

**Every next level of your life will demand a different you. ... and Little by little, one travels far. ...**

To plan, I paused and could immediately recollect 69 with Moon Landing, 79 with Iranian Hostage Crisis, 89 with Collapse of Berlin Wall, 99 with Y2K and 09 with First & Only American – African – Colored President of USA. Pity, and shame perhaps, reflection of half a century took far less than me figuring out how, or for what, 19 would be remembered, if at all, by the future. Hope, history would be more kind to the last teen of the century than me. So, this is my humble attempt to Reflect and (Hit) Refresh (Thanks Satya Nadella). Will try to move from Know-It-All – that I know I am not – to Learn-It-All (Thanks Carol Dweck), that I strive.

Like literature, the events – and the thoughts behind – reflect the happenings of the time and in the society. So the biggest surprise of 2019 could very well be no surprise as the world has either already anticipated – and therefore provisioned for (read Brexit even if it took three PMs) or couldn't have cared less (Three Israeli Elections and mandate still eluding) or has reconciled with (growing inequality – top 500 persons' wealth grew by 25% in a year when global GDP grew by 2.6% - to put it into the context – the combined wealth of these 500 individuals (\$5.9T) is MORE than GDP of every country on the planet except US, China & Japan and more than combined GDP of entire Middle East & Africa). No major disruption (positive or negative) of scale or reach or impact perfectly represents the current state of global economics and geopolitics where also there is no the superpower as the world moved from unipolar (UK – at best Europe) to bipolar (US & USSR) to multipolar (US, EU, Japan, BRICS) to nonpolar (where protests in Chile & Hong Kong could be more impactful than humanitarian crisis in Syria or Climate Emergency – Oxford word of the year).

While globalization continues to retreat, and beaten by populism around the globe, the world has never been so inter-connected, inter-dependent and influenced: Samples:

- Simultaneous protests in Hong Kong in 30<sup>th</sup> year of Tiananmen Square & Chile – incidentally the 30<sup>th</sup> year of dethroning of Pinochet.
- America formally out from COP25, India distancing from RCEP amid Hard / Soft – Yes / No – Now / Later / Now Brexit.
- Return of Modi in India, exit of Macri in Argentina and reinforced reigns of Erdogan, Putin & Jinping.
- Killing of Baghdadi and conviction of (at least some) perpetrators of Khashoggi's murder.
- Boris Johnson in command & Imran Khan intimidated.
- Independent Scotland & dependent England (Britain, still; Great, not anymore).
- 370 Vs Kartarpur, Ram Janm Bhoomi Vs CAB / CAA / NRC / NPR attracting huge praise and concerns – BIG, Bold, even if controversial, initiatives.
- Angry political season in Latin America (resonating with Arab Spring) with protests in Chile over metro fare, President & Congress declaring each other illegitimate in Peru, Fernandez in Meci out in Argentina, (flawed) election in Bolivia and, by now usual, challenges in Brazil & Venezuela
- Crisis beyond Iraq, Syria & Afghanistan to Xinjiang (Uyghurs) & Cox's Bazar (Rohingyas).

Despite all this, the global economy is growing at healthy 2.6% (not to ignore the challenges in Indian & Chinese economies), unemployment is historically low in US & Europe (but very high in India) and significant (even if not enough or little late) investments in addressing climate challenges (notwithstanding what Donald Trump or Etinne Chouard say, it's Greta Thunberg who outsmarted everybody else).

We are living in the very best times ever lived by the mankind. The advances in Artificial Intelligence and Medical Sciences are brining newer hopes for a better and equitable life while disrupting traditional thoughts. Cheap DNA sequencing and editing would mean disease free life and customized beauty regimes as routine. Longevity Escape Velocity would mean no afterlife and therefore no more Jihad, and charity. Growth in reliability, affordability and availability of renewable energy would force US to find another reason to go to war and (de)stabilize regimes around the world.

Half of the existing jobs shall be automated through so far demonstrated technologies, 60% of the driven miles shall be in autonomous vehicles and 80% of online shopping shall be through mobile. What all this mean is NOT gloom but opportunity to be faster, aim higher and reach farther (not in Piëch & Winterkorn manner though). The key challenge is to stay relevant in rapid paradigm shifts in multiple orbits. While Nirmaljit believe that Fact & Myth can't coexist, as per Devdutt, myth is nothing, but our subjective truth and we live in post-truth era. To complicate the matter more and confuse the reader further, I cannot miss the opportunity to quote Marcus Aurelius "Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth." How does one navigate in the age where opinions matter more than fact because all facts are opinions but not all opinions are facts?

Here's is my three-point formula that works (or so I believe) for me:

- Agility, adaptability and adoptability are existential imperatives. Stay learner for the life.
- Letting Go and Giving Up are two different things, differentiate between them. Be generous in sharing and praising while economical in criticizing.
- Childlike curiosity, saintlier humility and acute awareness of vulnerability help when we need but do not know. Make these your muscle memory.

While the data is accepted as new oil, just like old oil, it is also concentrated in few hands (pockets), described by Ginni Rometty as GMAFIA & BAT. With this, privacy is new controversy – notwithstanding latest GDPR norms, or myth like democracy (The Family Man). Any and every data that has ever been generated is accessible to anybody, anywhere, anytime whosoever care to. The word “delete” never existed in data lexicon and now with most storage on cloud, even “destroy” is no longer applicable. As Rana Foroohar says in “Don't Be Evil” “utopia they sought to create looks more dystopian than ever and it is imperative that we understand “how they lost their soul and ate our lunch and how and why should we resist”.

We are healthier (more deaths due to obesity than starvation), happier (aware of challenges and opportunities), richer (average person has more luxury than Emperors / Moghuls of last century) and peaceful (more deaths in road accidents than terrorist incidents). We are witnessing unprecedented growth (global GDP grew from \$32T to \$90T in last 20 years with US enjoying longest bull run of 11 years and counting) and another recession is still eluding. We are warned that it is around the corner but easily forget that earth is round. I am quite optimistic about the capabilities, commitment and courage of youth and am confident that they shall ensure is better, more reasonable and fairer world.

All this bloom does not, however, mean there is no gloom. The fall is natural (gravity) and terrorism, hatred and racism continue to spread. Machine Learning to detect & kill cancer cells can also identify and kill opponents. Data utilized to eradicate poverty can also be used by dictators (& there are quite a few around – though not identified as such) for spying their populace, making surveillance states, cheap and fast. In a world and at a time when political language “make lies sound truthful and give solidity to pure wind (thanks George Orwell), some fear, and not quite unjustifiably that India is in the throes of Gleichschaltung and Trump has been taking lessons from Idi Amin. Once secular, principled, strong and liberal institutions from the courts to the army to the media are being transformed into nationalist ones, too eager to please their political bosses. The world's largest and greatest democracies are under existential (the word of the year from Dictionary.Com) threat and in country after country, we are witnessing an astonishing wave of attacks on the constitution, institutions, norms and values.

Jason Stanley believes that Globalization, Geopolitics & Economics- all turning negative simultaneously. I don't, entirely, agree with him but have my fears? First economic – easy, then socio-political – no fix formula. High debt on corporate, and governments, have made them more vulnerable, leaving little room to meet

emergency through stimulus. Balance sheets are highly leveraged, long-term investments already cut and promotional extravaganzas strict no for a long time. To compound the problems, productivity is plateaued with less and less working age population. Interest rate are still low, and demand is almost stagnated. There, still, are pocket of growth but one must be competitive as nobody subsidizes the inefficiency, even in 'Third World'. Whether I am the CEO of P&G or a trader in copper, I better focus on Nigeria and Chile (respectively and respectfully). Technological disruptions mean I move beyond cost-outs to function-outs. Borrowing from Salim Ismail "Staff on Demand" is must (& not nice to) have (For details refer his IDEAS & SCALE concept). 2020 & beyond, being the best may not be enough – you better be the only one to do what you do. Learning from eagle to willingly shed your own wings is the only way to stay relevant in a world that pays good homage but doesn't care much. Keep making history else you become the history is the mantra to live by.

On socio-political fronts, less is more. Pity, we are personifying Roman Roy in Succession "I can promise you that I am spiritually and emotionally and ethically and morally behind whoever wins." As of now, Donald Trump is all set to return for another term. Both him and Modi have nurtured a core, and more the media criticizes them, more it expands. I expect European and Asian countries would continue to focus on putting their respective houses in order with no major impact on the rest of the world. The worry, however, is emerging from Latin America and Middle East where continued turmoil is taking huge toll, particularly on the engagement of youth and its integration into social fabric. While Saudi would be busy in expanding their economy beyond oil – and it is sensible with Saudi Aramco becoming THE LARGEST company in the world – larger than the GDP of many countries; protests in Iraq, Lebanon and uncertainties in Israel continue to pose threats to the entire world. Africa – at least western – offers hope while eastern and northern countries continue to be in the perennial state of unrest. In both the instances, their leadership is to be blamed. Risks inherent in the trends that are shaping the world today comes from the inability of governments to effectively anticipate and manage the coming changes. To compound the challenges, US sanctions policy – if there is one, revolutions – visible & invisible, protectionism, digital disruption, climate change, state engineered violence etcetera have augmented already unprecedented levels of volatility for society to navigate. The worst disruptions will not be due to trade wars or terrorist attacks but from the intersection of multiple geopolitical risks that current leadership is neither capable nor intend to address. I sincerely hope and pray that elected and anointed "leaders" heed to Bob Iger (The Ride of a Lifetime) "leadership isn't about being indispensable; it's about helping others be prepared to possibly step into your shoes – giving them access to your own decision making, identifying the skills they need to develop and helping them improve".

As always, I am running against time and words, unable to conclude as I, and you – the reader – would have liked, so here's we go. Agreed, the world is facing unprecedented troubles like a steadily warming planet, increasingly dysfunctional democracies, rising bigotry and xenophobia, a rising tide of refugees, growing political assault on the idea of truth and the concept of honor and so on. Even so, I'm thankful another year has passed with fewer conflicts and manmade casualties, that the United States has not entered any new wars, that the world economy didn't crash inspite of fears and warnings, that levels of poverty and disease continue to decline around the world. I am thankful for the lessons I learned and optimistic about future. I am happy having come thus far and hopeful of going beyond. I am more confident today than ever about leaving this planet better than one I inherited – economically, spiritually and sustainably. I learned from the past, enjoying present and hopeful for tomorrow.

Cannot, and Must Not, end this note without a BIG THANK for all your support, that I continue to count on and look forward hearing from you. Till then, have fun and enjoy.

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