Preface

This book is about how Indians think, feel and behave and why they do so differently than many other nationalities. Unlike other books, this one neither seamlessly adulates nor outrightly denigrates India or Indians. It neither takes a journalistic approach feasting the reader on "interesting" surface behaviour and sensational events nor does it get the reader lost in the intricacies of ancient philosophical abyss. Rather, it places Indians in the contemporary societal frame and profiles the major facets of their thought and behaviour, then goes back to trace their roots into the ancient past with a purpose to see how the past predisposes and the present guides Indians in their everyday life. Indians are deeply anchored in their ancient thoughts and habits that are still resilient and helpful to understand, cope with and excel in the globalizing world. The most salient feature of the primordial mindset is a pluralistic worldview that allows adding new ideas and influences to the old ones. Indians neither get rid of the old nor reject the new. Thus, they accumulate paradoxical beliefs, values, norms and practices. They smoothly navigate back and forth between them, often inviting the comment that Indians are elusive, hypocritical and unreliable. But in reality, they are highly sensitive and responsive to contextual factors in organizing their thoughts and behaviour in order to serve their individual and collective interests and goals. They have radar-like sensitivity to threats and opportunities and the agility to shuffle paradoxes and keep reorganizing their mindset to get the best in a particular situation. In adverse situations, they lay low and wait hoping that the bad will soon pass, or adopt defensive, selfish, quick fix and desperate measures to survive. As new opportunities open up, they get instantly energized and hugely entrepreneurial, and move quickly to cash them through fair or foul means depending on the rules of the game or the crevices in the opportunity structure. By the same token, they coil back and run for cover at the slightest ominous signs. They are, however, incorrigible optimists, and spring up as soon as the weather clears. It explains how the "India Story" builds up quickly, seems like over, and is kicked start again. The book presents a process analysis of the underlying dynamics of this story.

The book starts with a conceptual framework showing how the pluralistic worldview has encompassed and enveloped a variety of ideas and influences from divergent sources, which were superimposed on the foundation of the primordial mindset. As a result, Indians are both collectivists and individualists, hierarchically

oriented while recognizing merit and quality, or resisting dominance, religious as well as secular and sexually indulgent, spiritual as well as materialists, excessively dependent but remarkably entrepreneurial, nonviolent by professed values but violent in behaviour, and comfortable in taking analytical, synthetic as well as intuitive approaches to reality. Such a coexistence of opposites often causes inaction, perfunctory action, feuds and infightings, but also equips them to be creative and *jugaru* (improvisers) through continuously aligning their thought and behaviour to the demands of a milieu. The milieu has an inner layer consisting of *desha* (place), *kaala* (time) and *paatra* (person), which are embedded in the larger societal contexts consisting of caste, poverty, corruption, fragmenting politics and conflicts and violence. A window of opportunities has been opened in the milieu by liberalizing the economy that led to global influences from food and fashion to lifestyle and worldview. But then Indians are always conscious of their cultural heritage. Thus, Indians live in the existential reality of their socio-economic and political conditions, aspire to achieve and excel globally by imbibing modern values, beliefs and lifestyle, and yet yearn for realizing their cultural ideals centred on spirituality and personal growth. The Indian mindset oscillates in this complex dynamic two tired multi-factors space.

The various intellectual traditions have sliced this complex space differently highlighting the divides and the overlaps between colonial, nationalist, subaltern, elitist, Brahmanic, dalit, orientalist, global, cultural, institutional, and other narratives. The book bypasses their breaches and ignores their intricacies in order to explore Indians' culturally tempered unifying cognitive algebra in the service of a context bound inclusive mindset that is much more adaptable and agile than the mindset of many other nationalities. In order to support this conceptualization, evidence from the national and international research is added to present the state-of-the-science on the concepts and issues at hand. However, there is no hesitation to indulge in anecdotal evidence, cases and speculative ideas based on personal experiences in order to complete the picture. The book has been written in a jargon-free language. Scientific studies have been summarized to make sense and fit with lived experiences. I hope the book will interest national and international academics, Indian policy makers, change agents, businessmen and all those who are interested in understanding and dealing with Indians. I am highly thankful to Ms. Shinjini Chatterjee and Ms. Nupoor Singh of Springer to help and encourage me to revise the manuscript and to Ms. P. Kavitha of the Scientific Publishing Services to prepare it for publication. My wife, Gita, has been a constant source of strength and persistence. Without her, I would not have been able to complete this work. The members of ASSERT have directly and indirectly contributed many ideas contained in the book. I am thankful to them.

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