

LOCAL NEWS

Time to bring in a totally different level of governance in India

- a review of *Breaking Free of Nehru: Let's Unleash India!*

I recently received an advance copy of Sanjeev Sabhlok's book, published by Anthem Press in December 2008, soon to be available in bookstores in India. Sabhlok worked for eighteen years in the Indian Administrative Service before resigning and migrating to Australia where he works in the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance as a Senior Manager.

Heavily praised by Gurcharan Das, the author of *India Unbound* and former CEO of Proctor and Gamble India, who believes that this book 'must be read by every Indian', this indeed is a very important book that can potentially change India's future. Half the book is freely available for preview on the internet.

This should perhaps not be taken as a book in the traditional sense (even though it displays considerable scholarship, reflecting the doctorate that Sabhlok holds in economics from USA) but a political pamphlet. Sabhlok critiques the corrupt governance system of India with startling vigour and points out how the socialist policies of India (India continues to be a socialist republic even today) and hypocritical political system which favours the corrupt have, together, led to serious underperformance as a nation.

The book discusses a vast range of issues. Issues not covered in the book in detail due to constraints of space are covered in Online Notes which are freely available on the internet.

Sabhlok believes that policies must be informed by the principles of freedom and jus-

tice (the system that operationalises these being capitalism). A key feature of capitalism is its emphasis on morality. The immorality of socialism both as a theory and practice is intense and overpoweringly depressing. According to Sabhlok, Nehru was the 'Messiah' of socialism in India. India's love affair with socialism is not yet over. Sabhlok asks us to break free of Nehru because his policies have proved too expensive for India both in lost opportunities and lost lives.

Perhaps thinking some readers may be put off by the title of the book, Sabhlok addresses potential concerns in the preface and first chapter. Sabhlok then outlines the history of liberal and socialist thought in India. He evaluates a number of things we take for granted about India's governance, pointing out pitfalls of the socialist arguments that Nehru stood for, even as he finds much to support in Gandhi's views.

Sabhlok depicts a free society as a society with a few key properties that include migration inwards from less free societies, less terrorism, and greater wealth and innovation. I liked Sabhlok's simple discussion of the market system which often eludes even those of us well grounded in the theory of markets. The invisible hand is one of the hardest things to explain, and Sabhlok does an excellent job of it. His approach reflects the Austrian school of thought, most recently represented by Hayek. He finds collectivist identities unsustainable for the most part, and incompatible with modern thought and civilisation. Therefore a strong flavour of individualism and individual responsibility

permeates his book.

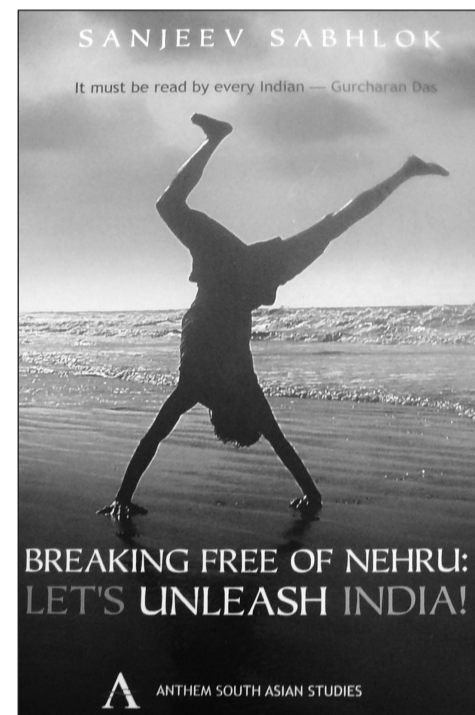
He then discusses the ills of the Indian Constitution and discusses land ceilings, reservations, and the uniform civil code. Sabhlok takes an analytical approach to issues with all his conclusions derived from the principles of freedom and justice. He asks us to take a fresh look at the Indian Constitution and to make the Constitution a robust protector of our freedoms.

Chapter 4 looks at the cause of political corruption in India, and proposes a range of well argued reasons why politicians in India are necessarily corrupt. Coming from a strong ethical perspective, Sabhlok is unable to support even people like Manmohan Singh, who are commonly perceived to be people of integrity. The reason he offers is thought provoking – making us reflect on the extremely low level of political integrity found in India, and makes for compelling reading.

The next chapter deals with the reform of the bureaucracy. This is a particularly enlightening chapter for those not familiar with the differences between the Indian bureaucracy and those in developed countries like Australia. Given that Sabhlok is perhaps the only Indian civil servant to have extensive public sector experience in two countries, his views are worth paying attention to. At least to me it is now clear what kind of reforms are needed in India.

The last chapter of the book is a bold, almost clinical, perspective on the nature of changes Sabhlok would like India to put in place. His narrative is based on a thought experiment:

of how, as a hypothetical Prime Minister of India, he would establish – along with his imagined Cabinet – new norms and practices of governance. It is here that his extensive experience comes to the forefront. We learn the exact method by which the incentives that operate in India's governance system can be changed, and how, like a jigsaw puzzle, the necessary change can be put together systematically.



In summary, this is a book full of new and innovative solutions grounded in classical liberal principles. This book is an eye-opener, and should open up urgently needed debates for change in India. An excellent book. *by DM*

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