

Accountancy Profession and New Frontiers

President of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee while speaking at the ICAI international conference in Kolkata in November 2013 said, *"The profession has moved much beyond performing merely accountancy functions, and has been contributing by giving inputs to the Government and various regulators in the areas of financial markets, taxation, corporate laws, economic laws, banking, insurance, reforms in government accounting, and has truly added value to the process of economic and social development in the country... A hallmark of the accountancy profession is its obligation to act in the public interest. The current spate of financial crises has only reinforced the role that the profession has to play in providing high quality financial information, facilitating market discipline and fostering confidence amongst various stakeholders in the financial markets."* These morale boosting words of wisdom from the first citizen of the country speak volumes of ICAI, Indian accountancy profession and their combined potential.

The story of ICAI has been a story of professional panache and perseverance wherein it took all trials and tribulations in stride to convert challenges into opportunities and emerge victorious. As such, over the last 64 years the CA profession too has undergone a paradigm shift. The ICAI's persistent pursuit of perfection, skills and knowledge has placed the Chartered Accountant in an exalted position in present professional order of the country. Today, the Chartered Accountants are not only the backbone of Indian financial system but are also an 'institution of public trust' besides being 'conscience keepers of economy'. From traditional bean counters, the Chartered Accountants have now metamorphosed into a multi-dimensional professional, offering complete business solutions as 'information and decision specialists'. The role of CA has shifted from backroom to boardroom. He is no longer a statistician but a strategist.

And the profession is still evolving with newer aspirations of young CAs, whose number is gradually increasing. As such, CA profession is passing through a crucial phase of restructuring, upgrading, value addition, diversification and global integration.

With accounting having become the language of global business, today's professional is no longer being seen as just a 'bean counter' but a versatile tool of modern day business. Today, the CA profession is not only spearheading the government accounting reforms but is also involved in the policy making processes at various levels of government. *"Chartered Accountants: Partners in National Development"* — These words of acknowledgement and recognition used by visionary

former President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam for the Chartered Accountant fraternity amply sum up the great role, power and potential of the Accountancy profession in the country.

The ICAI and the accountancy profession have indeed come a long way but still there are miles to go. There are still many challenges to be met, many frontiers to be conquered and histories to be made. Newer and newer opportunities are emerging in the garb of challenges, particularly in domains of 'IFRS', 'XBRL', 'e-Commerce', 'Companies Act 2013', 'Direct Tax Code and Goods and Service Tax', 'integrated reporting', and 'Gram Panchayat audits in connection with the MNREGA Scheme etc. Other emerging areas of opportunities are 'BPO/KPO', 'arbitration', 'corporate governance', 'due diligence & valuation', 'ERP Control Design', 'ITATS', 'Internal Audit', 'Insurance and risk management', 'consultancy', 'international taxation', 'transfer pricing', 'cross border transactions', 'mergers and acquisitions', etc. The need of the hour is to have multidisciplinary partnerships and build domain expertise and specialisations because the days of generalists are getting over. Alvin Toffler has rightly said that *"the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn"*.

Continuing with its glorious journey for over decades since 1st July 1949, the CA profession is well set on the course of a bright future in India and abroad. But more needs to be done for a brighter tomorrow. The threat of intrusion of competing professions into CAs' traditional and specialised markets, manifold increase in stakeholder expectations, more than expected pace of changes in business and Information Technology environment, growing gulf between small and big accounting firms and increasing level of regulations need to be dealt with effectively and promptly.

It is time to revisit and reposition the profession and translate challenges into opportunities. It's time for the profession to adopt 'Vision 2021'— the year when India is likely to graduate from developing to developed economy. It's high time that Indian accountants inculcated 'big picture perspective', and in the process, turned 'Vision into Value'. It is time that *ICAI Action Plan 2014-15: Moving Towards New Frontiers* is adopted and acted upon in right earnest to pave the path to a brighter future and reach forefront of ever-expanding horizons of Indian economy, assuming new roles and responsibilities. ■

— Editorial Board ICAI – Partner in Nation Building