

## **Atal's Vision for Bamboo based development in India**

*A slow and unsteady bamboo journey from 2004 to 2020*

Bamboo, considered to be the most versatile plant species, is associated with three legends. First, as the Buddha's bamboo of meditation. The relationship between Buddhism and Bamboo is tightly linked. Buddhism manifests: "be like the bamboo plant". Various bamboo species are named after the Buddha such as "Buddha Belly Bamboo", "Mercy Buddha Bamboo", and "Arhat Bamboo." Buddhism has also inspired various wisdom statements around the bamboo plant.

*Bend but don't break. Be flexible yet firmly rooted.*

*You can lean on a bamboo stick but not on a rope.*

*Like bamboo, be resilient and bounce back.*

*The higher the bamboo, the more it bends.*

*Commit to continuous growth.*

Secondly, as the Gandhi's lathi (stick) of conviction (satyagraha). When Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, visited Ghorghat village in Bihar's Munger district in 1934, the villagers wished to gift him a lathi (bamboo stick). The Mahatma said he would accept it only under one condition — the villagers would have to stop making lathis in the interest of the nation as it was the Britishers' weapon of choice against unarmed freedom fighters. At that time, Ghorghat made and supplied lathis all across north India. The villagers readily agreed and Gandhi accepted their gift, which he kept with him during the freedom movement, as a symbol of strength that would never be used to harm anyone. Ever since, the village celebrates a 'lathi mahotsav' to commemorate the gifting of a lathi to the Mahatma. For Gandhi, a lathi was a symbol of agrarian economy and society in which it serves as an all-purpose tool,

Thirdly, as the innovative vision of Atal Bihari Vajpayee about bamboo as a change agent for a better nation. The journey of bamboo-based development in India started with the historical speech of ABV, as the Prime Minister of India, at the 7<sup>th</sup> World bamboo Congress on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2004, which laid down a road map for the bamboo-based growth in the country. His vision "bamboo as change agent for a nation" has been successfully adopted and implemented in China, and few other countries. In India, there is tremendous potential of bamboo based economic development, much more than that of China, but with the present pace this journey has still a long way to go.

Taking the Atal's vision forward, as a milestone, recently on 8th September 2020 Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India, Narendra Singh Tomar inaugurated 22 bamboo clusters in nine states — Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttarakhand and Karnataka, gearing up the country to increase the export of bamboo products, ascertaining that with the wealth of bamboo in India and growing industry, India should aim to establish itself in global markets for both engineered and handcrafted products.

In the introductory remarks of his address, Atal Bihari Vajpayee expressed his personal attachment with bamboo, "Bamboo is used in religious ceremonies throughout Asia. Speaking of religious ceremonies, I seem to have some personal association with bamboo because of my name 'Vajpayee'. In an ancient Indian sacrifice called "vajapeya", bamboo seeds were offered to the fire. I do not say that my interest in bamboo owes to this association. But I have to admit that I have always been fascinated by bamboo, which rightfully deserves its nickname, **"the miracle plant"**.

He further shared his viewpoints about bamboo's versatility: "Bamboo is highly relevant in the global context, particularly in mitigating environmental crises such as deforestation, desertification and increased carbon dioxide emissions. Bamboo is important for us from many points of view – employment generation, sustainable development, raising farm incomes, and promotion of a wide variety of enterprises that are based on bamboo. Bamboo is an ordinary plant, but with extraordinary qualities. It is a symbol of strength, flexibility, tenacity, and endurance. For centuries bamboo has been integral to the daily life of people throughout Asia. Bamboo touches us in many ways. Just as every part of coconut is used, I am told that bamboo has 1,500 documented uses – from cradle to coffin".

ABV's poetic flair got reflected in his expression for bamboo, "Bamboo is used to build houses, and it is also used to make many things used inside people's homes. A poet has aptly said, *'When the first people came on earth, To make the first village, The bamboo was there!'*. There is great beauty in bamboo's amazing range of functionality. In flute it creates music. In brush and paper, it creates poems and paintings. And in simple sticks and strips in the hands of ordinary men and women, it inspires wondrous works of art".

In his enlightening speech, ABV had reinforced the multifaceted contributions of bamboo in our lives - "Bamboo is in the process of being rediscovered in modern times. For us in India, the natural wealth of bamboo

and the rich resource of traditional skills provide a good basis for its rediscovery and future development”. Bamboo was earlier a “minor” forest produce – considered the underclass or the poor relative of mighty cash woods. Now, we intend to make it “major” in its profile and its place in the rural economy. From an “orphan” crop, bamboo could emerge as the green gold for India. We have a large area under bamboo. We have a large number of crafts-persons, especially women, in bamboo craft. Yet, the potential of bamboo as an important economic resource had remained largely untapped so far. This was due to lack of an appropriate policy and institutional framework, scientific plantation, community involvement, technology upgradation, and product and market development.

Finally, ABV has clearly envisioned the role of bamboo in the economic development of the country – “India's bamboo economy is still small compared to those of some other Asian countries. We hope to create about 8 million jobs in the bamboo industry, lift 5 million families out of poverty and earning Rs 16,000 crore in revenues by the end of its Tenth Plan in 2007”. Bamboo is already creating a range of new generation global products that are enriching our lives. Power generation, pharmaceuticals, water purifiers and filters, innovative industrial and construction applications make it a dependable wood substitute – all these new uses of bamboo have been made possible by science and technology. Both domestic and global markets provide growing opportunities for the conventional as well as non-conventional uses of bamboo. With an established industrial base for a range of diversified products, a rapidly expanding domestic market, and growing opportunities in the global market, there is no reason why bamboo cannot leverage itself into a position of strength in India.

**What needs to be done?** To accomplish Atal’s dream of bamboo-based development, the present efforts at the federal level are not adequate and more extensive and intensive arrangements are needed. At the federal level, and also at the state levels, the subject of bamboo is scattered amongst a large number of Ministries, which demands an effective convergence of all schemes and initiatives of various Ministries / Departments to achieve the goal of bamboo-based development. Some of the key required actions are as follows : Establish an Inter-Ministerial / Departmental Body (National Bamboo Development Authority); Kick-start the market with sector-wise linkage to line departments, which are potential markets; Establish at least one model bamboo district in each relevant state; Raise bamboo productivity several fold; Build a vibrant market of bamboo; Establish Bamboo R&D, Applications Development & Training Centres; Make bamboo biomass an

equal choice to solar power for decentralized power applications; Make dedicated soft credit and grants available to the sector.

A strong political determination for bamboo sector has been manifested at the federal level through a historical inter-ministerial consultation of the Ministers and officers of eight concerned Ministries on the 12 February 2015, under the Chair of the Nitin Jairam Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, another bamboo legendary. The first ever such consultation confirmed following resolutions : • *Establish a 'Bamboo Development Task Force' in the Niti Aayog;* • *Constitute a committee to prepare a white paper based on the review of the efforts made in the sector so far by all the concerned Ministries;* • *Create National Bamboo Development Authority for Convergence of and synergy among all the Departments / Organisations dealing with bamboo;* • *Formulate a National Bamboo Development Policy;* • *Organise "World Bamboo Summit" in Delhi to strengthen international cooperation in Bamboo Sector.*

Atal's Bamboo Vision - **of the people, by the people, for the people** - needs to be taken forward effectually. Bamboo is a resource **of the people**. Bamboo is commonly processed **by the people**. Wherever possible, programmes **for the people** should include bamboo as a material that would provide a market and kick start the bamboo economy, leading to investment, growing, processing, and higher levels of value addition. To commemorate the Bamboo Vision of the legendary Soul, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, this historical day, the 27<sup>th</sup> February, witnessing his paramount visionary speech on Bamboo, may be considered to be celebrated in his memories, as the **National Bamboo Day of India**.

(AK Bhattacharya)

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*Dr AK Bhattacharya is a retired Indian Forest Service Officer and former MD & CEO of MP State Bamboo Mission & Board*