



GUEST VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Indian philanthropy has a worthy record that could shine brighter

Much good work has been done and there's much left to do that collaborative efforts among business families could focus on



NEERA NUNDY & RUMANA HAMMED are, respectively, co-founder and partner, Dasra, and managing trustee, Cipla Foundation



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Independent India turning 75 is an opportunity for us to introspect on the work of our forefathers and mothers that brought us to this moment and the work still left to do. Looking back at philanthropy requires us to recall the efforts of families like the Tatas, Birlas, Hamieds and Bajajs, who played an important role in India's advancement. Today, philanthropic families have an opportunity to shape the next 75 years by coming together as a community for the purpose of strategic giving.

A brief history of family philanthropy: India has had a rich culture of giving, primarily through social networks and religious institutions. The process of industrialization that began in the 19th century created significant amounts of wealth that business families could devote to philanthropic projects. Early charitable efforts led to a period of more institutionalized giving for vital causes like education and health.

The most influential philanthropist during that time was Sir Jamsetji Tata. Believing in the critical need to nurture brilliant minds, he established the J.N. Tata Endowment Scheme in 1892, much before similar foundations were founded in the West. Inspired by his conversation with Swami Vivekananda on a voyage, Tata persevered for over a decade and pledged half his wealth to establish the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). Founded five years after his passing, IISc remains one of its most remarkable contributions to nation-building, one that his estate continues to fund.

The next major shift was the consolidation of our freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. He believed that ownership of wealth must be held primarily in trusteeship for the benefit of the poor, a view shared by prominent industrialists like Jammalal Bajaj, G.D. Birla, Ardeshir Godrej and Dr. K.A. Hamied. Ardeshir Godrej contributed a sum of ₹3 lakh to the 'Flak Swaraj Fund' established by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. In 1935, Mahatma Gandhi inspired Dr. K.A. Hamied to establish Cipla with a vision to make India self-reliant and create wide access to quality healthcare. A compassionate approach to medicine and healthcare that goes beyond the pursuit of profit has been Cipla's legacy. Family philanthropists also supported Mahatma Gandhi's other objectives like non-violence and the promotion of *Ehadi*.

Philanthropic families played a pivotal role in endowing institutions and changing mindsets, thus contributing to modern India. They have helped found educational institutes that remain prominent even today, such as the Birla Institute of Technology in Pilani (G.D. Birla), the Indian Institute of Management (Kasturba Lalbhai) and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Sir Dorabji Tata). Many families have established foundations and trusts that work directly with non-profit organiza-

tions and local communities to address critical issues like healthcare, quality education, skill building and livelihood generation, thereby helping the country foster a better society.

Beyond philanthropy, Indian family businesses upheld social responsibility as a core value. They considered business a force for good long before corporate social responsibility (CSR) was a legal mandate. In 2001, Cipla's 3-in-1 fixed dose combination was the first anti-AIDS cocktail that brought the cost of treatment down from \$12,000 per patient per year to less than \$1 a day, enabling millions across the developing world to access life-saving therapy. Godrej's 'good and green' approach to building a more inclusive and greener India is an example of keeping sustainability at the heart of business.

The role of family philanthropy today: According to the *India Philanthropy Report 2022* published by Bain and Company and Dasra, Indian family philanthropy is expected to grow at a robust 26% compound annual growth rate from 2021-22 to 2025-26. There is still substantial scope to unlock an additional corpus of ₹60,000 crore to ₹1 trillion. Family philanthropists are willing to contribute and increase their giving over time to social causes.

The Covid pandemic has shown us how many unmet needs there are and how much work is left to do. Covid revealed systemic inequalities in our society, as the most disadvantaged sections were disproportionately impacted. Nowhere was this more evident than the migrant crisis; millions of

daily-wage workers were forced to travel long distances with little to no sustenance and support.

Family philanthropy has enormous potential to catalyse how society helps address these issues. Wealthy families can bet large sums on solving problems that remain underfunded. They also have the wherewithal to take a systems design approach to maximize the impact of their giving. New age role models such as Azim Premji, Shiv Nadar and Rohini Nilekani are setting an example for strategic family giving and inspiring others to follow suit.

Perhaps the most significant trend is an increasing inclination among family philanthropists to pool resources for collaborative efforts. For example, Social Compact, a multi-stakeholder platform founded with the support of philanthropists such as Rati and Farhad Forbes, Anu Aga and Meher Pudemjee, seeks to ensure greater dignity and equity for 1 million informal workers and their families. Such collaboration is an indicator of Indian philanthropy transitioning to a new era.

The future of giving: As philanthropists come to see the benefits of collaboration, they realize that this should be done more systematically. Family philanthropists can join hands to help scale up efforts in areas of critical need and provide support to new philanthropists. Towards the next 75 years, business families can draw inspiration from their rich tradition of giving during India's formative years and help build an inclusive India where a billion thrive with dignity and equity.

Facebook did well to throw its chatbot open to public scrutiny

Meta's disclosures on how it was trained could help us improve AI



PARMY OLSON is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering technology.



Facebook's BlenderBot 3 is clunky but at least we can see why

As one of this century's most powerful data brokers, Facebook is best known for its role in sucking up the personal information of users for its advertising clients. That lucrative model has led to high risks—Facebook recently shared private messages between a Nebraska mother and her teenage daughter with police probing the girl's sat-home abortion.

But in a completely different part of the business, Facebook's exchange of information was going the other way and to good effect. Meta Platforms this month published a webpage demonstrating its chatbot, with which anyone in the US could chat about anything. While the public response was one of derision, the company had been admirably transparent about how it built the technology, publishing details about its mechanics. That's an approach other Big Tech firms should take more often.

Facebook has been working on BlenderBot 3 for years as part of its artificial intelligence (AI) research. A precursor was called M, a digital assistant for booking restaurants or ordering flowers that could have rivaled Apple's Siri or Amazon's Alexa. Over time it was revealed that M was largely powered by teams of people who help take those bookings because AI systems like chatbots were difficult to perfect. They still are. Within hours of its release, BlenderBot 3 was making anti-Semitic comments and claiming that Donald Trump had won the last US election, while saying it wanted to delete its Facebook account. The chatbot was roundly ridiculed.

Facebook's research team seemed rankled but not defensive. A few days after the bot's release, Meta's managing director for fundamental AI research, Joelle Pineau, said in a blogpost that it was "painful" to read some of the bot's offensive responses in the press. But, she added, "we also believe progress is best served by inviting a wide and diverse community to participate." Only 0.1% of the chatbot's responses were flagged as inappropriate, Pineau said. That suggests most people who were testing the bot were covering target subjects. When I asked BlenderBot 3 who the current US president was, it responded, "This sounds like a test, lol, but it's Donald Trump right now." The bot brought up the former president two other times, unprompted.

Why the strange answers? Facebook trained its bot on publicly available text on the internet, which is awash in conspiracy theories. Facebook tried training the bot to be more polite by using special "safer dialogue" datasets, but that wasn't enough.

Facebook wants people to engage volun-

tarily with its bot, and click 'like' or 'dislike' buttons to help train it. But the company's openness about the system and the extent to which it is showing its work are admirable at a time when tech companies have been more closed about the mechanics of AI. Alphabet's Google, for instance, has not offered public access to LAMDA, its most cutting-edge large language model, a series of algorithms that can predict and generate language after being trained on gigantic data sets of text. That's in spite of the fact that one of its own engineers chatted to the system for long enough to believe it had become sentient. OpenAI, the AI research company co-founded by Elon Musk, has also become more closed about the mechanics of some of its systems. For instance, it won't share what training data it used to create its popular image-generating system Dall-E, which can generate any image via a text prompt but has a tendency to conform to old stereotypes—all CEOs are depicted as men, nurses as women, etc. OpenAI has said that information could be put to ill use, and that it's proprietary.

Facebook, by contrast, has not only released its chatbot for public scrutiny but also published detailed information about how it was trained. Last May it also offered free, public access to a large language model it had built called OPT-175B. That approach has won it some praise from leaders in the AI community. "Meta definitely has many ups and downs, but I was happy to see that they open-sourced a large language model," said Andrew Ng, former head of Google Brain and founder of DeepLearning.AI, referring to the company's move in May.

Eugenia Kuyda, whose startup ReplikaAI creates chatbot companions for people, said it was "really great" that Facebook had published so many details about BlenderBot 3 and praised the company's attempts to get user feedback to train and improve the model.

Facebook deserved much of the flak it got for sharing data about the mother and daughter in Nebraska. That's clearly a harmful consequence to collecting so much user information over the years. But the blowback over its chatbot experiment was excessive and overdue. In this case, Facebook was doing what we need to see more of from Big Tech. Let's hope this kind of transparency continues. **©BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

Meet the promise of education: It's a national imperative

ANURAG BEHAR



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

To mark 75 years of our independence, here is a (non-comprehensive) list of events, people, trends and ideas from modern India that have shaped our school education, for better or for worse.

Savitribai Phule and her husband Jyotibar ran three schools for girls in Pune in the middle of the 19th century. Their courage in the face of all opposition demonstrated that education is more than literacy and academic subjects, it is potentially the most powerful force for social reform.

Missionary schools spread across the entire country, beginning in the late 19th century, providing good education, sometimes along with religious zeal. These well-organized schools were often better resourced than others, and captured the imagination of the rich and poor alike. As decades passed, while these schools continued to spread and remain aspirational, the phenomena of faux-convent schools grew, with the sole intent of exploiting the hopes of parents for their children.

The powerful ideas of four people have formed the deep subtext of Indian education: Rabindranath Tagore's universalism, humanism and self-realization as the goal of education; Mahatma Gandhi's practical wisdom of education, about combining head, heart and hand for self-reliance; Bhimrao Ambedkar's clear idea of education as the foundation of real democracy, significantly influenced by his own guru John Dewey; and Jiddu Krishnamurthy's notion of education substantially focused on liberation of the self, harmony and holism, which had a profound influence on the 'alternative schools' movement in India.

In 1961, the National Council for Education Research and Training was established with a vision to lead education and foster educational thinking. Subsequently, equivalent institutions were set up in states. The establishment of Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV) in 1963 was an excellent demonstration of how good education could happen within the public system. Various high-quality public schools have been modelled on these KV's since.

The Kothari Commission submitted a report in 1966 that led to the National Policy of Education of 1968, the first such comprehensive policy. The soul of this seminal effort was J.P. Naik. In the practical architecture of

the Indian education system, there is an era before Naik and the one after him.

In the early 1960s, the Tamil Nadu government started a systematic mid-day meal programme in public schools. In 1981-82, the state's Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran expanded and institutionalized it, forming the basis for our current national mid-day meal programme that provides at least one decent meal to millions of children from disadvantaged homes who may otherwise go hungry.

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) began in 1962 as a citizen science movement to foster scientific temper and rationalism. It had a profound impact on educational thinking across the country. Kishore Bharati and Friends' Rural Society, and subsequently other institutions such as EkVidyā, developed and ran the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) along with the Madhya Pradesh state government. The HSTP has played a key role in developing the curricular and pedagogical imagination of education in

India. As a side effect, it attracted a vast number of highly capable people to school education. It was also a model for collaboration between public systems and civil society.

The first Saraswati Shiksha Mandir was set up in 1962 in Gorakhpur. As the numbers of these schools grew, Vidya Bharati was set up in 1977 to coordinate their growth. Over the years, this developed into what must be the largest private school network in the world, with a real commitment to education and an alternative to commercial private schools.

Few of which have an actual interest in education. Alongside, these schools have played a pivotal role in a resurgence of education informed by and reinforcing 'Hindu culture'.

Low-cost private schools have mushroomed, most of which sold the promise of 'Convent and English' education while delivering poor quality in every way. Elite private schools also grew in line with India's middle-class growth post 1991.

The single-minded pursuit of engineering and medical college entry by parents and

students relegated all subjects other than math and science to a secondary status. It also spawned India's insidious tuition industry, de-emphasizing learning and achievement in schools, while making entrance tests all important, converting our education system effectively into a testing system. It was in 1993 that the National Council for Teacher Education was established to regulate and govern teacher education, along with a set of policies which led in rampant commercialization.

The second National Policy of Education came out in 1986, which was replaced only in 2020 by the third. The District Primary Education Programme was initiated in 1993 to universalize primary education across 272 districts. In 2001, with the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, access to School Education was transformed across India, ensuring that there was a public primary school in every habitation and a middle school nearby. In 2009, the Right to Education Act made it a fundamental right for all 6-14-year-olds.

A quarter century hence, when Independent India turns 100, hopefully we would have fulfilled the promise of education—"not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially", in Jawaharlal Nehru's words. If so, we would have achieved our nationhood too, very authentically.

We have had truly diverse influences on our educational system and still have pledges to redeem