



Indian realities and imported case studies

By **K P SHASHIDHARAN**

India's higher education system is the third largest in the world, after the United States and China. The qualification-centric pedagogy of Indian universities produces above five million graduates in a year. Some of the IITs and IIMs are mentioned in global universities rankings somewhere down in the list of 500, showcasing them as world class institutions. How many of these highly subsidized temples of learning exhibited know-how to solve any of the real Indian problems relating to business, environment, urban planning or rural development and livelihood problems? Even to kill mosquitoes, the five-star hotels in the Millennium City at Gurgaon or BKC in Mumbai use the bats imported from China. The Nobel Prize winning micro financing ideas are fine but when implemented by Indian entrepreneurs many farmers resorted to suicide because of not adopting a win-win ethical business strategy. *Bloomberg News* of 2010 reported about Indian micro-financing: "First they were stripped of their utensils, furniture, mobile phones, televisions, ration cards and heirloom gold jewelry. Then, some of them drank pesticide. One woman threw herself in a pond. Another jumped into a well with her children. Sometimes, the debt collectors watched nearby." Mass suicides by villagers due to money-lenders were even unheard in world history.

The question of employability of Indian graduates is a deep concern. This anguish was best expressed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh way back in 2007 when he spoke at a function at Mumbai University. He said, "Our university system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair... In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrolments are abysmally low. Almost two-thirds of our universities and 90 per cent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters... I am concerned that in many States university appointments, including that of Vice-Chancellors, have been politicized and have become subject to caste and communal considerations; there are complaints of favouritism and corruption."

The Wheebox, an education technology firm, assessed the employability skill test for 20,000 engineering and business school final year graduates from 2,200 colleges across 28 States and seven Union Territories. The test adopted by them has been endorsed by the Confederation of Indian Industry

and the Association of Indian Universities. The employability of the degree holders overall remains only 34%. While Anna University in Chennai, with about 400 colleges affiliated to it, has an employability rate of 1%, Delhi University with the highest employability percentage has 13% and that of Bangalore, the "Silicon Valley of India", has only 3.2%.

The reasons for a low skill profile are many. Some of them are: teaching non-relevant ancient programming languages like FORTRAN, having no link with the ground realities of the Indian environment, the chasm between theory and practice, the approach of scoring in the examination being the sole objective of learning without gaining sound knowledge of fundamentals and the selection of subjects not based on the core strength of the student. Education is a prime constituent for nation building. Hence enhancing the quality and relevance of education at all levels must get priority. In spite of creating various statutory bodies like the University Grants Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education, the Distance Education Council for the promotion, coordination and determination of standards of teaching, evaluation and research, and having a number of IIMs, IITs, NITs and IIITs besides other technical and research institutions, the state of affairs looks abysmal. These problems have been persisting over the years. In the Indian context, education has no meaning without a job. IITs and IIMs select best students by competitive examination and train them based on the best case studies prepared by the best institutions in the world like Harvard, Stanford and other Ivy schools. Many of the Indian case studies are also prepared by these institutions only.

Exam-obsessed academics can rarely find innovative solutions. In the process of emulating the best in the world, they exhaust their energy and end up making extraordinary bookworms keenly focused on over-consuming alien stuff for delivering on examination papers but having no skills or understanding to apply at real Indian scenario. India is projected to have 11.6 crore people in the 20-24 age group by 2020. There should be appropriate initiatives at all levels in the education sphere encompassing not only higher learning institutes and Central universities and colleges, but also State universities and colleges. ■

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