Address by
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President and Vice President ICAI, Chairperson IBBI, Shri Ravi Mital, Chairperson, NFRA, Shri Nitin Gupta, Members of the Council, Office bearers of the Institute, distinguished professionals from around the globe, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good afternoon to you all.

I am delighted to be here today at WOFA 2.0, amidst the professionals who quietly shape the credibility of our financial system every single day. Most market participants and investors— whether they realise it or not —depend, for fruitful outcomes of their economic participation, on one certification: that of a Chartered Accountant.

This single certification is far more than technical compliance. It stands for assurance. For professional judgment. And for public trust.

In many ways, you are the unseen guardians of credibility, an institutional pillar of the economy, and the custodians of trust in a financial system.

The role you play today extends well beyond financial statements. You influence boardroom behaviour, guide enterprises through complex decisions, and help balance commercial ambition with ethical responsibility. This is the role to ensure accountability. And it is precisely because of this evolving role that this dialogue between the regulators and the profession becomes so important.

From Technical expert to Institutional Leader

The Chartered Accountant of the past was expected to primarily ensure technical correctness — accuracy of numbers, adherence to standards, procedural compliance.

The Chartered Accountant of today is expected to do far more.

Today, your work increasingly involves judgment under uncertainty. It requires the courage to question assumptions. It involves navigating grey areas where the standards provide principles, but not prescriptions. It requires the ability to influence boardroom conversations, to challenge management narratives, and to balance client expectations with the larger public interest.

In many ways, the profession has moved from being a technical function to an institutional one.

The CA today is not merely an accountant of numbers — but an interpreter of reality.

And this evolution has become even more relevant in the context of how rapidly India's economy and capital markets are transforming.

India's Capital Markets — Growth that Reflects Confidence

India today stands out in a world marked by uncertainty. At a time when many economies are grappling with weak growth, high debt and fragile confidence, India continues to demonstrate resilience and momentum.

As the economy has expanded, so too has the role of the securities market as a key engine of capital formation.

Over the last decade, India's capital markets have undergone a transformation that is not merely quantitative, but structural. Market capitalisation has risen from around ₹100 trillion in FY15 to over ₹470 trillion today — a growth rate of about 16% CAGR.

Between FY16 and FY26 (till December), more than ₹100 trillion has been raised through equity and debt issuances. IPO activity tells an equally powerful story. For the second consecutive year, we have witnessed record levels of public offerings — 320 IPOs in FY25, followed by 311 IPOs in just the first nine months of FY26. This signals that issuers increasingly view Indian markets as capable of providing scale, efficiency, and long-term capital.

The corporate bond market, too, has expanded steadily, with an 11% CAGR since FY15.

India today has 139 million unique investors, compared to just 38 million in March 2019. Market participation is no longer confined to metropolitan centres; it is expanding across cities, towns, and regions.

Mutual funds provide one of the clearest illustrations of this shift. Industry AUM has grown from ₹12 trillion in FY16 to nearly ₹80 trillion today. Average monthly SIP contributions in FY26 (till December) have reached ₹285 billion, compared to ₹77 billion in FY19 — a more than 3.7-fold increase. This reflects a cultural shift toward disciplined, long-term financial participation.

The Alternative Investment Fund ecosystem has also expanded meaningfully — from ₹0.2 trillion in FY16 to over ₹6 trillion today — channeling risk capital into startups, innovation-driven sectors, and emerging business models. Equally, REITs and InvITs are growing asset classes.

Taken together, these numbers tell a larger story: not just of market growth, but of growing trust in the market as an institution.

And as this trust deepens, the responsibility borne by professionals who anchor this ecosystem becomes even more significant.

The Age of Judgment — Why Rules Are No Longer Enough

The nature of professional responsibility has changed fundamentally.

Today's financial ecosystem is shaped by management estimates, valuation subjectivity, complex group structures, ESG narratives, non-financial disclosures, and forward-looking statements. Many of these areas are not governed by precise formulas. They are governed by principles. By interpretation. By judgment.

In such an environment, technical compliance alone is no longer sufficient.

More discretion inevitably means more responsibility. More grey areas mean greater ethical demands. Earlier, standards often guided compliance. Today, judgment increasingly defines credibility.

The real question is no longer: "Is this technically permissible?"

It is increasingly: "Is this fundamentally fair? Is this transparent? Is this in the public interest?"

These are not questions that regulation alone can answer. They are questions that rest squarely on professional conscience.

A World Facing a Trust Deficit

We also need to recognise the broader environment in which we operate.

Today, misinformation spreads faster than facts. Finfluencers often shape perception more than fundamentals. Narratives can be manufactured. Short-term performance is often rewarded more than long-term sustainability.

We have seen corporate failures — both globally and domestically — where formal compliance existed, but ethical substance was missing. Where governance failed not because rules were absent, but because courage was.

In such a world, the role of the Chartered Accountant becomes not just professional, but societal.

You become one of the key anchors of credibility in an ecosystem that desperately needs trusted intermediaries. The profession is increasingly called upon to defend long-term trust even when short-term optics are more tempting.

Technology Will Transform the Profession — But Not Replace Judgment

We are also witnessing unprecedented technological disruption.

Artificial intelligence can process enormous volumes of data. Automation can perform checks at scale. Analytics can identify patterns invisible to the human eye. Technology will undoubtedly enhance audit quality and professional efficiency.

But technology has its limits.

It cannot assess intent.

It cannot exercise scepticism grounded in ethical reasoning.

It cannot replace the human responsibility to stand firm when uncomfortable questions must be asked.

Technology will enhance the audit. But only character can protect its credibility.

This is why continuous learning, upskilling, and reinvention of the profession are so essential. The future relevance of the profession will depend not only on mastering new tools, but on deepening judgment, strengthening ethics, and nurturing intellectual independence.

Regulation as Enabler — Not a Substitute for Ethics

As a regulator, we recognise our responsibility in shaping an enabling ecosystem. Over the years, we have undertaken a series of reforms aimed at strengthening transparency, improving governance, and enhancing ease of doing business.

We have strengthened periodic disclosure requirements and mandated the top 250 listed companies to confirm, deny or clarify market rumours in cases of material price movement, helping curb misinformation.

We have enhanced transparency in public issues by improving disclosures in price band advertisements.

We have strengthened corporate governance frameworks through reforms spanning disclosures, board oversight, accountability mechanisms, and investor protection. The role of the Compliance Officer has been elevated to that of a Key Managerial Personnel, reinforcing its institutional importance. Governance oversight has been further strengthened through improvements to the secretarial audit framework.

On the ease of doing business front, we have streamlined IPO processes, introduced a single filing system for listed companies, simplified Related Party Transaction disclosures, and initiated a comprehensive review of key regulations across mutual funds, stock brokers, LODR and settlement frameworks.

We have also taken steps to deepen markets — strengthening the debt ecosystem through reduced thresholds under the Electronic Book Mechanism and expanding its scope to REITs and InvITs.

We have introduced greater flexibility in AIF structures by reducing minimum investment for Large Value Fund and simplified access for global investors through the SWAGAT–FIs framework and simplified onboarding process.

But even as we pursue regulatory excellence, we remain conscious of a fundamental truth.

Regulation can design frameworks.

Regulation can enforce minimum standards.

But regulation alone cannot create ethical culture.

It cannot replace independent judgment.

It cannot enforce courage in boardrooms.

We regulate behaviour.

You have a potential to influence culture.

Financial governance is as much shaped by the culture as the compliance.

Collaboration with the Profession

This is why deeper collaboration with the CA profession is essential.

I believe there is significant scope for more structured engagement in several areas like-

- Improving accountability frameworks for corporate governance
- Strengthening forensic capabilities and early-warning systems
- Capacity building in digital assurance, valuation practices, and systemic resilience

When regulators and professionals move in concert, the ecosystem becomes stronger, more transparent, and more resilient. And this partnership will only grow in importance as markets become more complex and expectations from the profession rise.

Global Collaboration

Capital markets today are deeply interconnected. Capital flows do not recognise borders. Risks travel globally. So do standards, expectations, and failures.

In such an environment, global collaboration becomes essential. Building robust international frameworks, sharing best practices, harmonising approaches to governance, disclosure and assurance — all of these are crucial for enhancing transparency and trust across borders.

India’s **Ind AS framework**, which is consistent with **International Financial Reporting Standards**, has enhanced the comparability and credibility of financial disclosures by both domestic and international investors for efficient cross-border capital allocation.

Similarly, alignment of ICAI’s auditing standards with the **International Standards on Auditing**, with emphasis on risk-based audits, professional scepticism, audit quality management, and enhanced auditor reporting through Key Audit Matters - have further strengthened the audit quality and accountability in system.

I would also like to acknowledge the research publication of ICAI titled **“ From Reaction to Resilience: A Preventive Approach to Capital Market Financial Fraud in India”** which contributes meaningfully to the discourse on preventive regulation. Their other initiatives such as Handbook on SME IPOs, study group on financial reporting frameworks for Private Equity and Venture Capital Funds are particularly noteworthy.

Closing Remarks

As we look ahead, the future of the profession will not be defined by technical excellence alone.

The leaders of tomorrow will be those who can speak truth to power.

Those who can operate with confidence in ambiguity.

Those who consistently prioritise public interest over convenience.

The true strength of our financial system will ultimately depend not on how detailed our regulations are, but on how deeply integrity is embedded in professional conduct.

As India’s capital markets continue to integrate with global financial systems, global collaborations will remain important for maintaining consistency with international standards, regulatory principles and exchange of best practices.

I believe forums such as WOFA 2.0 would play an important role in fostering the dialogue and in strengthening cooperation across jurisdictions and professions.

I thank each one of you for the role you play — often quietly, often without visibility, but always with profound impact.

I look forward to continued collaboration, and a shared commitment to building markets that are not only efficient, but also fair, transparent, and worthy of public trust.

Let us continue this journey together.

Thank you.