

On Death Anniversary of Dhirubhai Ambani: 6th July 2020

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## **Dhirubhai Ambani's Atmanirbharta**

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*- Parimal Nathwani*

The term Atmanirbharta is much in vogue now a days. To overcome downslide post Covid-19, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi exhorted all Indians to be Atmanirbhar! During the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi had also asked people to be Atmanirbhar or self-reliant. While both Mahatma Gandhi and Shri Modi have propagated for Atmanirbhar Bharat, though in different contexts per se, Dhirubhai Ambani propounded the principles of Atmanirbhar Bharat in his own way! His heirs, particularly Shri Mukesh Ambani and his children are pursuing the same.

Notwithstanding what the critics of Atmanirbhar Bharat say, both the Mahatma and Modiji meant to reduce dependence on others, become more reliant on India, our Indianness and its inherent strengths and capabilities. The ultimate objective after all is making India stronger culturally, socially and economically.

I as one who has studied and tried to understand Dhirubhai Ambani very closely, dare to say that Dhirubhai not only believed in Atmanirbhar Bharat but also practiced it in his business pursuits. Dramatic emergence of Dhirubhai on India's industrial and corporate scene itself glaringly proved his determination for building Indian capabilities and competitiveness. By naming his company as Reliance, he had already proved that he is self-reliant and that others too can rely upon him and his company.

I remember the days of 60s and 70s when the term 80-20 was popular among lovers of imported fabric for suiting and shirting. People were crazy for clothes of 80 percent polyester blended with 20 percent cotton. Dhirubhai, who had a sense to know the pulse of markets, set up a world-class textile mill in Ahmedabad, when the traditional mill owners were planning to encash their properties after shutting down their mills. Dhirubhai Ambani became a renowned name in the world of polyester and textiles. Later on, he built up a strong backward integration and made India Atmanirbhar not only in petrochemical downstream products including polyester but also made the country self-reliant in petroleum fuels. With his Jamnagar refinery complex, India overnight became an exporter of fuels from being a net importer of these products. This is Dhirubhai Ambani's Atmanirbharta! He became a major player among global supply chains of petroleum and petrochemical products.

This is what perhaps Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi too means when he announced Atmanirbhar Bharat. Self-reliance or Atmanirbharta is about encouraging innovation, empowering Indians and Indianness and it is about making the 'local' more 'vocal' with ultimately making it 'global'!

Government has already begun this process by liberalising the agricultural sector from clutches of age-old laws such as the Essential Commodity Act and the APMC Act. Our farmers are free to sell. Atmanirbharta is also about freeing Indian enterprises from bureaucratic hurdles. It is also about attracting investments, both local and global!

Dhirubhai Ambani with a global outlook, kept his feet firmly on ground and his eyes glued to industrial and economic development of India. He was typically local! He was very vocal about all that would make Indian economy stronger! He would create world class manufacturing capacities and products in India. He believed in and relied on youth of India and he never failed. He did face adversities, but he converted them into opportunities and advantages! His kind of Atmanirbharta is the need of the day now.

As Mahatma Gandhi said: "Self-sufficiency does not mean narrowness. In no case we would be able to produce all that we need. So, though our aim is self-sufficiency, we shall have to get from outside what we cannot produce!" That means, we must produce what we can! We, all of us, must do our best. That is Atmanirbharta!

On his death anniversary, while I try to revisit the many works of Dhirubhai Ambani, I feel he was a torch bearer who would always light up the dark paths, with his bright and brilliant ideas, thoughts and actions!

*(Shri Parimal Nathwani is Senior Group President, Reliance Industries Ltd. and also a Rajya Sabha MP)*

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