countries.

It's really as most of the other countries actually invest five, seven, nine percent so even in South Asia, we are doing fairly badly in terms of investments in public health. Whereas every government and I think after the, 8<sup>th</sup> five-year plan, every government, every political party has promised two to three percent, but we are still not being able to achieve that which has reflected in what we saw during the COVID second wave.

So, we certainly need serious investments, we did right to education many years ago, but we are seeing is there's a study that we do as the Right to Education Platform, only 12 percent of Indian schools are "right to education" compliant.

So there's a huge gap in terms of the aspiration of the right to education, the right to health, other socio-economic rights. But, we ,we have not built the state capacity to deliver these rights. But the second I wanted to say is which I would have probably not said five years ago, is that many of us also made that mistake of focusing on socioeconomic rights and not adequately on civil-political rights.

I think that's critical, we all talk of indivisibility of right, but we ended up probably naively looking at the discourse of development and kind of forgot the civil political rights bit. But I think it is absolutely critical that we work on civil political rights in multiple ways. Amnesty has been asked to leave this country, but we need many, many, many, more amnesties here at the moment.

The third thing that I wanted to say is really just, you know, going back to the Indian Constitution. It is probably one of the most remarkable documents and I still feel inspired every time I read the preamble of our Constitution.

Every time I feel inspired and I think we were in 1947 experimenting with something really path-breaking, bringing in justice to the preamble of our Constitution, talking about equality as

a central idea for the new Indian Republic. But our last 75 years have been fairly tough in many ways in terms of equality, in terms of justice.

And there's much ground to cover which I certainly feel that in just the last six, seven years we've gone on the reverse path. So that's a huge worry. But on this, I would say two specific things: that we completely forgot to work on the idea of fraternity which is so central to the idea of Indian Constitution and probably any democracy. In political theory, people would probably talk about it, but in reality, we just kind of forgot about it.

So the rebuilding has to be done through looking at fraternity also in a very very serious way. Otherwise, we are looking at where we'll have minorities as second-grade citizens which certainly is not the idea of India I'm going to accept and we'll need to fight for it.

The fourth that I wanted to say is just moving on to the idea of democracy itself. You know Arjan, in his opening comments talked about it and yes, you can look at it in multiple ways there are many and I have often said that in India, democracy gets reduced to one day of voting. And you do not have really democratic systems, processes, post that day of voting.

Let me also say that maybe I'm being very cynical because of the immediate context, democracy is also delivered in many ways. When I was growing up, even you know that's just in say 80s I could have never imagined that we would have a Dalit chief minister in Uttar Pradesh, but it did happen. So democracy has also delivered in some ways.

But what we need is a brick by brick building of democracy. It has to be a social democracy, it is substantive democracy. So the procedural and normative democracy that we talked of, it's anyways being eroded, with the onslaught of Hindutva, with the onslaught of the new idea of India which is being talked of.

I think the counter to this is to rebuild democracy brick by brick and we'll have to start with gram sabhas, we need a lot of thinking, but I do think that's critical.

And my fifth and final point is that I must say, these are also, in some ways, the pathways that I'm talking of. I do not have much hope from the mainstream parties. So the political system does not inspire confidence. But I do feel that the civil society is going to be the site of action for the next 25 years.

So, what I talked of, if we're going to achieve that, the site of action is going to be civil society. I do understand, I come from civil society, I'm very very critical of how we function, we are splintered, we do lack courage in many many ways. But if you still look at the most recent history, the real challenge to the homogenizing Hindutva has come from the civil society.

So we've just seen the big victory of the farmer's agitation, I think the NRCCA was another massive milestone. I would even say that, if you remember, the first challenge to this authoritarian populist, chest-thumping prime minister, actually came from the students -

started from a very small film and television institute, went to Banaras to JNU to Jamia, so I do have a lot of hope.

And civil society will need to redesign itself. The foreign contribution regulation that etc. are going to be just incidental. They need much more courage and to take on the challenge of this alternative idea of India head on. And re-establish I think, our idea of India which was in 1947 relevant and I think it's still relevant.

I do hope that, you know, in 2047 when Vir Das is speaking, he's not speaking of two Indias, and he's speaking of only one India. The India that Indian Constitution talks of, the preamble talks of. Thank you.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thank you so much Amitabh, thank you for sharing that with us. So sorry to hear about your losses during the pandemic which many particularly in India and elsewhere in the world have suffered, and important how you connect that to the investments in healthcare systems that were made.

One thing that comes out very strongly in your presentation, there's already a question about in how inequalities relate to social cultural realities. It's the interconnectedness of the challenges that raise the dream of India was I think an interconnected set of one dream and there are very clear issues in each of them and how they relate to each other which makes the discussion both, very hard and very important to have. So, I hope we can come back to that.

And also, thank you for those points of mild optimism perhaps and that changes do happen and where I think you said the democracy still has its teeth as we've seen recently. So very important to hold on to this as well.

We quickly move on to our next speaker, and Amitabh also already referred to one of the challenges of lack of progress inequalities have been in food security in India. Which I think in the 1980s people would have found quite unimaginable how much of a challenge that would still be 75 years into independence. So, for that reason, it's great and thank you so much for joining us, Sudha.

Sudha Narayanan's bio says - read it on the website - passionate about agriculture and food and nutrition policies. She's currently a research fellow in the South Asia regional office of International Food Policy Research Institute, previously worked at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Economic Growth. So, Sudha, over to you, thank you so much for joining us and looking forward to your comments.

**Sudha Narayanan:**

Thank you very much, I'm just going to share my screen here. And I also want to begin by saying that if anyone had told me that we would have to look to the agricultural sector for optimism I would have not believed myself.

But I guess what I'm trying to portray here is a pragmatic view of what we are going to see in the next 20 years, the incredible and formidable challenges that we face. But challenges that can be met with a little bit of effort. So let me start with the future of farming in India. Many people would actually say that this begs the question, is there a future in farming in India? And what does the scenario look like?

In 2012, 2013 all of us were quite startled that 41% of the farmers in the nationally representative survey said they would like to exit farming if they had an option. And that same survey actually said that agricultural households were actually earning as much as 40 percent from our farm sources, 32 percent of it was via wages.

And, a decade after the 2019 survey that's very similar to the previous one says the share of income has actually increased. So these are agricultural households that depend heavily on our farm resources.

Average land holding size is 1.08 hectares, declining over time. And the bulk of them actually have less than one hectare. And the story is this distressing that if you have less than one hectare, your incomes, net incomes, barely cover your consumption expenses, let alone making investments or meeting debts. And 52% of all agricultural households were in debt and what we find is since the survey in 2012-13 does not mean much improvement.

Now you would think that this prompts a huge shift away from farming into other occupations in the non-farm sector, and we do see some declines in those who identify themselves as main cultivators. You do see a little bit of a decline in the last decade or two, but nowhere in comparison to the kind of things we associate with structural transformation. And if you look at the data closely, several of them are dispossessed. So they used to own land and were main cultivators, but that's no longer the case.

Many of them have actually joined the labour force as functionally landless or landless workers. On the other hand, you see agricultural workers, the numbers are still increasing, the share of the population or workforce may be declining, but it's doing so at a very slow pace. So what does this mean that you still have these large numbers dependent on agriculture, but with the land, actually cultivated land, not growing? And here actually India bucks the global trends.

So across the world, outside of South Asia, you see farms becoming larger farms, fewer and India bucks the trend of farm consolidation where you have an increase in the number of smallholders and operational holdings and that trend has been steadily continuing.

Now why has this happened? Because I think this is the central issue with where we are headed as we go towards 2047. We do see a subdivision of land holdings across generations, this is the primary driver of smaller land sizes. And it actually varies across the country depending on the pace of demographic transitions.

We find that states that still they haven't completed the fertility transition, there's still scope for these land holdings to get further subdivided. There is on the other hand, advanced



agriculture areas where this transition is over, it's actually stabilized and it's no longer feasible economically to subdivide land further. But historically the Indian policy has always been favourable to small holders.

Now this is debatable in terms of how it's implemented, but overarchingly, if you look at it, there are land ceilings, there are restrictions on the transfer of agricultural land to non-farmers.

Many states are now toying with these laws to change those to invite land acquisition by non-farmers. So all of this is not perfect, but by and large including the efforts had land reform in some states, policy has favoured smallholdings over consolidation.

So that's on the farm sector, the other way is why are we not seeing this large-scale movement away from agriculture? Simply because exit is simply not an option. You still have 50 percent deriving livelihoods from agriculture, even though the share of contribution of agricultural GDP has gone down. And that has to do with the very peculiar nature of structural transformation in India.

There are not many routine jobs, there are precarious livelihoods, poorly paying and poor working conditions. And then when you look at it historically in other countries, the movement away from land and the disconnect from land comes when there are routine jobs. So that ties with land are broken.

That's not happening in India, it's unlikely to happen. So land continues to be a fallback option and that was no more clearly evident than in the COVID-19 crisis when the return migrants actually went to till the land. So the largest spike in employment we saw was actually in the farming sector.

There's also an interesting phenomenon on who farms and this is work actually I've done with Sharada herself, on pathways into farming. And across a lot of regions, especially where the urban non-farm sectors exploded, many people associate farming with lower status and manual labour.

There are of course caste, class issues associated with respectability of farming. But at the same time you see in a lot of areas the previously landless communities and castes are actually, their aspirations, are actually to enter farming. So you have this a lot of variation across the country. But the fundamental thing is going forward to 2047, we are going to see India being a nation of smallholders.

Ties with land are not going to get broken so easily, so complete exit, we are not going to see. And as long as there is no drastic change in the policy that favours consolidation, something that Amitabh mentioned about crony capitalism, we are going to see, we are going to be a nation of smallholders.

Very often this idea of structural transformation - exit from agriculture - is also seen as accompanied by technology transition. And globally there is a talk of agriculture 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

and 4. And basically looking at the different revolutions of agriculture that parallels the industrial revolution. But the industrial revolution in fact feeding the changes in agriculture.

So I won't talk about this in detail, but essentially it's about settled agriculture, some basic revolution with machinery and chemicals, then post-war increased through seed development and mechanization. Some people extend it to computers and robotics, now. And then, now we are supposedly in what is agriculture 4, which is the use of big data analytics, cloud computing, and blockchain.

And if you look at the contrast to conversations in India about this transition, essentially there are only two. So that is the first three is called one and then we have kind of pole vaulted to four. This is not to say that we are leaving the old behind, it's just that the technology transition in agriculture, in India is also very particular in the sense that there's coexistence of all of these different regimes of technology and each of it is viewed as something that will solve the agricultural problem, and in particular, the smallholder problem.

And so we now are in a scenario of great optimism that ag-tech is going to bring., And that's the central message that I want to convey, that when we think of technology, there are several guiding principles and in the context of India, it has to be smallholder-centric and people-centric.

And technology cannot solve a small-holder problem if it doesn't want to sustain. Yeah, we want to be able to support smallholder agriculture as a social imperative and this agriculture and ag-tech and technologies in agriculture cannot, be viewed to solve the problem by making the small-holders go away.

And if you look at the trends in mechanization, it just reinforces what I've been saying. If you look at the last 40 years of transition, draft labour has gone down, but human labour continues to be high. So the mechanization has actually replaced draft animal labour, but not human labour.

And so agriculture continues to be a source of food and employment, but it's happening under very complex and diverse conditions that varies across regions. Looming environmental challenges, some of it in fact a consequence of the Green Revolution, poor soils, groundwater, and then there is this looming crisis of climate change threats across the country.

Again, different in different regions. And we are slowly seeing the emergence of consolidation of corporate interests and big business whether it's in seed, in marketing, and the current ongoing thing is accompanying ag-tech.

We are going to see a huge digital consolidation. We already have a lot of controversies around technology, especially with GMO and gene editing technology, and now emergence of agri-tech.

And the point I guess I want to emphasize here is that all of these technologies are trying to solve a smallholder problem without explicitly incorporating smallholders as part of who they want to help. One instance, for example, in the emergence of ag-tech is that smallholders who hitherto, did not have extension services are now going to be able to access these technologies and improve productivity.

At the same time, when you look at the way agri-tech is unfolding here, the control is very much, even though there are a lot of small-scale start-ups. It's only a transitional phase where we do anticipate that big business is going to acquire these small players. And the reach - the last mile issue of reaching the smallholder - is still a problem that remains unresolved.

But there are opportunities. The expansion of production, we think of technology solving the productivity problem, but there's huge scope to also expand on the extensive margin where irrigation penetration in India is still pretty limited, only 48 percent is irrigated, and only 41 percent of the areas cropped more than once.

So while there is a focus on yield gaps and covering them via technological interventions, very simple, old solutions, like providing sustainable irrigation is still relevant across many states because it's not true of the mature agriculture Green Revolution areas, but other areas there's still a huge scope.

And those investments are essentially, especially as fertile agricultural land is diverted to urban uses, we need more marginal areas to come under production and that investment is required. And India's advantage of huge domestic demand, the problem so far has been when people say that we need higher productivity to lower prices for the poor, we also have to keep in mind that wage rates haven't increased very much.

So as long as the wage rates increase, the ability to pay would increase and so the pressure is not to keep farmer prices down, but actually to ensure that incomes overall go up, so that the food becomes affordable to the people, because of their rise in incomes. And today we have moved largely away from a food-crane dominated system.

In 2018 we saw for the first-time horticulture overtaking food grain production. So many of the critiques of the farmer protests as well as the Green Revolution that there is absence of diversification, maybe true of specific regions, but not of the country overall. Likewise, milk, poultry, and fish are increasingly becoming important paths.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Just a reminder of the time, maybe you can try to wrap up in about two minutes?

**Sudha Narayanan:**

Yes, yeah. So the agriculture policy making in India is quite fraught with a lot of contradictions. We on the one hand, we have legacy problems. We have a procurement policy and fertilizer subsidies that we have inherited from the Green Revolution era.

We are still struggling with that. But it's also a bundle of contradictions where you promote organic farming on the one hand, with larger subsidies for chemical fertilizers, you promote smallholder dairy with a ban on cow slaughter and you have export promotion policies, but you ban exports without any warning.

There's also and this is something that conforms to what Amitabh said, is a recent trend towards centralization which is quite disconnected from local needs and issues. And the complete breakdown of center-state coordination, which is very imperative when you talk about problems like climate change.

This is my last like, just a bunch of takeaways. I anticipate that we are going to be a nation of smallholders where it's going to be peasants who are actually more looking like labour households. So it's going to be landed labour with pluri-activities. Agriculture is not going to go away from their livelihood portfolios.

And historically we have focused on solving the problem of agriculture sector by relying on the non-farm sector to absorb farmers or former farmers, and my submission is that we need to focus on agriculture sector as a sector that can generate employment and sustainable livelihoods.

The third point I want to make is technology cannot independently solve which problems nor can economic policy, the two are very linked. But often it's driven by efficiency goals and I feel that we need to have environmental and social sustainability guiding principles.

The fourth point is that Indian agriculture is too diverse for it to be dealt with in a centralized way, it demands local action. And I want to flag the role of civil society that has been doing incredible work in the area of climate change adaptation and food security.

In short, I believe we should have a pragmatic approach to accommodate plural agricultures and that's a huge challenge, and it's going to be slow but I think, I'm an advocate of gradualism which offers scope for course correction rather than big bang and magic bullet efforts. So I'll stop there and thank you very much.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thank you, thank you so much, Sudha. That was such a clear, important contribution. The lack of, again, back in 1947, people would no longer expect it in 2021 to be having this, this discussion. The lack of transformation and so important, so that your emphasis, this is the reality that it is, it needs policies that are both suited to that context, take into account the new challenges.

And these to be context, specific policies and involve stakeholders in a civil society which of course Amitabh commented as well. So, thank you very much for that. There are questions coming in please continue to add those and I will try to, if possible, organize this in the discussion. Before we get there, of course last in our wonderful panel is Yamini Aiyar who needs

very little introduction I believe. She is of course the president and CEO of the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi.

She's worked for many Indian as well as international organizations including the World Bank, Ford foundation, I follow her closely on social media and I'm so happy to introduce her as the last speaker. Yamini, the floor is yours.

**Yamini Aiyar:**

Thank you, thank you very much for inviting me to this wonderful discussion and giving me the toughest task there is, now having to think of something more profound and newer to say than my two wonderful panelists that spoke before me. So apologies, I don't think I'll be able to live up to that task.

I may well end up repeating what a lot of what Sudha and Amitabh have said, so with that I was asked to think about what an inclusive Indian economy or economic policy could look like in 2047.

And much like Amitabh and Sudha, my starting point is somewhat more, somewhat pessimistic. In fact it's deeply pessimistic, and also recognizes the many deep uncertainties in which we find ourselves today, in 2021. I think a decade or so ago, had we had this conversation, the tone and tenor of how each one of us would have approached this question would have been remarkably different.

Because I think we stand at a particularly critical juncture today where fundamental, foundational, accepted certainties about India, even as though those uncertainties may well have been shaky on occasion, but all of those certainties combined look far shakier today than they did even a decade ago. And I'll emphasize four, but while focusing specifically on two.

The foundational pillars of India: a liberal constitutional order, a commitment towards deepening political democracy, a commitment towards social inclusion and an expectation and anticipation of growth.

These were four foundational pillars on which the India story was built and particularly in the post-1991 narrative of India, this was what was distinctive about India's growth and India's developmental model, shaky as it may have been in some areas, but the aspiration was clear. Amitabh spoke about the uncertainties of political commitment to a liberal constitutional order and the very deep vulnerabilities in a political democracy.

I won't emphasize those more than to say I completely endorse everything that Amitabh said and Sudha spoke about this as well. There are some elements of democracy that remain strong and robust, and really, it is the mantle of holding on to our democracy today rests far more firmly with civil society than it does with our mainstream party politics.

And that battle will continue and hopefully be won by civil society. But let me focus a little bit on the two other pillars, social inclusion and growth.

Again, we touched on these in both the presentations earlier. But I want to start by sort of emphasizing some of the very significant uncertainties that we confront today in the following ways.

I think the narrative of India's growth or rather the expectation that India will continue to see positive growth over time, and in the 2000s, the hope that growth will expand itself or reorient itself towards a focus on inclusive growth, are no longer certainties. Before the pandemic the Indian economy was already seeing a significant slowdown.

And I would argue, and that's the theme of what I want to emphasize, is that the reason we saw slowdown, we saw the economy slowdown, that many specific factors that contributed to that slowdown, but the big picture challenge was that we didn't actually have a robust, inclusive structural imagination of where the economy needed to go in order that all Indians become active participants in economic opportunity.

We focused specifically on growth, we did not focus on economic opportunity. That has presented itself with a context where inequality was widening, Amitabh spoke about this as well. But just one figure to give you a sense of how deeply significant the inequality challenge is, the share of total wealth of the top 1 percent of the population increased from 12 in 1981 to 42.5 percent in 2020, but the share of wealth of the bottom half 50% in fact dropped as a percentage of total national income.

So to give you a sense of how deep inequality is in India, and it's not just a factor of initial divergence to eventual convergence, you compare the Indian economy with China and you see that the inequality, structural inequality is far deeper here. But this structural inequality was also reflecting itself in an aborted structural transformation, I think.

Sudha spoke of the complexity of India's structural transformation, but what has been important about India in the last two to three years, but well last year pre COVID and then COVID of course exacerbated all of this is that we in fact saw a reversal back into agriculture as was evident from the last periodic labour force surveys.

So growth, equity, and structural transformation or a pathway towards structural transformation all that were accepted certainties for India, slow sputtering, but certainties today in 2021 as we think forwards towards 2047, don't look as certain as they did even a decade ago.

India's demographic dividend the great hope that would lead us to a strong path towards economic growth, I would argue today looks like a demographic ticking time bomb. A ticking time bomb because we didn't, as Amitabh pointed out, invest effectively in health.

We also failed entirely to invest effectively in education. We managed to some degree to universalize access, but we completely failed on outcomes. So even before the pandemic, fifty percent of children in standard five can barely read a standard two text.

India today sits on what is the world's longest school closure, primary schools are not open in a large part of the country. It's been over 21 months. Digital access is limited, so a large proportion of Indian students have not seen the inside of a school or not had any schooling for these last 21 months.

The learning loss is huge and we, honest to God, do not have a plan for what this is going to do. I suspect a whole generation and more of students are going to deeply suffer as a consequence. India's formal and informal economy which is also at the heart of what we expected for our structural transformation, the informal economy will eventually formalize.

We haven't quite figured out the pathway. But what's particularly worrying today is that the formal economy has expanded and COVID has enabled that in no small measure. The informal economy has shrunk, not because the informal is transitioning to formal, but because the informal has now been invisibilized even more. Our ability to invest and strengthen in medium and small enterprises, and transition medium and small enterprises in towards the formal economy, despite various efforts like the goods and services tax which were billed as efforts to formalize in an economy, have failed significantly.

We today sit on a labour regulatory regime that supports neither labour nor capital and every time we seek to reform it, we end up trying to support more capital, but failing at doing that too, lending itself to an extremely complex regulatory regime that helps nobody and only undermines possibilities.

The last of the uncertainties we confront links to the complex 21<sup>st</sup> century transitions that we face. The transitions that we face linked to technology, the transitions that we face linked to climate change, all of which means that the old imagination of transformation from farm to non-farm, urbanization, manufacturing, the linearity of those transitions no longer seemed clear.

The East Asian model of exporting your way to prosperity in an environment of deglobalization also no longer seemed clear. All of which combine to exacerbate the uncertainties in India's growth story and also highlight the fact that we need to think very differently and very creatively of what our growth pathway could and should in fact, look like.

And this is where I'll come to the second part of my talk which is thinking through what this could be. I believe that India's growth narrative will only build itself in a progressive direction, one that emphasizes inclusion and underplays the fault lines that our growth story of the last 30 years actually highlighted, is one that builds on new imagination.

And I offer a few starting points of how to think about this. The first element of this new imagination has to be a very different understanding of markets and the relationship between state and markets. The narrative of India in 1991, perhaps coming off the licensed Raj, was a narrative of getting the state out of the way, a narrative which saw the state as an impediment.

Rightly so, I think in more ways than one, but saw the answer as one of getting the state out of the way, “India grows at night while the state sleeps” - Gurcharandass infamous quip. In many ways epitomize the imagination of the 1991 moment and imagination that continues to think in no small way.

And we saw this in the farm laws to shape how we think of states, how we think of markets, and how we think of making markets work for the poor. What we know in 2021, especially after the last ten decades post the global financial crisis, that imagination for making markets work, that emphasizes deregulation, without adequately emphasizing building state capacity for regulation in the right way and the right form lends itself to an environment where crony capitalism inevitably wins.

The predatory and coercive instance of the state is always significant and the ability of the predatory instincts of the market to combine hands and join forces with the predatory instincts of the state are significant. So what we saw in that 1991 phase without investing effectively in the regulatory infrastructure of the state was a sort of two-faced capitalism, occasional dynamism, but deep predatory instincts unfolding, lending itself to the crony capitalism, that has in many ways and rightly so, built a deep distrust amongst the bulk of Indians in what markets can do.

I again think that this was very much reflected in the mobilization around the farm laws where the fear of corporatization was not because the farmers were captured by the left necessarily, many of the elite farmers, do not necessarily speak the grammar of the left. It is because there's genuine lack of trust on the ability of the free market minus the state effectively regulating it to protect interests of players in the market.

Don't forget that we are talking about markets in the context of deep structural and spatial inequality and deep information asymmetry. So the language we need to adopt is one that understands better.

What is the nature of state investment needed to make markets genuinely work? This means that there is a need for state investments in physical market infrastructure, in incentivizing supply chains, in managing risks, in enhancing bargaining power.

It means that the state need to carefully understand what it takes to build regulatory infrastructure, that means also thinking through the human resources and basic capacities needed to strengthen regulatory infrastructure, and how to balance transparency to ensure that regulation works. The second element of what we need to think about, yeah.

Arjan de Haan:

Yamini, sorry, a reminder of time if you can stop in three and a half minutes.



Yamini Aiyar:

Yeah, I will stop in three and a half minutes. The second element of what we need to reframe our imaginations of growth paths is to break binaries that we have conceptualized of where and how we can think about growth.

It is quite stunning that a country which is as deeply dependent on agriculture as India is has looked to growth without actively understanding the rural economy. It always has built an imagination of growth that wants to move rural into urban without understanding the complex interlinkages between rural and urban.

In fact, the bulk of urbanization takes place as rural economies transform, which means the investments that we need to make have to be investments in those interlinkages. But if you just look at how we structure our interface from the policy framework, we have an urban development ministry, we have a micro, small and medium enterprise department, we have a rural development ministry, we have an agricultural development ministry, across center and states.

We do not recognize regional interconnections, spatial interconnections, and the centrality in fact of the old socialist version of planning. I'm not arguing for socialist planning, but I am arguing for planning. You cannot expect markets to work without effectively building a regional imagination that invests in interlinkages that enable markets to work and enable the possibilities of building opportunities. This means that our federal infrastructure needs to be strengthened deeply.

As the Indian economy has got more complex, states and the centre of our markets have become much more integrated. And this creates new kinds of tensions. Spatial diversion, spatial inequality is vast in India. The expectation, this is another significantly unique aspect of India's growth, the expectation that eventually, you will see convergence 30 years after liberalization hasn't in fact worked.

Spatial inequality is significant and again we saw this in the most violent forms during the lockdown, where you saw the movement of labour from production, from producing states, to poorer states from where labour supply comes. We are an integrated market, but we're also a differentiated market, which means states and center need to work in a much more coordinated fashion.

And this tendency of our politics to centralize undermines the possibilities of this deep coordination and deeply diverse and decentralized approach to planning and development and growth that we genuinely need.

Last and not least, perhaps the most important, we have an economic imagination that prided itself on the assumption that growth, there are trade-offs between investments and growth, and investments and welfare. In fact, the growth is constitutive of welfare. Again, something that COVID has brought out in the sharpest of relief, investments and welfare prove crucial, but

in order for us to invest effectively in welfare, we need to shed our disenchantment in the state's ability to deliver. The state's ability to deliver basic health and education.

We see in our politics today and expanding welfare state expanding in the form of direct benefit transfers, cash to all kinds of beneficiary groups that are politically relevant to electoral play. But we do not see robust, effective investment in pure public goods.

And most importantly in health and education. That is left to an imagination of something the state should perhaps finance, but cannot actually deliver on, leaving it to god and markets to deliver on. No country in the world has progressed or grown without deep investment in basic human capital.

Ultimately, that's the foundation and that's where we need to go. So my closing point - if India is to develop a new pathway of growth for 2047, the 1991 imagination of getting the state out of the way has to give way to a 2047 imagination of a strong, robust, capable, not predatory, not coercive, but, inclusive, participatory, and democratic state.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thank you, thank you so much, Yamini. This is such a rich contribution and I definitely hope in the discussion we can come back to it. I don't think I've ever heard that expression, but the problem we face is it's a free market minus the state, that is a core to that problem, and that's so closely linked to the models of democracy of course.

And the point you're making about kinds of regulation and investment in public goods is so important. Before we go back to that, perhaps, I would love to and there's two questions that touch on this, love to hear a little bit more about the sustainability side. The climate side. One of the questions in the chat was around growing water shortages and maybe we turned to Sudha first, to kind of deepen, to say a little bit more about how new climate challenges are impacting, your picture of what has happened and what might happen.

Because this climate problems will likely not get less, so around, so around the issue of water shortages and also there was a question, I believe it was from Gopi, that, in that context, what is, , it's a broad question I realized, but what does a model of green growth look like? And particularly decentralized.

Were you assuming these models should be decentralized? What should these models look like? So maybe we start with Sudha and then see if Amitabh and Yamini would may want to add anything on broadly how the, what I think is a growing climate crisis internationally as well as in any country, how does that impact your picture?

**Sudha Narayanan:**

Yeah thank you, Arjan, and thanks for the question. With regard to water, I think the source of the problem are several. One is what was caused by policies, so if you look at a lot of groundwater extraction, we have power subsidies, so free power in many states.

Likewise, we've never really metered electricity to agriculture or metered water consumption other than in a few states. And one of these, the problems with India's, we are very good with adding new policies, but it's been very hard to remove policies that have already been put in place. Now, we also have the danger where with solar energy pump sets, we have this threat of further groundwater extraction.

Now there are innovative solutions, many of them are politically difficult for example with solar pumps, selling electricity to the grid by farmers is one option where you're incentivizing limited irrigation rather than irresponsible use of water.

But, there are others that like free electricity and free water, it's very hard for state governments to do. And I think this is one of the tough issues with policy, and a lot of the mature and green revolution areas actually have a problem of over-extraction of groundwater.

Now there's another set of problems that's coming precisely from diversification, so our notion is that paddy weed systems are inimical to water supplies and because it comes together with this package of irrigation and power subsidies. But what we are finding is highly commercialized regions, especially such as Maharashtra where intensification to grow horticulture crops for the market has also reached unsustainable water level use.

So you see people actually exploiting water resources in order to make profits in the short-term. So that's a very different set of, there's absolutely no incentive to conserve water and policy has very little to do with it.

I think it's hard to predict, and then there's, of course, these unknowns coming from climate change. Personally, I don't really work on water, but I think a lot of it is about creating awareness, and an incentive structure and a focus on sustainability. So and there are many efforts again at the local level, this probably answers Gopika's question as well, that what we are seeing is district-level initiatives by enlightened district-level administration combined with civil society actors, and now increasingly farmer organizations.

And I think it is, I don't know exactly what it will look like because that's not really my area of research, but you do see these initiatives happening. And I would say that while we argue for state-level agricultural policy, I think we really have to look at climate change adaptability strategies at the district level and even beyond to block level and panchayat level. Because a lot of the adaptation strategies and the implementation of those and the cooperation that you need is going to happen at a very, very local level.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thank you, thank you so much. Turning to Amitabh in a second, but just to, I should have mentioned it a little earlier, please continue to ask questions in the chat function and now also we can open up the floor for spoken comments.

There is, if I am not mistaken, at the bottom of your screen there's a button as reactions and within that there's a possibility to raise your hand, so as we're going back to two speakers. Please let us know when you would like to intervene, and we can open that up.

Amitabh, do you want to follow up on that, I think your comments on, you know, on the need for civil society participation in that was very clear, underlines what Sudha is saying in the context of growing climate challenges and the need to respond to climate change. What does this look like? Are there any examples where this is working, or can work?

**Amitabh Behar:**

So this is a tough one for me but from my work, from what I can say is the challenge is growing many fold every year. This I can say from the work that we do on disasters, as you know, Oxfam does a humanitarian piece. So I'm told by my humanitarian team that our work was five years ago, much smaller the portfolio was much smaller than what we have.

And in the last one year, we've been responding, we did respond to COVID. We have responded to Kerala, Uttarakhand, at the moment I'm looking at a situation report for Andhra, so the number of disasters has grown immensely and we are completely stretched now, and it is very clear that while we work also with communities that the livelihoods are getting affected.

And that's where I think we are working on resilient livelihoods, we are, as Sudha was saying, you know, we are trying to do this in Orissa. To work with panchayats to look at a panchayat level disaster management plan. But these are still early days. There is, in terms of the policy framing, every state does talk of even a panchayat level disaster management plan. But we work in six or seven states intensively.

But it's in only in Orissa where we've been able to actually work with panchayats and start working on it. Yeah, thanks.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thanks, before it turned to Yamini, there was of course there's been a lot of talk about building back better and the idea that crisis kind of unlock political institutional blockages over the last year. Have you seen that happening at all?

**Amitabh Behar:**

The building back better. Is what you're saying?

**Arjan de Haan:**

Yeah, particularly in the context of COVID which was an international and a national crisis or any of those climate, those disasters, something.

**Amitabh Behar:**

I would say that's not even a rhetoric that we use. Very often there is at least empty rhetoric, but I've not seen this as a rhetoric, we have not made any fundamental change in terms of how

we look at health for instance, post-COVID. And there were so many government committees telling the government, for instance, to talk about the most vivid experience that we had around oxygen. There were commissions which told the government that we needed much greater oxygen supply, but we did not address that.

You look at the Ayushman Bharat, the result has been very poor, a lot of people have not been able to access Ayushman Bharat, but we have not seen any fundamental changes. So, building back better, you know, at the moment you know as I'm saying I might sound pessimistic, but it's about building back worse is what we're looking at. And it is so evident in the way the India stories unfolding and I did talk about it.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thanks, Yamini, before we get back to the markets, states and regulation questions and anything you'd like to deepen your analysis and kind of your forward-looking comments related to a growing climate crisis as it exists internationally and in India.

**Yamini Aiyar:**

I think well, I guess there are two parts to it. I think you know, at some level, India is also at an important crossroad in terms of the kinds of pathways it chooses to adopt. You know, despite all the uncertainties there is once there is in all likelihood one certainty that our energy needs are going to grow.

If nothing else, because that small proportion of the formal economy is beginning to look better and better as we can see post-COVID.

But you know, less pessimistically there is, we are definitely on a forward path and we do have to make very crucial choices around what pathways of energy transitions we want to lock ourselves into. I think the global play and the global powerplay has placed us in a place where we are willing to look at renewables seriously.

But we haven't quite fully figured out how we need to balance our growing energy needs with generating more capacity for coal versus renewables and, you see, some of those confusions in the political positioning, global positioning, that India presented even at COP26. And of course, there is this larger question of global equity around financing. But I do think that at a broad policy level, there's more recognition of the centrality of thinking about this for India domestically as well.

But the real tipping point is going to be on whether we have the state institutions to actually develop the appropriate pathways and build together. So both Sudha and Amitabh spoke about the centrality of local governments.

The latest finance commission for urban local governments has allocated some specific funds to look at climate resilience and climate adaptation, evolution, environmental aspects locked into a certain kind of funding. But I think that it's at the discourse on the institutional capability to actually manage, to navigate the challenges that climate presents us is at a very, very nascent

stage. And, you know, even the ability at a policy level to project what our carbon trajectory is going to look like parallel to our growth trajectory needs a lot more investment and strengthening.

So we are a long way away, but I do think we've recognized the problem and that's perhaps a starting point. I did want to just add while endorsing Amitabh's point about our building back better or rather not building back at all because we haven't acknowledged any of the challenges that COVID presented us with. In fact, we've probably regressed along with the Indian economy back a few miles.

What we did try to do, through the crisis was to legitimize the narrative that crisis is opportunity, and it is in this opportunity that we need to push through a set of reforms that will push the Indian economy further and the farm laws were an important example of precisely that.

I think we've seen in the act of repealing those farm laws, an important recognition and corrective to the broad narrative of economic growth in India, that reform by stealth or crisis in opportunity, reform that doesn't take those who are impacted with by reforms particularly as we're now dealing with more complex factor markets that affect people's everyday lives, is not the appropriate path forward. And that hopefully is a lesson that some of our politics will take on.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thanks, thanks very much, as you were speaking, there was, and maybe I think you're in the best place to answer this question if others want to comment, of course, feel free to do so.

The question came from Andrea, I'm just reading it out, could the speakers give greater clarity on the relevance of the four labour codes being rationalized, simplified in 2021 related to industrial relations, way to social security occupation and health and safety? How do you see those? How can we see those in the context of inclusive growth? And I think I say something also points out that it's closely linked to the question of the farm laws, isn't it?

**Yamini Aiyar:**

I think - so a few things - one, you know, India's informal economy has long been invisible to policy and in fact, to our growth discourse.

We ignore it, we also don't collect data on it. We have broad numbers on it and it remains hidden, even now. But it found a way to make itself extremely visible in a moment of crisis. The first lockdown that the Indian government imposed in March 2020, the images of workers from cities walking home, down the highways, was perhaps the most emblematic image of the Indian lockdown and highlighted the extent of vulnerability and informality.

Vulnerability generated because of informality in the Indian economy. The expectation was that a crisis like this would potentially highlight the importance of robust social security and of

building genuine, organic pathways towards bridging from informality to formality that protects workers.

The reality is that we never quite got there, in fact, the informal economy shrunk even further as the formal economy expanded and India's economic recovery is entirely on the back of a profit-led recovery where market shares being taken by big corporates and listed companies away from informal companies because they were able to adjust better to demands, in the context of COVID. And they also recognized that they could cut costs and generate profit.

At the same time this crisis is an opportunity, gave the space for the re-emergence of a long-held reality of labour market, which is we have complex regulation, we have poorly implemented regulation, and therefore a lot of regulatory uncertainty that supports neither capital nor labour.

Manish Sabarwal has a phrase which he uses often, which has also become part of the policy narrative called 'regulatory cholesterol', there's a large number of regulations which makes it difficult for companies, firms to grow, which creates perverse incentives for firms in fact to remain informal and remain small.

And the crisis was seen as a grand opportunity to undo all of this cholesterol but undo it entirely in favour of capital, not labour, given that the vulnerabilities of labour were very visible, you can see which way the political discourse was going.

So barely a month after the horrific images of workers going home and the failure of the state towards these workers, you saw several states trying to reform labour laws which in fact extended work hours, removed safety protections such as they were in the laws. The labour codes, then these four labour codes that you're talking about were in the works for some time. Some of them were sensible, but they needed a lot more debate and discussion.

In the parliamentary session of September 2020, just as the farm bills were bulldozed, with absolutely no parliamentary discussion, so were the labour codes. And they were completely different to what was presented to the standing committee and what was debated in the parliamentary processes of standing committees.

And the expectation was that state governments would align and all of this would be implemented on the first of April. Some of the advantages of federalism are that when things don't quite work, state governments can actually slow processes down so those labour codes have still not been, states have still not issued their rules, codification has not happened.

Will this open up the space for a more serious discourse on what appropriate labour codes should be like? Ones that allow capital to function, but at the same time protect labour? That's the big question, our politics is not leading us there. Hopefully, civil society and public discourse will.

Arjan de Haan:

Thanks very much, it's a horrific picture there, over 'regulatory cholesterol' itself is hard enough. 'Regulatory cholesterol', I've never heard that, actually an awful image comes to mind.

Thanks, thanks for that and thanks for putting this debate, contextualizing this debate on ideas on rebuilding through a pandemic. Amitabh, any comments, perhaps on the labour codes, or you feel it's sufficiently covered?

Amitabh Behar:

It's been covered sufficiently but maybe just to add emotion to it, as Yamini said, she's responded to the question, but in terms of the emotion I think what's very critical is to go back to the images that Yamini talked of.

Where you're looking at people walking back in 42 degrees, 43 degrees, thousands of kilometers, often barefoot, no food and water, and that's the time when we completely failed our working class. That's the time we reverse the rights that labour have won through decades of battles, maybe actually centuries and we just were taking it away without any debate, without any conversation, so I think that's something very critical and we need to highlight that.

That probably reflects the health of this democracy and, also the intent of the state, and I think the way Yamini put it. I was talking of the predatory state, but it's about the predatory state and the predatory market aligning. And that's what I thought was something very important to underscore.

Yamini Aiyar:

Just can I add, sorry, just a very quick two-finger on this? which is the one thing that COVID highlighted most significantly related to informal workers and the labour protection is a complete lack of robust social protection for workers in urban India and the absence of portability of rights. And we have had a lot of talk of one nation, one ration card, but nothing more beyond that.

And in fact, the 2021 budget, national budget, social protection budgets were slashed in perhaps the expectation that we were past the pandemic and all was well and the consequences are visible in the form of, in fact, increased poverty in India.

Arjan de Haan:

Thank you so much both and thank you for adding that, Amitabh. For me similar, and I come as a student of Indian labour history. I compared that to what the colonial records said about economic crisis for example in 1931, where the solution to the economic crisis were workers basically going back home and that has not changed one bit as far as I can see.

There's hardly or none at all for those rights, plus what struck me was like this was, such a recipe for that pandemic to spread into the fastest. It didn't actually happen, but it could have been so far worse right we had no idea how the pandemic was spreading and those poor



labourers is going back in crowded trains. If there was, if they were there, it was like the complete neglect of the public health aspect of that as well, which is awful to see.

We're almost out of time, I'm going to speak last round, perhaps, a quick round of one minute of thoughts and then the one, perhaps, might be your thought, maybe unlike, but you know, what is your one last minute, you want to leave us with. But perhaps you can all say and this is you know, this is a CIRCLE, is a venue that promotes exchange of research and thoughts, you know, what are the kind of things that we should be focusing on going forward as a research community.

As an international research community, I know that's a tough task but, Sudha do you want to, last comments. One minute, any thoughts?

**Amitabh Behar:**

Sure, so can I go?

**Arjan de Haan:**

Please go ahead.

**Amitabh Behar:**

So you know we've been really wondering, as in I certainly work with a lot of activists that this is not India specific, in terms of the regime that we're looking at. So how does popular protest work? And we are looking at a moment where in many ways, the idea of representative democracies is in deep crisis. And you have the same story starting from Trump.

Fortunately, if we have seen his back, but you go to Brazil, to Turkey, to Russia, to the Philippines, you have very similar strong men at the moment. So what is the kind of popular mobilization, what is the work that civil society could do to reaffirm faith in participatory democracy, in substantive democracy?

So that's the question, as in we're struggling, it's everybody is trying to work on it, but ideas from the academic world would be very, very helpful to see how, what lies ahead to rebuild democracy even the normative consensus around human rights on social justice, it's all shattered. So how do we rebuild that is really the big question. Thanks.

**Arjan de Haan:**

Thanks, thanks very much. Excellent, Sudha.

**Sudha Narayanan:**

Yeah, I don't think it's an easy question to answer. I think on the face of it, Canadian agriculture and Indian agriculture are like worlds apart.

At the same time, I think there are overarching similarities and the trajectory that Canada took in terms of the retreat of the state from procurement as well as these large cooperatives and

the challenges of accessing land and getting into farming, especially of the non-industrial variety, are all things, but interestingly, India seems to have not gone the whole way.

But, has just started plugging into the new innovations already that are happening in Canada, so I think their especially on the technology, institutions front, I think is a large area of research and learning that's feasible.

I also think that in terms of, so, sort of more empirical work, as I said, India is so large there's so much going on in different contexts that we don't have enough researchers, in fact, to go into these and even document what's going on. And as an agricultural economist, I'm always told that you're one of the few in your generation who do agricultural economics because the fact is – the way economics is done now has changed a lot.

It's dominated by randomized controlled trials, and there are no longer subject experts and field experts. So, you have economists who work on agriculture, but not really agricultural economists. And I think that tradition is very much alive and well in Canada as well as the interdisciplinarity of approaches and collaborations, and I think that somewhat weakens Indian academics, even today. So I think that is again an area worth exploring. Sorry that was longer than you wanted, but yeah.

**Arjan de Haan:**

I think that was a question that deserved more than a minute, but we don't have the minute anymore. Yamini, would you like, could you, help us wrap up? I want to make a quick announcement before we have to close. Thank you so much Sudha.

**Yamini Aiyar:**

Two very quick things: one more pointed, and the other open-ended. I think that India's economic trajectory is also at an important juncture, linked to a federal trajectory. And there is a lot that we can learn about the nature of federal dynamics from Canada about how central governments and sub-national governments have addressed questions of divergence through performance grants, etc.

So many of the technicalities of building strong fiscal federal systems, there's a lot that India can learn and a lot of Indian public finance economists look to these questions and Canada often comes up, but we don't know enough. So I think that's an area which is ripe for a lot more research and a lot more comparative work that can feed directly into policy.

I think a second big question that confronts, not just India, but the globe which is around how you can create equitable markets and if an effective state engagement in creating an enabling environment where both the state and markets check effectively, each other's predatory instincts. I don't think there is any such thing as a perfect answer to this.

Both are by definition, complex and predatory, but how best to create in an environment which predatory instincts can be effectively checked is a question for us to explore because cronyism is rife across all democratic societies. So democracy, in and of itself, may not be the best check,

but we need to strengthen parts of democracy to make them effective checks, so those relationships need to be better understood.

Arjan de Haan:

Thank you so much, it may not be the best check but it's then, you know, we can't do without it either, right?

Yamini Aiyar:

Absolutely.

Arjan de Haan:

So we strengthen some form so it's not one form, but forms of democracy. Thank you, thank you so much, thank you to our three speakers, thank you so much to the audience for the questions. Thank you Amitabh, Sudha, Yamini, for your time to share those thoughts with us. It is the first time, it is part of a series on democracy in India 2047.

And I want to mention that one, all of this information is on the CIRCLE website which I think is [canadaindiaresearch.ca](http://canadaindiaresearch.ca), but maybe Sharada, you can post that just to make sure we have the right one. But you can certainly find it under CIRCLE at the University of Guelph.

And the next event will be, correct me if I'm wrong, Sharada, on Wednesday the fifth of January, so early in the next year it will be at the same time and it will be again a fantastic panel.

I think closely following up on many of the questions around democracy and representation there with Niraja Gopal Jayal, Yogendra Yadav, and Navsharan Singh. So I certainly very much look forward to the next one, with that, again to our speakers, thank you so much for your time and your input and to everybody – stay well and hope to see you soon.

Amitabh Behar:

Thank you, bye-bye.

Arjan de Haan:

Bye-bye.

[End of transcript]