DECODING MAFIAS, NATIONAL HEROES, AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN EDUCATION

Ft. Anil Swarup

Sattva Knowledge Institute SKI

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[00:00:23]**Anil Swarup:** I thought I would be moving out of the dark dungeons of coal mines to the bright lights of school education.

[00:00:28]**Anil Swarup:** And to my utmost horror, I found that the mafias of school education are much worse than the mafias of education. I had 20 months and probably the only assignment in my entire career where I felt that I should have had more time because of the sheer complexity of issues in education.

[00:00:42]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** There are three types of people who work in education today. Those who know the reality of a classroom. There are those who know the reality of grassroots. There are very few who know the reality of how the government looks at education.

[00:00:53]**Anil Swarup:** And my understanding is it's very easy to have ideas in this country. For an idea to fructify and sustain, it has to be politically acceptable.

[00:01:00]**Anil Swarup:** That's the top priority. Without that nothing will happen.

[00:01:02]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** The lack of consensus within even the country, which is really what happens to our young adults in India today. What is that winning asset? Do we want them to be employable? Do we want them to study in college? Do we want them to be good citizens?

[00:01:13]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I don't know if as a country even articulated it.

[00:01:15]**Anil Swarup:** Action can't happen in Delhi. Action is in the state. You got to go and sit with the states. As school secretary, I didn't convene a single meeting in Delhi. All meetings in the state.

[00:01:22]**Anil Swarup:** So you have to go there. Start with the child. Determine what is required. Then develop your infrastructure, human resources on the piece of that.

[00:01:29]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** So starting with counseling, which is the information gap. Then the skilling, to address the skill gap and then helping the child move forward, I think is very, very critical.

[00:01:36]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Welcome to Decoding Impact by Sattva Knowledge Institute, hosted by me, Rathish Balakrishnan, where we speak to experts and practitioners to go beyond simplistic solutions to understand what it truly takes to solve social problems at scale.

[00:01:49]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** 50% of India's population are made of young people under 25 years of age. To ensure that they can actually thrive and have a prosperous future, we need the right education systems in this country. that guide and provide agency to young people. The role of the government in enabling high quality education still stands paramount.

[00:02:10]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** However, despite the progress and the initiative in foundational literacy numeracy, there is limited dialogue and conversation on the role of the government and the kind of education systems we need for enabling young adults in India today. To speak about the role of the government, the role of partnerships, and the inherent systems and attitudes we need to make it happen.

[00:02:31]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** We have with us today, Mr. Anil Swarup. He's had over 38 years of experience in the government across various ministries and roles. Post his stint within the government, he's the author of four books around the role of civil servants in the country, and his own personal interactions with the government and with politicians.

[00:02:52]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** He's had the opportunity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, which led him to start the Nexus of Good, an initiative that helps replicate best practices and learnings from across the length and breadth of this country. He brings a deep understanding of the issues in education, and I'm so glad that he is joining us today as part of today's conversation.

[00:03:12]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Sir, thank you so much for joining us in today's conversation of Decoding Impact. I've had the chance to listen to you on audio, podcast, in person. And it's such a pleasure to have you in this. I look forward to this conversation. Exactly. And today's conversation, sir, is about education that I, a topic that I know is, you know, as something that's close to your heart.

[00:03:31]**Anil Swarup:** Close to my heart, but I am not very sure whether I know so much about education. Actually, I was probably the most illiterate uneducated civil servant we made school education secretary. I had no experience whatsoever, and I still do not know much about education. My exposure has been only for about 20 months but I will try and answer whatever I can.

[00:03:48]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** But I do want to explain why I'm saying what I'm saying is that there are three types of people who work in education today. Those who know the reality of a classroom. There are those who know the reality of grassroots. There are very few who know the reality of how government looks at education and government still today.

[00:04:04]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** It's a very important stakeholder in the education space in India. You've had a chance to look at the government's view on education, not just in Delhi. I remember the time you went to Bharat Yatra. Where you went to every state and called up stakeholders and said, *"Ab batao kya ho raha hai?"* Right? And so I would love to know that

view of education which is very, very government led, and also why it is not sufficient. Something that you've talked about a lot.

[00:04:28]**Anil Swarup:** You know, let me give you a bit of a background. When I was posted as school education secretary, this was after my stint at school. So, I thought I would be moving out of the dark dungeons of coal mines to the bright lights of school education. And to my utmost horror, I found that the mafias of school education are much worse than the mafias of coal.

[00:04:47]**Anil Swarup:** Because in coal, mining was underground and the mafias were overground. In education, all the mafias are underground, eating into the essentials of Indian society. And that damage is so enormous. And the most surprising bit, no one seems to understand it, or if they understand it, they don't express it. So, it was really a tragedy, what was happening in education, what is happening.

[00:05:07]**Anil Swarup:** And then, when I looked at it from a particular perspective as Secretary of School of Education, I thought I must go around the country to see what the ground reality is. That has been my habit in whichever assignment. I always felt that I should go down to the ground, understand the ground reality, because much of the problem that I understood in the government was, the inability of those that thought that they had wisdom sitting in Delhi to understand the ground reality.

[00:05:32]**Anil Swarup:** So I thought I should move around. And as you put it, I traveled to about 24 states in the first three months. I used to travel every Monday, every Friday to one state. And when I say state, it was not merely the state headquarter. The first two districts that I visited were Bastar and Sukma.

[00:05:49]**Anil Swarup:** And then I drove from Pune to Goa, dropping down on the way to schools, some are structured visits, some are unstructured. I drove from Srinagar to Leh, not taking the national highway, going deep inside terrains, you know, that gave me an understanding of what was right, what was wrong.

[00:06:07]**Anil Swarup:** And the best discovery during those visits was, such amazing work was being done in the hinterland which we did not realize in Delhi. And all of us were looking at Finland, England, Ireland, Scotland, all the lands of the world without looking at the good work happening here. And what I thought was the advantage was that I don't have to do a proof of concept.

[00:06:28]**Anil Swarup:** All I have to do is to pick up a good practice here, roadshow it to others, and they could pick it up. And that's why, after these visits, we had regional, state level workshops where good models were being displayed, and thankfully number of them were picked up by other states.

[00:06:44]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I want to talk about the good side, but before that, I want to talk about the bad side, the mafia in education.

[00:06:49]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** It's actually very different from the view everybody has, that's because the view on education really is there are a lot of well-intentioned people trying hard and it's not working. And you are one of the first people who said, well, there is an underground here that we need to realize. Tell me about the Mafia in Education.

[00:07:02]**Anil Swarup:** So first of all, there are indeed very well intentioned people. So, I endorse that. Yes. And there's no contradiction between well intentioned people and mafias. In every society, every organization, there are good, bad and ugly people. So, I usually don't talk about bad people because we learn from good people.

[00:07:18]**Anil Swarup:** But let me tell you which I have stated in my book also. I looked at a series of mafias. And the worst mafia was the publishing. And even worse, was the B. Ed and D. El. Ed colleges. Let me explain this to you how it works. You know, I, to my utmost horror, I discovered that the colleges that are supposed to train budding teachers for B. Ed and D. El. Ed, of the 16,000 colleges, 4,000 did not exist. That was my feeling. They did not exist? They existed in a room, two room at the most, and they could give you a degree. So when the chairman, National Council for Teacher Education came and met me and told me this, I couldn't believe it. How is it possible?

[00:08:00]**Anil Swarup:** He said, yes, sir. So I asked him, what is your plan? He said, sir, I'm issuing them a notice asking them to submit certain basic information in an affidavit. Why affidavit? Because if they furnish wrong information in an affidavit, there's a criminal (offence) in it. So I said, please go ahead. These guys were so powerful, they never thought anyone will question what they're doing.

[00:08:23]**Anil Swarup:** They were politically linked, this, that, and it. So as a part of strategy, because I've always had to make an idea politically acceptable. If it is not politically acceptable, it's a no go. So, while traveling to those 24 states, I met with a lot of chief ministers from all political parties. And believe me, everyone from every political party supported.

[00:08:44]**Anil Swarup:** I distinctly remember in UP, when I told the chief minister, sir, this is a serious problem. So, then he heard me out and then he says, *"Haan Anil ji, samasya toh duruh hai, lekin main aapke saath hoon."* Similarly, all other chief ministers agreed. So these guys, this mafia of B.Ed and D. El. Ed colleges, who thought they will be able to stymie it through political pressure, didn't succeed.

[00:09:06]**Anil Swarup:** So they went to 17 high courts, filed a writ against obtaining of information. Three of those high court granted stay, three. So as you look very perplexed, so was chairman N. C. T. E. He appeared himself in a high court and explained to them, sir, we are only seeking information. The high court judge got so annoyed that issued a contempt notice to him.

[00:09:28]**Anil Swarup:** And a notice to secretary school education, asking me how he could be checked out. Chairman and said, anything can happen. We live in a wonderful country and anything can happen. At this point in time, the support that he was getting politically in

the central government, the chief, the minister said, how long can I, I mean, now that the courts are asking, I was a bit upset.

[00:09:52]**Anil Swarup:** But the, the chairman NCTE, one of the finest officers, IAS officer, Santosh Mathew, he got so upset he resigned from the IAS. You know, it's one of the failures. So that step failed at that point. But good news was that consequent to these steps that we had taken, the National Education Policy framers took note of it, and they have come up with a formulation that hopefully will get rid of these frauds.

[00:10:19]**Anil Swarup:** This is the biggest mafia. Then the publication mafia. Publication mafia worked in a very interesting manner. They didn't do anything. They just ensured that the NCERT published its books not online. So session starts. So what do you do? The parents go to private publishers and buy those books. NCERT books come.

[00:10:42]**Anil Swarup:** This we succeeded because I remember as soon as I joined, I think I joined in November and for the next. education year, I got to know of it. I got the NCERT moving and we got the books delivered on time for that year's session. This is 2017 session. There again, all hell broke loose because these guys, private publishers, had actually printed those books and they were having a margin of around and if I remember the figure correctly, annually making 3000 copies.

[00:11:12]**Anil Swarup:** So they were hit because what do you do with these books because NCERT delivered the books, people were not going to them. So they tried all sorts of things. And they took it out in a very different manner, you know, because CBSE was also involved in it. They were very annoyed with this Chairman CBSE. So there was a paper leak.

[00:11:28]**Anil Swarup:** I don't know whether you've heard about it. In 2018, there was a CBSE paper. These publishers got together and I got to know of it and raised a massive hue and cry against paper leak. They wanted to get rid of the chairman CBSE. Governance is not easy. You have to be aware on all your sides and understand what's going on.

[00:11:49]**Anil Swarup:** And play accordingly. I mean, that is another story. I managed to, I had failed in case of Santosh Matthew. In this case also, the minister said *"Anilji, Chairman CBSE ko hatana padega"*told him, *"Sir, Uski kya galati hai?""Galati toh nahi hai, situation diffuse hui hai"* I said, sir, immediately struck me, I have to come up with something quickly. So I told him, sir, right now the media is after her. She's a buffer between you and the media. The moment you remove her, the media will be after you. Bingo! He agreed with me. We held a press conference, diffused the situation.

[00:12:24]**Anil Swarup:** Chairman of CBSE went on to become Secretary of School Education thereafter, a very fine sir. So, that's how education is very complex. You know, in my entire career, I used to make myself redundant. At Co Secretary, I had made myself redundant. Beginning with sleeping in the office, I had only 45 minutes of work.

[00:12:41]**Anil Swarup:** We had setup systems, self operated systems. Those systems are working even today. I left it in 2016, but in education, I had 20 months and probably the only assignment in my entire career where I felt that I should have had more time because of the sheer complexity of issues in education. So these are two mafias.

[00:12:59]**Anil Swarup:** Then the third mafia is Nakal mafia, and you can't understand it in southern part of India. You can't even visualize what happens. Let me give you a narration from my early, early part of my career. I was a subdivision magistrate and my driver said,*"sir, aaj aapko le chalte hain, ek nazara dikhaayen".* I didn't understand.

[00:13:16]**Anil Swarup:** So I said "chalo". So I went there. I reached, the school examinations were going on. As soon as my Jeep arrived, people started jumping out of windows. So I said, what's this going on? So he tells me, *"sir, nakal karane aaye hain sab log"* I said, look, you know, in UP, Bihar they will, the schools are auctioned for, for copying.. You can't believe I saw it with my own eyes.

[00:13:39]**Anil Swarup:** So I said, this is nonsense. Listen, *"Sir, yahan aise hi hota hai exam"* next day he tells me, *"sir, aaj thoda jaldi chalenge aur.""Aaj kya hai?" Bole " sir, aaj doosra nazara dekhle"*so I went with him. I reach his examination hall. It's very quiet. I said, *"Yahan toh bada badiya chal raha hai".* bola, *"Woh nahi sir, parcha abhi abhi bata hai"*

[00:13:58]**Anil Swarup:***"Woh sir, woh aam ka bhaag dekh rahe hain. Mango.. Waha pe sir, yeh log parcha solve kar rahe hain. Woh solve karke, aage nikal kar aayenge."* So I'm giving this first hand, personal experience about it. Kalyan Singh tried. Because there are nakal Mafias in the sense they take up schools, they allow people to copy, or enable them to copy, ask, what is going on?

[00:14:23]**Anil Swarup:** This is education. So I can go on and on. So there are codes of mafias. Work on it, towards it. And no one talks about it because I'll tell you, my reading is, because I used to wonder why isn't anyone concerned about it? Especially the politician. Now the politician is concerned about today and tomorrow at the most.

[00:14:43]**Anil Swarup:** And some visionaries will look at day after tomorrow, certainly not five years down the line. Education destroys over a period of time. Or the monuments are built over a period of time. Who's bothered? You're bothered about today-tomorrow. That's the tragedy.

[00:14:57]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I want to only pick up and I promise in about next five minutes, I'll stop talking about bad news and move to good news.

[00:15:02]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** The last point that you talked about is something that bothered me so much. And I've had the pleasure and privilege of working with Dr. Santhosh Mathew multiple times. One of the pet peeves for him is how do you make issues like education, health, politically salient? Has that something, has, given your experience, have you sort of seen, is there a way to make that happen?

[00:15:20]**Anil Swarup:** You know, it can be made to happen. Anything can be made. In government, it's difficult, but anything can be made. And my understanding is it's very easy to have ideas in this country. For an idea to fructify and sustain, it has to be politically acceptable. That's the top priority. Without that, nothing will happen.

[00:15:36]**Anil Swarup:** Socially desirable. technologically feasible, financially viable, administratively doable, judicially tenable, emotionally relatable, and environmentally sustainable. Now, these are not easy aspects, but they can be done. But if everything has to be hunted, it requires time. So, for example, in coal, contrary to the general impression, the problem was not as complex as education.

[00:16:01]**Anil Swarup:** In coal, it was a single dimensional problem. There are mafias there, coal production was a problem. You sort it out, mafia problem, you sort it out. In education, it's very complex. And there's so many stakeholders in it, all that were limited, you could count them in a fingertip here. So you require greater time.

[00:16:19]**Anil Swarup:** You know, that's why I felt, yeah, I wish I had some more time in education because I'm sure it can be handled. How it can be handled. You have to take issue by issue and try and convince the political master that it would be good for him politically. Once he appreciates that. It's all a question of conveying a value proposition.

[00:16:36]**Anil Swarup:** Whoever you are talking to, whichever stakeholder you are interacting with, if you are able to convey a value proposition, because you have to convince him that what I am saying is good for you, not for me. Obviously, it's good for me, but until he accepts it as his own value, he will not, he will probably like my language.

[00:16:51]**Anil Swarup:** If I am good at expression, he'll say yes, do nothing about it. The internalization happens if the person starts finding value in it. So that requires a bit of time. I had struck a chord with Prakash Javadekar. Very fine minister. And so we could stall a few things, which would've happened. So we stalled - I mean something which is happening now - changing history and geography, literature, we stalled it and that pointed time I could manage to convince it.

[00:17:17]**Anil Swarup:** So should we be spending time on this or should we looking ahead? For that matter, another very critical issue, there's some people who wanted to set up a vedic board and wanted government endorsement on it whatever. We don't endorse it. You want to set up a board, go and set it up. Why should government endorse any board?

[00:17:35]**Anil Swarup:** ICSE is not endorsed by government. It's an independent board. Go and set it up. We stalled that as well. I'm told it's there now. It's been set up. The point here is, do I have the skills to convince the political master into believing? So for that, you have to develop confidence. His confidence in you, his trust in you, and then you start believing.

[00:17:55]**Anil Swarup:** Having worked with a number of politicians before, probably over a period of time, developed this art of conveying it a manner that the politicians accepted it. I

had a reasonable amount of experience in convincing politicians of various shades into my side. I mean, people say politicians are the biggest innovating factors.

[00:18:13]**Anil Swarup:** I used to tell them, 90% of the cases I could convince the politician to my side. Of course, it's a democracy. 10% they will do what they want to do, which is very fair.

[00:18:22]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I want to take you now from a politician's office in Delhi to the roads between Kashmir and Leh, Sir and, maybe a couple of stories from the time you went to the ground..

[00:18:30]**Anil Swarup:** Well, it's, it's, um, what I saw was absolutely amazing. I must narrate a couple of stories to you. In one instance, this was Maharashtra, and I had been told by somebody not from Maharashtra that there is a school in Maharashtra who doesn't have electricity. They said, you must visit that school. There's a two-room government primary school.

[00:18:50]**Anil Swarup:** Okay. So I, it was conducted to her in the sense that he knew that I was coming. So he came and received me and took me inside the room, a room which was supposed not to have electricity. When I entered the room, I find that every child has a tablet and there's a smart screen. I'm shocked. I said, where are you getting electricity from?

[00:19:09]**Anil Swarup:** So he took me around those two rooms and showed me a foldable solar panel. He said, sir, we charge batteries with it. And from batteries, we charge. I said, where did you get the money to buy these tablets and the smart screen? He said, Sir, when I came to this school, and the name of the teacher is, Sandeep Gund, amazing teacher.

[00:19:27]**Anil Swarup:** So he said, sir, when I came here, there were 40 to 50 children. Many didn't come to the school. So I didn't know what to do with them. So where I stay, there's some internet connectivity there. So I used to download some video films, educational films, and we used to come and play. The children used to congregate.

[00:19:44]**Anil Swarup:** Two months down the line, about 20, 25 parents came to the school asking very funny questions.*"Guruji, pehle toh school jaate nahi the, ab aate hain, aapne kya kiya?"* So he says, *" main shayad yeh video dikhaata hun, isliye woh aate hain."* So when he discerned interest in the parents, he requested those parents to contribute 500 rupees each.

[00:20:02]**Anil Swarup:** Now these were poor people. They managed to give. With these, he brought two tablets and attached them to the lap. Now this passion of the teacher was getting to be known. So a CSR funding agency and an NGO, they visited the school. And they were amazed at the passion of it. So, they decided to fund the tablets and the smart screen.

[00:20:22]**Anil Swarup:** Around this time, I visited. I was very impressed with Sandeep. So, I took a photograph and tweeted it. So, suddenly, Sandeep Gund becomes a local hero. So, teachers from other schools started visiting his school. And they started replicating in their own way. In between, I met the President of India, Mr. Kovind had just taken over as the president.

[00:20:40]**Anil Swarup:** So, I had gone for a call and inviting him for an event. So, we had some time, we were sipping a cup of tea. So I narrated this story to Mr. Kovind. He looked impressed. So I said, sir, would you like to meet Sandeep Gund? He said, why not? So I got Sandeep Gund over to Delhi. He met the President of India, photograph taken, tweeted, Sandeep Gund becomes a national hero.

[00:21:01]**Anil Swarup:** This is not the end of the story. The Pashtepada model was subsequently replicated in more than 50,000 schools of Maharashtra. And not a single penny of more than 300 crores from the government. Everything crowdsourced.

[00:21:17]**Anil Swarup:** It is an amazing story. I mentioned that in my book. This was one such story, which inspired me into thinking in terms of Nexus of Good.

[00:21:28]**Anil Swarup:** The other story is totally different. This was an unconducted tour. I just saw a school somewhere. I just walked in.

[00:21:34]**Anil Swarup:** My wife was there. We just got down and went. It was lunchtime and I had heard horrid stories about midday. So, I had the meal that was being served and it was very delicious. So, I jokingly told my wife, *"Itna achha toh aap bhi nahi banati ho".* Then I asked the teacher*, "Yeh bataiye, khana kahan se aata hai*". She says, *"Ek sanstha hai, Akshaya Patra, woh deti hai"* Because she also didn't know much about it.

[00:21:56]**Anil Swarup:** So, I went to the state headquarters while having a meeting. I asked the secretary of the state government. I said, what is Akshaya Patra? He said, sir, it's a very good organization. Does this, everything he told me… And I said, Can I talk to the state representative? He was immediately called, so I asked him,*"Bada achha kaam kar rahe hain"* complimented him.

[00:22:16]**Anil Swarup:** I said, *"Kitne zillon me kar rahe hain?"* How many districts? He says,

[00:22:19]**Anil Swarup:***"Sir, do zillon me kar raha hoon".* I mean, UP has nearly 80 districts. I said, *"Yeh achha kaam aap kyun kam jagaon mein karte ho? Baaki mein kyun nahi karte?"* Bole*, "Sir ye hamara nirnay Bangalore mein hamara headquarters hai, wahan se hota hai."* Within a couple of days, I flew to Bangalore.. I met the president of Akshaya Patra, he was shocked. He said, secretary, Gov of India coming and meeting me. I said, I've come here for a request. I asked him, you're doing a wonderful job. I want you to replicate it. He was very happy. I said, you tell me what I have to do.

[00:22:48]**Anil Swarup:** See, he said, I'll give you within an hour of two hours, he made out a whole list. This state, this state, this state, we want businesses. Then my job again became that of a facilitator. Talk to those states and get those going. And they have now last year, they doubled the meals from 1 million to 2 million. That's a major scaling that is happening.

[00:23:08]**Anil Swarup:** So you know, and then it demonstrates that good can happen. You know, that's the point that I was trying to establish. Usually, we believe that nothing can happen. I give those eight dimensions to say that nothing can happen. On the contrary, I keep telling that these dimensions are there to, for you to understand the ground reality, work around them and make things happen.

[00:23:32]**Anil Swarup:** So I came across hundreds of stuff, hundreds. That's where the Nexus of Good movement started. And it inspired me to believe in whatever the circumstances. The challenge was, how do you create a model that is replicable? And the challenge was how to sustain services. And that's where, through my career, I thought that if you can create a vested interest around the happenings, then you can withdraw.

[00:23:59]**Anil Swarup:** That vested interest, if I can use that term, enables good thing to sustain. That's very important. Otherwise, usually what happens is most of us civil servants, the outstanding ones, they do a good job in the world. Rest of it collapses. You have to create that. And I learned it while doing a scheme Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana which as a system was so good that despite the fact that the current government wanted to dump it for three years, they went back to it, rejigged it, renamed it, and it's thriving, in that scheme Ayushman Bharat.

[00:24:31]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I want to specifically in education talk about one problem that we feel today needs a lot of attention. Just a quick background. There has been a lot of focus on foundational literacy numeracy in India, helping children learn, the ASER work, our work, etc. And today I think the country is on its path.

[00:24:46]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** It's a difficult problem. But I think there is a part of education where I think there is the lack of consensus within even the country around what to do, which is really what happens for young adults in India today. This is anyone about 13 years of age when they start to get ready for college and higher education today, I think there is, one, limited conversation on what we want from them. Two, there is also limited alignment on what is that winning aspiration for that young adult. Do we want them to be employable? Do we want them to study in college? Do we want them to be good citizens? I don't think we've, as a country, even articulated it very well.

[00:25:15]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** And third is that vested interest group around this problem doesn't seem to be set yet, but I want to get your thoughts on that.

[00:25:20]**Anil Swarup:** See, you are right. There is a visible indifference towards it, which is shocking because you're playing with the future of the country, which is supposed to have a demographic dividend.

[00:25:33]**Anil Swarup:** And if you don't even have the conversation, as you say, It will be a demographic disaster. So they have very sporadic conversations. I've been a part of some of them. As I said, no one seems to be bothered about five days down the line, leave alone five years down. That's the real problem. Because if I am obsessed with the newspaper headlines, then I would obviously not talk about five years down.

[00:25:58]**Anil Swarup:** So that is a problem today. And earlier also more so now, because everyone seems to be only bothered about publicity. And education is not publicity. I mean, others could be, education is hard work, brass tacks. And for that, you have to have greater detail of, for example, National Curriculum Framework. I'm digressing it.

[00:26:21]**Anil Swarup:** No, no one is bothered about it. Look at the time it took for the National Curriculum Framework. Then everyone talks about vocational education, skill development, their conferences held. No one sits down and understand why is it not happening? You know, I learned that in coal. that if you want to find a solution to a problem, you must go deep into the 'why' of it. Keep going down till you go to the bottom and then start working.

[00:26:49]**Anil Swarup:** So, for example, skilling, there is a realization that is skilling is the main appeal. Okay. Now, if that be the case, why is it lack of infrastructure? Is it lack of human resources? Is it lack of funds? Is it lack of political will or a combination? And this is a conversation or discussion that should happen.

[00:27:08]**Anil Swarup:** But then if I'm busy holding conferences and inaugurating things, You know, we've had *"Chintan Shivirs"*. They call them *"Chintan Shivirs". But uske baat, chinta ka vishay yahi hai ki chintan ke baad kuch hota hi nahi. Phir agla chintan shuru ho jata hai*. So it becomes like industry organization who keep holding these conferences. No, they can afford to do it. Government cannot. Government has to go into the depth of it. So, for example, if there is a shortage of infrastructure, okay.

[00:27:34]**Anil Swarup:** I'm just taking one. If you require certain infrastructure for vocational training or skilling, We must then try and understand what the education policy doesn't. How do I create that infrastructure? Who all can do that? Government alone can't do it. See, the problem with the National Education Policy, which I've read, is that they look at private sector with, you know, they don't touch them with a bargepole.

[00:27:58]**Anil Swarup:** How can you do that? 50% of our children going to private schools. How can you ignore them or treat them as, you know, pariahs, they are having, they're just there. There has to be a partnership. And I've been an advocate of public private, big time. So, for example, if money is required, to what extent can I engage gainfully with the private sector in creating that?

[00:28:23]**Anil Swarup:** The tragedy is that we are so obsessed with statues that the CSR fund goes for the statue rather than the infrastructure. If the same money goes to infrastructure for IT, things will happen. I'm not saying only infrastructure will solve the problem. What I'm saying is, it's a very important component of skilling.

[00:28:38]**Anil Swarup:** You know, in the policy, they say that every school should have skilling. No, for that you have to have infrastructure in the school. Skilling can't happen in the classroom. You have to have hands-on experience. Where do you do that? So, I've just taken one example to illustrate how indifferent or callously we are looking at these aspects, which are so critical.

[00:28:56]**Anil Swarup:** You know, everyone goes and joins BA. I mean, my personal view is we should dissuade people from doing BA in history. I mean, there should be some people obviously going there, but by studying just history in BA and everyone who doesn't get admission as well does history and geography, it doesn't work.

[00:29:13]**Anil Swarup:** They should be made employable. Then there are other issues. I mean, I can go on and on this employability part, that level of training, which you give skilling that you get a person skilled in, say, in, Jhajjar will not be able to come to Bombay and work. He has to find employment close by because the salaries that he will get will not sustain him in Mumbai.

[00:29:36]**Anil Swarup:** So these are aspects that, it's not that they have not been discussed. They are not taken to logical conclusion. Now, there are some states I am told, I have not studied it at length, who have done this. Like in Tamil Nadu, I had the occasion to travel interior areas. They have managed to create employment locally.

[00:29:54]**Anil Swarup:** Quite a lot. There's still a lot of improvement that can be done. But can we understand, say, if somebody elsewhere in this country can study that? And that's where I feel NITI Aayog should play that role. But this is good that has happened in this part of the country. And it's not merely one presentation.

[00:30:11]**Anil Swarup:** It has to be a very intensive dialogue. You know, in Coal, I mean, I'm taking an example because I feel action can't happen in Delhi. Delhi is a fiction. Action is in the state. You've got to go and sit with the states. As Coal Secretary, I didn't convene a single meeting in Delhi, all meetings in the state, maybe in the, at the mine level.

[00:30:28]**Anil Swarup:** So you have to go there. That requires indulgence, would not give you publicity. If you sit in a mine, who, which photographer is going to come and take a photograph and publish on the… but if you announce something in Delhi, everyone will notice it. Big things are happening. So more so in education, because these are nitty gritties of education, which will never catch limelight.. But I think will be beneficial.

[00:30:48]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I want to reiterate a couple of things you said. We did an internal research at Sattva where we said that for every hundred students in grade eight today, only three of them are employable at the end of their college, three to hundred. The numbers are stark and I had a chance to speak to some college principals last week.

[00:31:05]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** You know, the discussion was different and their only question was *"Rathish yeh bataiye, bachhon ko kaise hum college leke aayen."*

[00:31:12]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** They've all registered for BAs…Nobody wants to come to college. And so there are these phantom students on whose future we are discussing today. And I think it just reflects the reality that we are sort of dealing with. But the question, sir, and I think I'm asking you this specifically because you engage a lot with young people. And I saw that even yesterday where I had a chance to be part of your book launch. What would your winning aspiration for young people in India today be? For the whole of India, not just for the Bombays and Delhis.

[00:31:41]**Anil Swarup:** See, the issue is that we can't have a generic decision and say this is the strategy. It doesn't work that, you know, India is a very diverse country within a state there's... so I have to engage with them. Now, obviously I can't engage with them. We have to have intermediaries who engage with them.

[00:31:56]**Anil Swarup:** I can, I equip the teachers of the school to engage with, I say engagement because each individual requires a different sort of an in different sort of counsel. We can't say that all should become engineers or should become this.

[00:32:08]**Anil Swarup:** That's what we do while making policies. And it has to be much more intensive engagement. Again, it's a tough job, but doable. It will again not hit headlines and hence people don't do it. Someone has to sit down and engage with these children and understand them and make them understand. We may not succeed in all cases, but in majority of cases we'll bring them around to our point of view.

[00:32:31]**Anil Swarup:** But that conversation is not happening. That conversation has to happen with the child. He has to have faith in you, you have to have faith in him and have a conversation with him what he wants. And then probably, that's why I lay a lot of importance of counseling. Especially post class eight, child has to be counseled.

[00:32:48]**Anil Swarup:** And for counseling, you have to understand the child. You just can't counsel and say, this is the prescription, this applies to everyone. No, you have to understand. It's like diagnosis. You have to understand the child and then guide him that this is best for you. For example, I guide a lot of aspirants to civil services, okay?

[00:33:02]**Anil Swarup:** And I spend a lot of time individually with them, especially those that qualify for interviews. I spend one on one with them, at least 10 to 15 minutes with each child. I guided 200 of them last year. So I spend those time to understand what are his strengths and weaknesses and then tell him in the given time how you can work on your strengths.

[00:33:22]**Anil Swarup:** So that is a very intensive engagement. I think teachers will have to be equipped with that. The policy talks about counselors, but *"Jeb mein nahi pata, chal diye Calcutta"* don't really know how to go about doing it. I mean, I told Dr. Kasturi Rangan, you know, a smaller policy and larger action plan. Because when you work out what needs to be done, how it will be done, who will do it, by when it will be done, you will understand the limitations of the recommendations that you're making.

[00:33:49]**Anil Swarup:** And there has to be a pathway. States are not equipped. You know, many states approached me, I had retired, on how to go about implementing the policy. That has to be inbuilt with the policy. That institutional mechanism had to be there to handhold some of the states to take the policy to its logical conclusion.

[00:34:05]**Anil Swarup:** So they are picking up piecemeal here, here, here, here, making a mess of a fantastic policy. Because there's no action plan.

[00:34:13]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Leads me to the second question. I understand when people outside the government throw darts at the government: *"Sarkar ko yeh karna hai".* My mom always has an idea on what should government do. And that's okay because she's outside.

[00:34:24]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** What you're saying seems to be like the 101 for the state's officials. And I mean, government civil servants to be able to do.

[00:34:32]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Increasingly that focus on Delhi is growing rather than the focus on the ground. Is that an incentive challenge? Is that a capacity-capability challenge? Why do you think there is.. Because this is a government document on what needs to be done. The actual plans are still missing.

[00:34:47]**Anil Swarup:** And as I said, hitting the headlines of the objective, that's the problem here. And that's an incentive problem. So everyone wants to hold a conference and discuss, you know, I, I became pretty employed after the policy was announced because everyone wanted my statement.

[00:35:03]**Anil Swarup:** In fact, many people paid me a good amount just to speak on the policy. I said, that's great. I've never got so much money to speak as they did one, one leading national daily. The editor, I may have, sir, if you can write 800 words, it would be great. I said, alright, sir, we'll pay you this much amount. I said, but what I've not got so much amount ever in my life would give me, I'll write, but then it, the story ends.

[00:35:25]**Anil Swarup:** You know, someone at the operational level has to sit down and understand, and then the roles have to be defined. You know, central government cannot just sit and issue instructions. You define role. This is what the central government do. This is what CBSE will do. This is what the state governments will do.

[00:35:45]**Anil Swarup:** And that role definition has to be determined in consultation with the state governments. Otherwise, we are in the habit of the Government of India. You're showing instructions to the state government on what they have to do. There's no consultation for even role definition. And it can be done. I mean, I'm a great believer that everything can.

[00:36:03]**Anil Swarup:** But you have to indulge. You have to sit. You have to examine. Go to the depth of the problem. Sit with experts who had some experience. When I say experts, I

mean practitioners as well. You know, one of my grouse with the National Education Policy group was, there's not even a single principal or teacher on that group.

[00:36:21]**Anil Swarup:** They were all experts. So they, no one knew where the shoe pinch is now. So, it should have been somebody, a principal or a teacher sitting on the group itself. They did interact with principals and teachers. That's a different matter. In the final document, as you are sitting there, a, you know, a perceptive principal would have said, these are the likely problems in implementation.

[00:36:39]**Anil Swarup:** So, okay, have a separate document. This is the way this policy has to be implemented. These are the likely problems. This is the likely solution. We don't have the solution to this problem. Admit it. Let another group sit down and find a solution. I think it can be done.

[00:36:55]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Leads me to the third question. I want to bring it back together. It's the private sector participation. I've actually been in a closed room discussion with Secretary/ Ex-secretary who frankly said, listen, there is always distrust with private sector. That's the problem. Yeah.

[00:37:09]**Anil Swarup:** You know, the assumption and I've worked in government for 38 years in the government and offices… We've seen that private sector is there only to make money, okay? And unfortunately, private sector thinks that everyone in the government is corrupt. Both are equally wrong. There are outstanding people in the government, there are outstanding people in the private sector.. And I thrived over it as well. I'll give you a classic example.

[00:37:34]**Anil Swarup:** You know, one of the mafias or one of the biggest problems in private sector school education is the fee structure. You know, parents are always upset that the schools raise the fees irrationally. It's a perennial problem. In Gujarat, they went to High Court, Supreme Court. What did we do in UP? When the FICCI delegation, FICCI ARISE delegation came to meet me and I had, I mean, I always believed in public action.

[00:37:56]**Anil Swarup:** So when they came to me, I said, can you come up with a legislation with a solution to them? You've given me a problem. Okay. So I sat with them and my fund, I gave them the bottom line. I said, bottom line is this, that school can charge any fee at the time of admission because then the child has an option not to go to that school.

[00:38:14]**Anil Swarup:** But once the child gets admitted, there has to be a reason or rationale behind every increase. That was the bottom line. They agreed. So they worked out the legislation. Now, legislation made by FICCI ARISE. And then I put them in conversation with the UP government. They had conversation, minor amendments to the legislation.

[00:38:32]**Anil Swarup:** The legislation brought out, problem solved. A critical problem for which in Gujarat took everyone to Supreme Court here it was. So what I'm saying here is, sit with the private domain, you, I used to tell everything. See, ultimately, I'm the ultimate

decisionmaker. Why should I deprive myself of the wisdom that I may get from anybody, including private actors.

[00:38:49]**Anil Swarup:** I'm listening. What is wrong in listening? The thing that you said in the beginning, we don't trust them, is an assumption which I had with the politicians to begin with. I had a lot of problems in the beginning. Why should I trust them? If they do something which is untrustworthy, I'll do that. I'll take it accordingly.

[00:39:08]**Anil Swarup:** But upfront, if I don't trust people, then I'll end up doing everything. Why should I do it? I shouldn't. Now, anyone who has a problem would have a better chance of finding a solution than me giving a solution to them. So, I mean, I got into this habit of asking anybody who came with a problem to give me a solution also.

[00:39:26]**Anil Swarup:** Because then it made my task easier. I didn't have to start with ABC. I could jump in LMNOP and take it to its logical conclusion. It solved my problem. So this trust has to be built by demonstrating areas where public private partnership has worked.

[00:39:41]**Anil Swarup:** So, Akshaya Patra is a classic example of public private partnership.

[00:39:44]**Anil Swarup:** Classic example. Money coming from the government, operated by an entity. So as I said, learn from practices that have happened on the ground, and then you can replicate it and see. It can be done.

[00:39:56]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** So just bringing it all together... And I know you don't like to build castles in air. You are, when I heard you multiple times saying, *"Yaar, hawa mein baat mat karo, tangible kaam karo"* but now that I have you in the room, and if you had to look at the secondary education or the problem, one of the things that you highlighted is role clarity.

[00:40:14]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** *Ki Centre ko kya karna hai, State ko kya karna ha, Private sectors ko kya karna hai aur teachers aur headmasters ko kya karna hai…*

[00:40:19]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** How would you sort of break that down for young adults in India today? And if you just take ninth and twelfth standard, I mean not even go to college at the moment, what are some priorities that you think as a country we should focus?

[00:40:31]**Anil Swarup:** So first of all, going to the student himself, he, you know, a student opts for a particular, you know, subject or particular stream based on the feedback that you would have received or on the pressures from parents or society. That's the first step of downstream of the child, understand him and take him to heights.

[00:40:52]**Anil Swarup:** It may not work in every child, but 80-90% it will work, solves the problem. If it catches the wrong stream, then there's struggle in the future. So that's the first step. Second, broadly within a year or two years, you will understand that how many children are going in that stream. Right now, it's all guesswork.

[00:41:10]**Anil Swarup:** In fact, we create an infrastructure, we create a stream and push the child in. It's not demand based. Some experts sit and decide, that's not correct. You start with the child, determine what is required for him, then develop your infrastructure, human resources on the basis of that. Again, it's long term, it won't happen in one year or two years.

[00:41:29]**Anil Swarup:** Because in two, three years, you'll get to know where the children are going. Then you will plan your infrastructure, human resource. Another two years, we'll get that human resource. If people have time, they should do this. And then how do you train that human resource to enable the child to, you know, fulfill his dreams, whatever they are. So it has to be very structured.

[00:41:49]**Anil Swarup:** And in doing all that, We have to identify all the stakeholders therein and then start defining the rules. And to me, role definition is important because we waste a lot of time doing something which could be done by others. So, if a private sector can do a job better than me, so be it. Why can't I get private sector on board, do it for me?

[00:42:09]**Anil Swarup:** You know, in government, I did not have the expertise or wherewithal in a large number of areas. So, what do I do? Claim that I'm an expert and do something or I ask the expert in the private sector. I used to ask private, please do this work for me. They used to do it very happily. They were happy I was happy.

[00:42:26]**Anil Swarup:** Obviously, my intentions were clear. There was, they couldn't browbeat me or they couldn't mislead me in the sense that with all the experience I knew that this is a vested interest. So that you have to keep in your mind. Apart from that, they are there to help you. After all, it's their problem. So take all the stakeholders along with you.

[00:42:45]**Anil Swarup:** And that's not very easy. You know, sometimes if I have a belief that I am only the wise man around, Then obviously I will not take even help. But if you believe that I can become wiser by talking to other people and get their wisdom on board, then it works. It works brilliantly. I tell you from personal experience, you take everyone on board, as I keep saying at the cost of repetition, ultimately decision is mine.

[00:43:10]**Anil Swarup:** No one can push me into taking a decision. So why shouldn't I listen to you? Why shouldn't I get private sector on board? If there are any financials, give you another example. Now, NGO does a good job in a particular area, right? Now, I used to tell NGOs that you don't expect money from them, because to give you money, they have to go through a process which will kill you and kill your bank.

[00:43:31]**Anil Swarup:** So don't do that. You create a model, go to the government and define that these areas shall be directly funded by the government, not to the NGO, for example, teachers training. So the literature printing and everything would be done by the government and literature provided. So money doesn't go to the NGO.

[00:43:46]**Anil Swarup:** NGO provides the expertise to train the teacher. They work together. The model is computed beautifully. Similarly, you can find roles of NGOs, roles of private sector in each set of activity. Again, as I said, it requires a very detailed indulgence in every area. I distantly remember we used to come up with these solutions with Kaivalya Foundation.

[00:44:05]**Anil Swarup:** We used to have sittings in the room through the day. What would the NGO do? What would the government, what is expected of the state government? And then by discussing the state government representative sitting there. So he has to endorse that or he opposes it. We discuss it. Once the model is accepted by everyone, it happens on the ground.

[00:44:23]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** So I want to reflect on two things as we were talking, which is what I'm taking away. One is, I think what you're not saying, which I think is so critical is the self assurance of this facilitative leader. I know what I want. I know I cannot be coerced. I have clarity and I have confidence and I'm going to approach you from trust.

[00:44:38]**Anil Swarup:** No, let us, let us say that even if I don't have this confidence in myself, I think still that is the way forward.

[00:44:45]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** *"But Sir, hota nahi hai na sir?"*

[00:44:46]**Anil Swarup:** *"Isliye nahi hota.."* Because see, conversation has to start from a certain level. If as Secretary of Government of India, I don't converse, the Joint Secretary will not converse.

[00:44:55]**Anil Swarup:** So, unlike elsewhere in the world, there's a top man who makes a difference. If he opens up to conversation, others will also start. That way, bureaucracy is fairly flexible. It looks at what are the signals. I mean, if you're busy talking to only two, three industrialists, and they determine everything in the country, how dare you talk to anybody else?

[00:45:18]**Anil Swarup:** So it's a question of what is the signal coming from the top? And that's what Mr. Kalyan Singh used to say. Mr. Kalyan Singh, I worked with him when he was chief minister. He said, *"Chief Minister toh ghudsawar hota hai… ghode ko jaha jaaye, wahan le jaata hai"* you know, a lot depends on the signals in it. I had a great time in the first two years as the Secretary, Government of India, where the signals were such, open conversation.

[00:45:42]**Anil Swarup:** And that's why I used to go to the state government, despite the so-called war between the Center and state. And by the way, coal existed in all opposition states. Despite this war going on, center-state, conversations helped. I got them to give land, environment clearances, all that. So it's a question of, again, conversation.

[00:46:00]**Anil Swarup:** But obviously, if I am not confident about myself, if I don't trust people around me, then obviously they go on with it.

[00:46:07]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Then I think we're going back to something you've mentioned before saying attitude.

[00:46:11]**Anil Swarup:** Ultimately, ultimately, people talk about expertise in the bureaucracy. I said nonsense. You can outsource expertise. You can't outsource intent. That has to be developed.

[00:46:23]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** And I think the second principle I'm taking as you were talking, because I think you started with counseling, because building the agency of the child to make the right choice, especially at that age is the foundation, then enabling every stakeholder to enable the child.

[00:46:37]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Yes. But the child should provide that, the confidence and the clarity and the direction to say*"Mujhe yeh karna hai"* because then the child doubles up to actually do this better rather than saying *"Yaar, marwa diya...kahan phans gaye hai hum?"* Because then you're always making wrong choices. So starting with counseling, which is the information gap, then the skilling to address a skill gap, and then helping the child move forward, I think is very, very critical.

[00:46:58]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** So that's helpful. But I want to come back to private partnership again once to ask you another question, which is there are two schools of thought today, in the philanthropy space. One school of thought is that the role of private sector is to innovate and the role of government is to scale.

[00:47:13]**Rathish Balakrishnan:***"Yeh aap choti scale pe dikha do aur government ko de do, government scale karega".* The second is that there is a symbiotic relationship between private sector and government. Perpetually, private sector will be good at doing a few things and government will be good at doing a few things. Here it is a handover approach. *Ki, model karo, scale karne ke liye government ko do.* First model it, and then go to the government to scale it up, and you focus on innovation. Here it is a symbiotic perpetual partnership. Which of these two will probably be?

[00:47:37]**Anil Swarup:** No, no. Both are okay. There is no contradiction.

[00:47:40]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Is it an and?

[00:47:40]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Absolutely.

[00:47:41]**Anil Swarup:** It's not either/or, because in some cases, the incubation will be done by the private sector, and then scaling by the governments. Another case, that partnership has to continue, in the sense that there would be certain role for the private sector, continued role for the private sector, and continued role of the government.

[00:47:58]**Anil Swarup:** Akshaya Patra is a continued role, so the private sector does something there, continues to do that. Governments do something, continue to do that, right? But there are other models where the private sector has come up with a model that work and handed over to the states. I used to talk of three steps.

[00:48:14]**Anil Swarup:** One was a private sector incubating, innovating, and coming up with a model and then doing it all entire expenditure being incurred by the private sector. Then they talk to the state government and since state government cannot part with money, they say, okay, in this model, we will continue to do this and you do the rest of it.

[00:48:36]**Anil Swarup:** Then the third stage would be that NGO or the private sector moves out totally, but continues to be a consultant to the government so as to sustain that idea. Now that partnership continues, but the role changes initially doing everything, then the part thing, then only consultancies, because then, I mean, it happened during my time also, I used to tell them, don't walk away, be there and continue to guide.

[00:49:01]**Anil Swarup:** Then your expenditure of the NGO is only one or two people associated with the government, course correction, guiding them, rest of it, they build institutions and they sustain.

[00:49:12]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** In your experience, sir, are there certain things, especially in education, where you feel private sector is better place to do than public sector?

[00:49:21]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Like how do you make a choice?

[00:49:22]**Anil Swarup:** It's a question of, again, as I keep saying, role definition. Something that the government can't do, shouldn't do, is doing. So you identify that. But it's not complete. There's certain aspects of that government. Let's, let's look at school education. Okay. Thank you. Now in school education, government runs these schools, but there are problems with that.

[00:49:44]**Anil Swarup:** Now, they can't get every child there. So how do you enable the private sector schools also flourish along with the government schools? Now I have written a chapter in my book. We haven't yet experimented in India, but how about giving him an entitlement to a child, allow him to go to a private school or a government school.

[00:50:02]**Anil Swarup:** So you're creating a competition between public and private. He pays that coupon to government school, something which we did in health. That no one believed in it, but we created that entitlement with the beneficiary who decided to go to a government hospital, to a private hospital. In some states, government hospital improved the performance because they were getting money.

[00:50:21]**Anil Swarup:** Doctors were getting money, so they get incentivized and they include performance. I think there is an author called Tooley. He has suggested this. How about a coupon to the child? So if he's spending say, 8000 rupees per annum on a child,

instead of governments giving it to the government school without teachers or with few teachers.

[00:50:38]**Anil Swarup:** Enabling a private school to come to creating a potential for private school to come up. So it's not either or for every action, you have to again have a detailed discussion and then define the role.If you go to every state, then probably I'll be able to tell you this possibly could be the role of the government. This could possibly be the role of the private sector.

[00:50:58]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** What you're saying reminds me of an anecdote that stuck with me. I don't know if you know the story, so Jesuits used to be only in one part of America and at some point they decided they'll go all over the world. And apparently one of the priests asked the head of the Jesuits saying, we have a book now. This tells us what to do when we go all over the world. What do we do? And apparently the head said, descend to the particulars, which means that don't follow the book, wherever you go, descend to the particulars of the context and make the choice. And there's a principlethat is, descent to the particulars. And as you're talking to me, I'm like, you know, don't make broad rules.

[00:51:30]**Anil Swarup:** Especially in a country like ours, you know, this one nation, one thing business doesn't work in India. It will be a disaster. There are certain common principles for the country, that's fine. But the variety is so much. I'll give you another example.

[00:51:44]**Anil Swarup:** If a teacher doesn't go to school in Kerala, probably he'll be beaten up. In UP, they think it's a right – 25 % teachers at some point in time were not going to the school. Now they would be going, but there's a World Bank report, 25%. So, it's so different. How can you, sitting there, in Delhi, define everything? I used to keep telling my colleagues there, and some of them agreed with me. *"Arey sir har cheez kyon handhold kar rahe hain? Aap broad principles kar lijiye, let the state take a call".*

[00:52:10]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I want to finish the last part of the discussion with one topic, which is state capacity, which is government, even if it lets go of 55 things and gets by with it, it still does a lot of things in India. And I think there are two crucial challenges specifically with regard to education, which generally applies.

[00:52:25]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** One is the issue of procurements, which is, I, I've now worked with the government at center and state, but my realization is every problem in the government seems like a procurement problem. Because it is so hard because it doesn't operate from a place of trust. It does not operate from the maximizing quality principle.

[00:52:40]**Anil Swarup:** This is probably the toughest part because, you know, going by what happened in 2012-2013-2014, with all those scams coming up, no civil servant will risk it. And I don't blame them because I've seen aa school secretary, what trouble they go through without any fault of theirs, right? So they would go like to be straight, but you know, the best way to go in some cases, they managed to do it.

[00:53:05]**Anil Swarup:** To set those technical qualification parameters. See, so that the bidding happens only after they achieve a particular level of technical competence. That is the way you can avoid a lot of problems because once you define those, and again in defining those technical parameters, engage with the stake. Let the stakeholders themselves define, and then you take a final call, which is the best definition.

[00:53:29]**Anil Swarup:** Once that gets done, you can mitigate or reduce the problem substantially. You may still not get the best. But still, it won't be anyone, anybody walking in and getting the right. So, it can be done. There are no perfect solutions. I mean, throughout my career, I used to tell everyone. There's no perfect.

[00:53:47]**Anil Swarup:** There's a Japanese concept, wabi sabi. Don't go in for perfection. There are no perfect solutions. Go for an improved solution. And to me, this is an improved solution. You must work on technical parameters, technical qualifications.

[00:53:58]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** By the way, my WhatsApp status is wabi sabi, sir. Yes, it is. The principle that I live by.

[00:54:06]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** The second thing that I wanted to ask you, and I think things have shifted significantly from 2014 to now, in my opinion, is that there is increased government and non profit partnership in many parts of India, which is actually thriving and helping. But I think it is leading to a place where today there are three NGOs sitting in the same classroom and telling a teacher what to do.

[00:54:24]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** And since it is free, the district collector is like *"Jo bhi kuch karna hai, kar lo"* the accountability framework to ensure both accountable finally for state outcomes to work is starting to get very diffused.

[00:54:38]**Anil Swarup:** So I, when I was Secretary GOT, I started this, I wish I could complete it. On a geographical map, I used to define which NGO works where. So that to avoid overlapping, and again, as I keep saying role definition. I'm not going to determine if he goes there. I'll say first mover, you are there. I won't let anybody else come in there in that domain. So if it is teacher's training, you do it. They will do something else, supplementary, complimentary, but not exactly what you're doing.

[00:55:09]**Anil Swarup:** We could map teachers. But we haven't as yet to my knowledge map the NGOs. The moment you map it, you'll be able to bring in some semblance of, of order in the kiosk of NGOs, same NGOs going to a same location and doing multiple things. Duplication that can be avoided today in this day of technology is very easy.

[00:55:33]**Anil Swarup:** It is. You've been actually map it on another. 'In this block, in this village, this NGO is working for this purpose, which are the other NGOs', sit down with them, redefine their geographical location, get them to do either complementary work in the same place or do the same work in some other place.

[00:55:49]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Yeah, because now the supply is increased of NGOs and competent NGOs, the accountability framework, I think.

[00:55:54]**Anil Swarup:** Then will come accountable. Now, if everyone is there, how do you hold accountable? Exactly. You can't determine the outcomes also because 10 people are impinging. So, you have separate people in going, different people to different places. Then you can actually determine what are the outcomes.

[00:56:08]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Exactly. And that then helps the government hold the nonprofit accountable and the nonprofit hold the government accountable ki *"Hum bhi kaam kar rahe hain"*

[00:56:13]**Anil Swarup:** But this is an easier thing. No one has thought about it. I started it. I didn't know what has happened. This can be done very easily. You have to get a form fit and amp it on it. Someone takes a call on that.

[00:56:25]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** And I think it's about time for a good idea and an easy idea. This is a low hanging fruit as well.

[00:56:30]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Sir, I don't know where time passed, but I want to summarize what we've discussed so far very briefly. I think first is, anyone who's working in the education space should recognize what is not working in the education space. So I think your introduction about some of the mafias that we spoke about is very very necessary because these are institutional ossified structures that even a civil servant has lost his job on and I think that's important to know not to be dissuaded by it, but to be aware of that.

[00:56:55]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Second is I think magic happens everywhere in India. I think we are a large country, which means there are so many people of potential. I love the story. You know, about how some teacher takes initiative to say, this is what we have to do. And really that problem is not unlocking potential. It is the transferring of good ideas across a large country like ours. And I think that was helpful.

[00:57:13]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** I think thirdly, we spoke about the various ways in which state has to look at education. For me, I think the principle that stayed with me is, put the child at the center. Ask ourselves whether we are providing the child agency, the teacher of the agency. And I think to do it another principle that you highlighted.

[00:57:26]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Bring the people who matter in the room when the decisions are being taken, not when it's getting rolled out, because they will tell you where the shoe is pinching to capture your words. And the other point that you mentioned, sir, is that small, with smaller policies, longer work plans, I think is important because the policies can be long and ambitious. But as long as it's not clear who's going to do it and what has to be done.

[00:57:46]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Yeah, all of this is paperwork and we can all be happy about it. I think it was also great to hear your acknowledgement that this is a problem that needs attention. What India needs for its young people should be thought through.

[00:57:56]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** And I think for me, it was great because I had you in the room to talk about state capacity issues where I think once you fix it, the unlock of value, be it procurement or accountability frameworks makes it a lot more easier for us to solve problems. So it's been a pleasure talking to you. Thank you so much.

[00:58:10]**Anil Swarup:** Thank you. Thank you.

[00:58:11]**Rathish Balakrishnan:** Thank you for joining for this episode of Decoding Impact. I am your host, Rathish Balakrishnan. If you loved our conversation with Mr. Anil Swarup today, do check out more of our education content on the SKI Knowledge website. You can also check out episodes from season one and season two of Decoding Impact on Spotify, YouTube, or wherever you get your podcasts from. Do join me again in a fortnight for another episode of Decoding Impact.