

**Twenty-Fourth Lovraj Kumar Memorial Lecture**  
**13<sup>th</sup> November, 2017**

**ACCELERATING MANUFACTURING –  
IMPEDIMENTS & STRENGTHS**

by

**Shri R. C. Bhargava**  
Chairman  
Maruti Suzuki India Limited

Organised By  
Lovraj Kumar Memorial Trust  
in association with  
Indian Institute of Chemical Engineers  
Northern Regional Centre  
New Delhi

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## **ACCELERATING MANUFACTURING-IMPEDIMENTS AND STRENGTHS**

**I am deeply honoured at having been invited to deliver the Lovraj Kumar Memorial lecture. Lovraj was several years senior to me in the Doon School. He was a great all-rounder, excelling in sports and academics. The Rhodes scholarship, and an Oxford blue, are testimony to his capabilities. His professional career was no less illustrious. He was one of the first lateral entries to the post of Secretary to Government, and his contribution as Secretary Petroleum is still remembered. He was deeply committed to the economic development of India, and my talk today is on an aspect of that subject.**

**Why has accelerating manufacturing become so important that the Prime Minister has made it the core of his strategy to make India an economically developed country, where all citizens can have employment and are able to live comfortably and with dignity? The political importance of manufacturing has become compelling because the population of young people has been growing rapidly, and employment opportunities for them have been quite inadequate. A large number of young people without work, will create serious social tensions, and lead to law and order problems. Without productive work for all, a more equitable society cannot be created. The stability of democracy itself can get endangered if the situation is not corrected. It has also to be realised that these young people have very different aspirations and understanding of what they are entitled to, thanks to the rapid spread of cell phones and access to the internet. They are no longer satisfied with the traditional teaching that poverty and hardship is their God given fate. They want change, and they voted for Mr. Modi because they thought he could best deliver that change.**

**The realization that manufacturing growth is the most effective route to rapidly creating wealth and employment is not new, and there is convincing evidence of the efficacy of this strategy. Japan was the first country in the post second world war period that adopted manufacturing as the key to economic growth. It was successful, despite the serious handicap of not having natural resources, including energy, and export markets that were thousands of kilometres away. Korea learnt from Japan, followed the same strategy, and did extremely well. China was the third big country to succeed economically by concentrating on manufacturing growth. All these countries had manufacturing contributing between 35% to 45% of GDP after about 20 years of starting development. Even smaller countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia have gone ahead of India, in economic terms, because they also adopted policies to increase manufacturing in their countries. In India, the contribution of manufacturing in the GDP is still 15%, 70 years after Independence.**

**The usual system of reporting the creation of jobs is sector wise, and the impact of a sector's growth in creating jobs in another sector is not credited to that sector. This is the reason why many people often argue that manufacturing creates a much smaller number of jobs than the services sector, and that we must adopt labour intensive technologies in manufacturing. Let us first see what manufacturing, including mining, does for job creation in the economy. Employment is created in the company that makes the finished products, and sends them out for sale to the consumers. Each such factory buys varying amounts of raw materials, components and semi-finished products from its supplier base. Employment is generated in each of these supplier companies, and increases as production rises. This is the employment that is attributed to 'manufacturing' in our reporting system. However, the bulk of the employment, from these**

manufacturing activities, is generated in the down-stream activities that all are under the 'services' sector. The activity of manufacturing requires transportation of various inputs to the factories, and this creates jobs in the transportation sector. Finished goods have to be sent for storage and sale, and this creates more jobs in transportation activities. The whole sale and retail activities associated with manufactured goods generates huge employment. This includes the creation of infrastructure to support selling activities. Many manufactured products require after sales service, maintenance and repairs because products have to be used over a long period of time. Cars are one such example. In India, cars also provide employment to large numbers as drivers. In a competitive market, some other areas of employment created by manufacturing are marketing and advertising, consumer financing and banking and general insurance. Car financing started because of Maruti, and today provides large employment opportunities. General insurance does a great deal of its business with manufacturing companies. The mining sector grows largely because of the increase in manufacturing activities, and the larger demand for energy and raw materials that is created as a result. This sector employs large number of people. None of these jobs are credited to the manufacturing sector though the existence of these jobs is dependent on manufacturing activity.

It is hard to understand why economists and others doubt the importance of manufacturing for creating jobs. One reason could be the way employment generation data is presented and which shows the growth of jobs in manufacturing to be comparatively slower than in the services sector. It is necessary for economists and planners to re-look at this aspect. I have not been able to find studies which accurately estimate what percentage of jobs created in the economy have their roots in manufacturing. It is important that such studies be made to give the correct picture. The experts concerned with

**employment generation should also look at the experiences of Japan, Korea and China and what manufacturing did in this respect.**

**Accepting the importance of manufacturing for creating employment, it is then necessary to examine what would accelerate manufacturing activities. One necessary condition for this is that the demand for manufactured products should rise faster than in the past. More people will buy manufactured products, if these give better value for money. Better value for customers is created by making products cheaper in terms of constant prices, by improving their quality and reliability, and by understanding and implementing the consumers real requirements from those products. This requires keeping close to the consumers, listening to them, and making continuous improvements in design and to reduce costs, in all aspects of manufacturing, including procurement of raw materials, capex spend on establishing and maintaining production facilities, packing, transport and retailing. Manufacturing methods should result in achieving the object of giving consumers more value for their money, even if that requires automation, and less job creation in manufacturing. Higher sales will result in more jobs being created in the economy. Consumers also want that they should have greater ease in buying products and in servicing and repairing them. The gains from spreading sales outlets, and service facilities, so that they are nearer the consumer has been experienced by us in Maruti. The growth of e-marketing is another aspect of how consumers buy more if it is easier to do so.**

**It is of course possible to create a very large number of jobs by importing manufactured products, with low custom duties, and selling them. The consumer is likely to get products best suited to his or her requirements. However, a country as big as India cannot afford to do that. It would be impossible to meet the foreign exchange required for making such imports. We need our foreign currency for**

importing what is not available in India. Availability of spare parts could also be a problem. In addition, the employment opportunities in the manufacturing process would be lost. Thus, it is important that the needs of manufactured products, including the intermediate goods, be met to the largest extent possible by being manufactured in India. The benefits of doing this are not only in terms of saving foreign currency and creating jobs. It would also enable costs to the consumers to be reduced, as in almost all instances locally made products, using good technology and management, are lower in cost than imported products.

The challenge is therefore to make Indian manufacturing as competitive as possible. Productivity must keep increasing so that costs can come down. Waste in all forms must be reduced. Non-value adding activities must be eliminated, whether such activities arise from processes within the manufacturing unit, or because of regulations. Quality must improve all the time. It is now well established that quality has to be ensured through strict adherence to processes, and not by inspection of products at different stages of manufacture. Such inspections add to cost and are non-value adding. Adherence to processes would also reduce rework on defective pieces and avoid the cost of repairing or scrapping them. The philosophy of the management of manufacturing companies has to be that everything is capable of improvement all the time, and that it is their responsibility to create conditions for making that happen. Technology and engineering capabilities must increase so that products can be improved all the time, and thereby give better value to customers. This requires Companies to generate enough internal resources so that funds can be allocated for this activity.

If manufacturing in India can become globally competitive, it would be possible to substantially increase export of Indian made products. This would increase volumes and give better economies of scale,



making manufacturing even more competitive. Over 750,000 cars are even now exported every year from India. Maruti has started exporting cars to Japan, perhaps the most difficult market for this product. Over \$10 billion worth of auto components are also exported. However, this is not anywhere near enough in terms of what India needs and is capable of doing. If the automobile sector can become globally competitive, there is every reason to believe other manufacturing activities can also reach that level. The Governments, both at the Centre and in the States, have to accept that it is partly their responsibility to make this happen. They must understand what makes industry competitive and make the required changes in policies and rules. At the same time, managements of industrial units also need to understand what they have to do to increase competitiveness and act accordingly. Their role is actually much larger than that of the Governments in achieving competitiveness.

What are the impediments, and what changes are required to be made? Many of the obstacles to becoming competitive have been the outcome of the policies that have been followed in the past. During the decades after 1950, the Central Government controlled the bulk of the investible resources, and allocated them to different sectors under the 5 Year Plans. A large percentage of the funds for industrial development went for investments in creating a dominant Public Sector. After some years it was apparent that the public sector units were not achieving what was expected of them. They were unable to grow and modernize without further budgetary support, because they were not generating adequate internal resources. The utilization of installed capacity was rarely achieved, and they were unable to reduce costs of production, improve productivity steadily, and remain competitive with similar industries outside India. The failure to give a reasonable return on capital employed meant that national wealth was being eroded, instead of being created. Most of the PSUs were over manned, because of political interference, and the

objective of creating jobs. The public sector also controlled most of infrastructure and basic raw material production. Like most other public-sector enterprises, most of them did not work efficiently. Maintenance was inadequate, capacity utilization sub-standard, and quality was not up to international standards. This factor had a negative impact on the private sector increasing competitiveness.

During the years up to 1991, the policies subjected the private sector to severe restrictions. Their growth was controlled by the licenses given to them. The maximum production was specified, as also specifications of the products to be made. It was not permissible to exceed the production limit, or change specifications without permission. Most manufactured products made in 1991 were not much different from what they were when production first started. High taxation made the generation of internal resources difficult. The MRTP Act placed further hurdles in the way of any industry or group becoming big. Generally, the private sector was tolerated but not given any encouragement to grow by the Government. But what was worse, during this period the private sector managements developed attitudes, practices and thinking that were not conducive to competitive manufacturing.

During this period, the political establishment and the bureaucracy had learnt to behave according to the policies that were being followed. Most of them were not supporters of private enterprise or a market economy and free competition. The crisis of 1991 did bring about many major reforms, but not any change in basic thinking regarding the need to grow manufacturing at a much faster pace, or the factors responsible for slow growth. The private sector, while freed of many shackles, did not receive much support and was still unable to become competitive. The public sector largely remained as it was. It was only after 2014, that the manufacturing has been given pride of place in the development strategy, several reforms have happened and are happening, and more are expected. The approach

of the bureaucrats is also changing and they are becoming industry friendly.

But let us first analyse what the policies till 1991 did to shape the thinking and behaviour of industrialists, managers and others. The licensing system had resulted in creating seller market conditions for virtually all manufacturers. Products could be sold, and profits made, without worrying about quality, cost or new technology development. Getting approval to increase production was extremely difficult and the motivation to become competitive, in order to get a bigger market share, and grow in size, did not thus exist. There was no benefit, or incentive, to try and motivate workers to improve the efficiency of operations. Managements were not unduly bothered by higher costs, as they could pass them to the customers. They were more concerned about production not falling short of their licensed capacities. Companies were operated largely for the benefit of the promoter and his family, and the interests of other stake holders became subservient to that. Thus, the private sector managers were not attuned to competition, and to understanding what was required to make themselves competitive. Relations with workers remained distant, and giving value to consumers was not on anyone radar.

After the death of Pt. Nehru, Indian politics no longer remained the monopoly of the Congress party, and competition started to grow. This led to the Congress party and others requiring ever increasing amounts of money to meet election expenses. Their requirements were far above the legal limit, and the gap was bridged by collecting 'invisible' money from industrialists and other sources. This became easier because of the enormous control Government had over the working of industry.

While probably some amount of corruption was always there, the demand for funds from political parties, and the advantage that

donors got in respect of their economic interests, started the process of non-compliance with tax laws, and generation of black money on a much larger scale. It did not take long for industrialists to realise that if they siphoned out larger amounts of money than what was required to be given to political parties, they could keep the balance for themselves. The result would be that their companies would show lower profits, and hence lesser amounts of taxes would have to be paid. On the other hand, they would have large amounts of money for their personal use, and this income would of course not have to be declared to the tax authorities. One result was a sharp increase in the spending on luxury items. Foreign travel, real estate deals with a large component of black money, building palatial houses with costly imported fixtures and fittings, buying jewelry and other luxury goods were some of the activities on which black money was spent. The 'hawala' business also developed and through this route money was sent abroad for use there. Since the person having control over the management of a company controlled the generation of such money, the importance of not losing control grew. Fights between families happened because one member thought the other was having access to much larger amounts of money. Top managements got accustomed to this way of working and living.

Another, and perhaps even a more serious longer-term consequence of large scale non-compliance with tax laws, is not generally understood. The result of non-compliance leads to weakening the balance sheets of companies. Profits become low, and as a result such companies have very small retained earnings. Retained earnings are very important for the longer-term health and growth of a company. Companies that have low profits, and retained earnings are not considered to be bankable and do not get loans from banks. A large number of small scale and micro industries are unable to access bank credit because their balance sheets, even if they exist, show them to be not creditworthy. Such companies have to borrow money from private lenders at much higher rates of credit, and this

further erodes their profit-making ability. The absence of their own resources results in the companies not being able to invest in acquiring better technology, equipment and machines. This results, over time, in loss of productivity due to machine breakdowns, and inconsistent quality because the tooling and fixtures are worn out. The ability to invest in better maintenance equipment, and trained manpower is also adversely affected by inadequate funds. Spending money on R&D, and new product development is rare in such circumstances. Expansion of capacity is also handicapped. Experience has shown that such companies have failed to expand and grow to larger size. Very few small-scale industries in India have graduated to become medium and large companies even after decades of operations. The habits that have become ingrained because of access to untaxed money are now proving hard to give up. They do, unfortunately make industrial growth and competitiveness very hard to achieve.

The process of siphoning out funds from a company through non-compliance with tax laws, cannot be done by the top management by themselves. Some of the trusted employees have to participate in the process. Other employees and workers inevitably become aware of this practice and realise that the balance sheets of the company do not reflect the true position of operations. They also understand that if they work to improve the company, the benefits of their efforts would all go to the management. As a result, the workers do not have any interest in improving productivity or quality, and become adversarial with the management when it comes to wage negotiations. The argument that the company cannot afford to pay higher wages cuts no ice with labour because they know the true situation. In these circumstances companies cannot become competitive, and that is exactly what has happened over the years. Unfortunately, this practice of generating black money only increased after 1991 and continued to adversely impact the expansion of manufacturing and its ability to become competitive.

**The widespread and largescale non-compliance with tax laws over a long period could only be possible if either the auditors, and the tax authorities were both very incompetent, or they were also benefiting from the illegal cash generated by the management. The prevalence of widespread corruption is a common belief among most people. One of the big challenges before the Government is to bring about a reform in the regulatory and tax collection agencies so that they become effective tools for enforcing compliance with laws.**

**The generation of black money by many industrialists, their corrupting various authorities and agencies, and leading a life of luxury resulted in people at large losing all trust and confidence in private businessmen. Even though many politicians were beneficiaries of the largesse of industrialists, they also realised that the public would not vote for them if they were seen to be close to industrialists, or helping them to grow and make profits. The result was that policies and regulations were made with the object of giving greater benefits to the agriculturists and the common users of various services, and industry was required to subsidize these sectors by paying a higher price. The pricing of electricity, water and gas is one instance of this policy. Allocation of scarce resources, like railway wagons, cement steel etc. during the days of shortages is another instance. Cost of compliance because of a large number of laws and regulations became high. All this added to costs and made industrial production uncompetitive.**

**The attitude of labour, and their politically linked Unions, was also shaped by the socialistic ideology. Workers saw no link between more efficient production, better quality and lower costs, with job security, emoluments or perquisites. These came from negotiations with managements, with the State governments usually supporting the labour view point. Unions thus became irresponsible in their**

**demands, and since managements were not much worried about rising costs of production, but wanted the factories to keep working, appeasement of workers became the usual policy. Labour also knew that If a company failed, Government would come to their rescue by taking over the Company and protecting their jobs. The textile industry was perhaps the most notable example.**

**The bureaucracy had also to ensure that they were not tainted by being associated with industrialists, or to be seen to be helping them in any way. Taking decisions in matters relating to an industrialist's problem, in a reasonable period of time, was interpreted as helping them. Often the bureaucrat found it safer to first raise objections, even in totally reasonable matters. Delays, and unreasonable objections all resulted in higher costs and loss of competitiveness. The value of time lost was rarely appreciated in the Ministries. In addition, the bureaucrat lost the opportunity of acquiring domain knowledge from people working in industry, and without that, decision making has often not been in the interests of growing industry and making it competitive.**

**The Government, in their desire to show that it was very serious about curbing corruption enacted very stringent laws applicable to public servants only. The normal laws of the land were considered to be inadequate for public servants. As we know, despite these laws corruption continued to grow, and these laws largely became an instrument by which the politician could keep the senior bureaucrats in line. The honest civil servants, in turn, became more and more reluctant to take responsibility for decisions, for fear of being prosecuted under these laws. The 'committee' form of decision making became the vogue. The result was further delays.**

**Rapid industrial growth is not possible without the Government and the private sector working closely together, and having trust in each**



other. Japan and Korea are examples of this. Without trust, the processes become cumbersome, delays are inevitable and higher costs are incurred even by the honest industrialist. One of the big challenges now is how to build this trust.

The non-compliance with income tax laws did not remain confined to industrialists. Businessmen, both large and small, also became non-compliant, both in respect of direct and indirect taxes. Many businesses were done largely in cash and no taxes paid. Excise duty was also evaded by many businesses, with the collection agency turning a blind eye. The result was that Government revenues, both at the Centre and the States were much lower than what they should have been. This impacted on the ability of the Central and State Governments to allocate adequate investments for infrastructure development. The poor infrastructure availability led to higher costs of manufacturing. Reliable and good quality electricity has not been available in almost all States in India, on a sustained consistent basis. Virtually all industries have had to invest in captive power generation facilities, and the cost of this power has kept rising as oil prices rose. The port facilities were not modernized and ship berthing and clearing took much longer than in other countries. Road and rail transport had its own shortcomings that led to higher costs.

Social infrastructure, particularly education and health services, have also suffered from lack of resources, and have consequently adversely impacted on industrial productivity, and costs.

In manufacturing industry, the workers play an extremely important role in determining productivity and costs of production. Despite the best of systems, consistent achievement of prescribed quality standards is largely dependent on the workers. The ability to make continuous improvements each year is also in the hands of the workers. This is particularly relevant to India, where the availability of



cheaper labour gives a comparative advantage over the developed countries. China has captured large parts of the market for low technology products by using cheap labour and mass production techniques. In the period 1960 to 1980 Japanese workers enabled Japan to become the most competitive manufacturing country. It is also apparent that workers will not, over long periods of time, contribute to continuously improving productivity and quality, and reducing wastage and costs, unless they believe that by doing so they also stand to benefit. The management labour relations, and the way each viewed the other, during the period 1950 to 1991 created quite the converse kind of conditions. Even after 1991, only a few managements made the attempt to develop a more productive and cooperative relationship with the work force. Top managements generally leave all communication with workers to the industrial relations managers. As a result, Indian industry has not gained much in terms of the ability to keep improving costs and quality. In future, keeping in mind the political situation in India, managements would gain most if they developed cooperative relations with their workers.

What I have said gives an idea of the enormity of the task of making manufacturing competitive in India, and may instill a feeling of pessimism. We need to recognize that all that has happened in the last 70 years is man-made, and not God given. It is the result of decisions taken, after Independence, that socialism was the best route for the development of India, and creating a society that removed the huge disparities that existed. The Soviet experience in centralized planning, at that time, looked very attractive and was adopted for use in the country, including reliance on public-sector industries to develop industrially. It became possible for India to accept this model, as Pt. Nehru was a leader who commanded the total trust of virtually all Indians. His belief in the efficacy of this model of development, and the socialist ideology that was inherent in it, was accepted by all.

By the time Pt. Nehru passed away in 1964, there was already evidence that this model of development was not working too well. However, Pt. Nehru did not make any changes, possibly because other matters like the war with China, occupied his attention. After his death, the Congress party was emotionally unwilling to change anything done by him, as it would imply that his policies were not perfect. Moving to a market driven economy would mean that the socialist ideology adopted in 1950 was wrong. This was unacceptable to the Congress party, and largely remains so even today. There has been unwillingness to recognize that a policy that was the best for India in 1950, may need changes after a period of time. Improvements would never take place unless there is willingness to accept that something done in the past is no longer the best now. The reforms in 1991 were accepted because there was no alternative. However, as soon as the crisis passed, the pace of reforms also slowed down.

The public-sector model of industrial growth has been given up everywhere in the world, including Russia. The market economy, and enabling private enterprise to flourish, has been the route adopted for economic development. Even China encourages private enterprise, and individual wealth creation. Perhaps the unwillingness to change in India has something to do with the creation of many strongly entrenched vested interests, who have benefitted very substantially from under that system. The public-sector units offer many opportunities for exercise of patronage. The black money generation has enabled the required expenditures to be made on elections, and possibly for some individuals to amass large private wealth. The professed desire to help the poor has justified the huge expenditures on subsidies and doles, though Rajiv Gandhi admitted that only about 15% of the money spent reached the intended persons. The rest was embezzled.

**In 2014, the country elected a leader on a platform that promised a complete change in the system. Mr. Modi promised to accelerate manufacturing, create jobs and eliminate corruption. He commands a level of trust among the people of India that has not been seen for a very long time. He derives his strength from the common man, and the youth of this country. The ordinary man is desperately seeking freedom from corruption and harassment from petty functionaries. He is hoping that someone will create conditions that will enable him to go about his daily life without having to cross man made obstacles everywhere. The youth want jobs and a better life. A majority of Indians think that Mr. Modi is the only person who can make this happen, and are willing to put up with temporary hardships that are inevitable in the process of change. These are strong factors that create the conditions for change.**

**Increasing the level of compliance is essential for curbing black money generation and the attendant corruption at different levels. Compliance is also necessary for making business easier to do, and for manufacturing becoming competitive by reducing costs. Reforms starting with demonetisation have been directed towards this end. The people at large have welcomed these measures, despite many facing temporary hardships, because they are happy at the corrupt rich persons being deprived of their wealth and the hope that corruption will reduce. It is likely that the government will get the political support it needs for making more reforms.**

**The government has also been making increasing use of technology both to ensure compliance, as well as to simplify the life of ordinary people and eliminate the opportunities for harassment. The availability of technology, and the spread of the internet and access to it, are strong weapons to change the ills that had crept into the system in the past.**

**The efforts of the Prime Minister to build close relationships with several countries, important to India for both technology and investments, along with the reforms to make doing business easier, are likely to lead to large foreign direct investments in manufacturing. Such a favourable situation for foreign investments did not exist in the past.**

**Another major strength for competitive manufacturing is our work force. The workers in India have always been receptive to ideas that will enable them to improve their lives. I have personally experienced this in the Gurgaon factory of Maruti, and seen how quickly workers understand that their job security, career progression and quality of life would be best improved if they work as partners in the undertaking, and contribute to make the Company more and more competitive. They understood the dangers of multiple, politically affiliated Unions, with outside office bearers, and resisted pressure from politicians in this respect. To educate workers it was necessary for me to have constant communication with them, and to adopt policies to demonstrate that what we were saying was true. At present, over 700,000 suggestions for improvement from workers are implemented every year, resulting in savings of over Rs. 300 crores. If workers in Maruti can behave like this, workers elsewhere can also do so. However, it has to be understood that such a partnership can only flourish if both sides can create and maintain trust in each other. The initiative for doing this has to come from the management, and includes good communication, respect for workers, having the company growth as the sole agenda and ensuring that all managers walk the talk.**

**The old school of industrial leaders consisted of those whose thinking and behaviour was shaped by the license raj, and the attendant corruption. Many of them found it difficult to adjust to the competition that started to come in after 1991, and they did not**

change very much. However, they are now being replaced by a new breed of young, ambitious entrepreneurs. Many of them have been educated abroad. They recognize the opportunities that India offers to them to create globally relevant companies. These young leaders of the business world have to build trust and confidence in the Government, in the people and in their employees by their conduct, behaviour and the way they live their lives. They have to be fully committed to the growth of their companies, and manage them so that all employees and stakeholders trust them, and work as partners in the enterprise. The gap between the Government and businessmen has to be closed. I have met several of these young industrialists and businessmen, and they give me confidence that they will not let the opportunities now developing to go waste.

The men-made policies of 1950 that, over time, led to slow industrial growth, rising corruption and non-compliance are now being undone, again by other men, and replaced by new policies that are better designed to promote manufacturing growth, competitiveness and job creation. These men have a better understanding of how wealth is created, and are willing to create conditions for that. Creation of an equitable society has to remain as a major objective. These men recognize that if they do not succeed democracy will be at risk. The support of the people, who want change, is what gives strength to their efforts and hope for success.

