

Singapore and the art of intelligent living

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Reuters In its 65-year history, Singapore has excelled in building strong institutions as the foundation of a good society.

India could learn a lot from the social, cultural and intellectual institutions created by the tiny, modern country

The India-Singapore “Fever” as Goh Chok Tong, the then Prime Minister of Singapore had called it in 1993, embraces a wide-range of shared economic and non-economic areas. And, while the ‘economic’ usually commands the headlines, the ‘non-economic’ is equally, important. This is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that Singapore’s success is an inspiration for India.

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Social order

The **first** area of learning for India is discipline and work ethic. Singapore is a country renowned for its Discipline, thanks to Lee Kuan Yew, its founding father. With Discipline came work ethic. People learnt to focus on work, generating high productivity.

If there is one issue which could transform India, it is Discipline, Work Ethic and High Productivity. If simple things such as driving, crossing streets, could be done in a disciplined manner, India would gain enormously. This is a critical area for learning, adaptation and implementation in India.

The **second** pertains to traffic management and transportation in urban areas. Singapore is efficient. Indian roads are chaotic. Avoidable accidents occur. India's towns and cities are becoming increasingly congested and crowded. Hence it is essential to induct the best-possible traffic management systems to deal with a rapidly growing problem. There's huge scope for partnership.

Third, a crucial area of learning is 'integrated living', or people of different communities and religions living side by side. This is especially in the case of 'public housing' in Singapore. Ghettos are non-existent. India is facing huge issues because of the tendency to live "within" communities and building "walls" which prevent integrated living.

Fourth, families love to live in Singapore because it is a safe place. Women and children are safe. India, however, is perceived to be unsafe, especially for women. And, many children go missing. India's cooperation with Singapore can only help it gain in credibility and respect if safety and security are assured. In contrast to India, Singapore has low levels of crime.

Cultural spaces

Fifth, as for art and culture; the museums in Singapore are just amazing. India is far richer in its history, art and culture, heritage sites and museums. But, there is much to learn from Singapore about modernisation, maintenance and marketing. A partnership between the agencies in the two countries would be of particular benefit, especially to India.

Sixth, Singapore has established a reputation globally for its educational institutions. Indians are increasingly sending their children to Singapore to study. India has a huge infrastructure of educational institutions but is missing out on building leadership and global standards. This is a vital area for collaboration.

Seventh, an adjunct to education is the area of skills. Singapore has built an infrastructure of skills training centres, especially the ITE, which are world class. India, historically, had kept skills training in the Government sector, namely, the ITIs or Industrial Training Institutes.

In recent years, India has changed direction and opened skills training to the private sector. With 500 million plus young persons to be trained, this is the biggest challenge India faces. It is a massive business opportunity as well.

India has already partnered ITE of Singapore to set up a skills centre in New Delhi but the need is for many more, spread throughout the country.

Intellectual institutions

Eighth, in its 65-year history. Singapore has excelled in building strong institutions as the foundation of a good society. India also did likewise soon after Independence in 1947 but most have declined. The rejuvenation of Indian institutions is essential and is an area of potential collaboration with Singapore. The 'dos and dont's of building strong institutions need to be imbibed and implemented in India.

Ninth, in particular, "think-tanks" are very important for research, data collection, analysis and framing strategy. Singapore has started late but steadily built 'think-tanks' of world renown, such as the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and the Institute for South Asian Studies (ISAS). India has no 'Think-Tanks' of global standard. Building Indian Think-Tanks, a long term process, must be an agenda for joint action.

Tenth, a small country like Singapore has built public libraries of great quality for the benefit of the community. India, too, has a few but too scattered to

serve 1.2 billion people, especially children. Children's libraries are specially needed, as also public libraries for the common man.

A partnership to set up a network of public libraries throughout India would be of immense advantage to the less privileged, particularly Indian children.

Eleventh, changing focus, but remaining on the learning circuit, India can truly benefit from a partnership with Singapore in regard to zoos. The zoo in Singapore is amazing, including the facility of night safaris. India, which is so rich in wildlife resources, could transform the lives of its citizens in a positive way by modernizing its zoos, learning from Singapore.

Twelfth, the local community in India, especially in the urban space, is not connected, whereas, in Singapore, the local community associations play a significant role in bringing and keeping people together. The local community is the backbone of society and there is much to do to build a network at the grassroots level. India and Singapore can cooperate in this field productively.

Thirteenth, tourism is of high priority to both countries. The potential is huge, especially in India.

Fourteenth, Singapore has built a wonderful tradition of re-inventing itself from time to time. The process begins with a National Task Force (the last one was headed by Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Deputy Prime Minister) which consults widely, researches deeply and comes out with the set of

priorities for the country, especially focusing on New Technology and Innovation, both of which change the global and national landscape and outlook.

India has embarked on a major initiative on innovation, harnessing new technologies. There is, therefore, much to be gained in terms through a deep “connect” in this area.

Finally, there is one issue which India does not debate but it is important for all societies, especially today, in the era of terrorism. It is national service. Singapore has it. India does not. Singapore gains from it. India loses from not having it. Through mutual consultations, an adapted, limited form of National Service needs to be introduced in India. Future generations will benefit.

Singaporeans are always modest in saying that their resources are limited. Theirs is a small country. Just a city-State. And it cannot allocate all its resources to India. India would need to be creative in accessing Singapore’s skills, knowledge and expertise for its own benefit. And, persuade Singapore to appoint more than one Special Envoy to monitor progress.

The years gone by have seen the two countries coming together, but way below the potential. The Heads of the two governments need to meet annually at the summit level to give a impetus to the relationship. And, this needs to be backed up by a network of joint teams to take the agenda forward and translate the potential to reality.

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