

I for India

At this moment, roughly there are a hundred and six crore, fifty lakh, seventy thousand, six hundred and seven lives connected to this piece of land. The number of lives could have been higher, if only they weren't ceased, be it by mishaps, calamities, or a few remorseless radicals in the name of God. But, a huge number of these lives still have a promising lot to be spent, to earn what they yearn for. India is witnessing an ineluctable youth bulge, and to exploit this powerhouse, innovation is more than a necessity and as the cliché goes, necessity is the mother of invention. Historically, youth bulge is associated with higher economic outputs and general progress, and about 65% of our population, under thirty, certainly conflagrates confidence. I am sure.

In a way, the economic crisis came up at the right time, pushing India to act immediately and think different. It's a welcome wake-up call, to the nation that was draining its brains on less significant goals. It slashed away the scenario of secure servitude. May be the crisis is here to aver that risk aversion is the biggest curse of good times. For India, this is the perfect time to create a comprehensive competitive advantage as people would be willing to adapt, make sacrifices and work without the ideal conditions and so much so in case of Indian temperament, sufferings and sacrifices being our daily transactions. So, why waste a crisis? I welcome you.

What should Indian innovation and entrepreneurship do? Where should they lead India? The answer is- innovation should help us arrive at a "sustainable growth" and alleviate poverty. Entrepreneurship should make the best use of the human resources, relying on innovation-led practices and inclusive growth, to achieve a much needed economic and social transformation. Thus, innovation in India is not about devising methods to bring back a dead man alive, but it is about helping common man live well. Entrepreneurship in India is not just the "risk vs. reward equation". It is more of a "requirements-recommendations mapping". I am ready.

We want entrepreneurship to be innovation-led. The growth of entrepreneurship results in competition which in turn lays down more fertile fields to harness the innovation potential. Similarly, we think that innovation is necessary to make the best use of the youth bulge. At the same time, it is an explainable observation that young minds are the

best workshops for path-breaking innovations. So, interestingly, we have a rare scenario with the questions answering themselves. Overall, it is evident that, for innovation and entrepreneurship to flourish, the setting is perfect with the necessity intersecting the opportunity. I can.

So, how do we approach this challenge of unleashing our potential? It is again the question answering itself- by coming up with “innovative” strategies that can surely be effective. Let us touch upon some basic issues, placed in a random order as they are thoroughly interdependent, which would help us unleash and utilize our potential in a better way. I will.

Unblocking the skills bottleneck:

Although we see the dynamic young population as a benefit, only 17 percent of people in their mid-20s and older have a secondary education, which is no benefit. Only 16% of the Indian manufacturing firms offer in-service training, which is less by any standards. Gross enrollment in higher education is only 12 percent in India. Thus, it is time to intelligently derive and distribute funds to increase the skill levels throughout. Conditions should be made rewarding for the firms to invest in training. The educational institutions should alter their fiscal outset a bit for quality education to be within the reach of more. All the experience we gained in the field of IT should be put to use, to devise intelligent, cost and quality effective, ways to diffuse knowledge. The universities should strike a more effective relationship with the industries, which helps the development of both.

Reforming Pedagogies:

The top Universities, on which the country has been investing huge amounts for R&D, are failing to come-up with path-breaking innovations and ventures, as much as expected from them. The top 10% of their products have always flourished, or rather, perished, in the wave of globalization. Noticeably, Indians in foreign universities are doing better. This signals a need for the change in the pedagogies. Degrees should transform from being too restrictive. Internships and projects should not be limited to vague work on abstract technologies. Teaching, learning and evaluation should all demand and follow innovation. Teachers should make the subjects more interesting, by citing real-life examples and applications, and challenging the students with some real-time projects that have useful applications in their immediate surroundings. By this, the teachers can reach

their students well with the subject, by solving practical difficulties and by continuous evaluation, and the students get firsthand experience with real-life projects even before they graduate. The surroundings would get benefited, like in the cases of the pro-poor projects. They in turn, can provide useful feedback and this cycle fosters continuous improvement of the students and technologies they learn and apply. The evaluation methods should be changed, from the traditional written examinations format. These real-life projects should be evaluated, on the basis of their suitability and sustainability, also considering the feedbacks given. Adequate weight-age should be given to ‘innovation’ in the project, besides its implementation.

Encouraging Healthy Competition:

Competition is vital to unleash innovation, as it demands one to be different from, and better than, the rest. There is a clear difference in the outset of the firms in India, since the economy has opened up in 1991. Large investments, especially for R&D, were made in sectors most open to competition. Hence, India should encourage small and upcoming industries, by rewarding them, with tax exemptions, relaxation of limits imposed on them and helping them meet FDIs easily, if they prove to be not just innovative and promising, but also righteous, which is proved to be important by some latest revelations.

We should make people think. This can be done by regularly conducting national level competitions inviting ideas for technological innovations and business plans. This would serve as a productive channel between the capabilities and the capital. The best ideas can be rewarded with mentors and incubators, to develop them into well-rounded executable plans or usable products, and can be put forth for the venture capitalists to invest on. Events like “The Power of Ideas” by The Economic Times, or this very competition, for that matter, by the National Knowledge Commission are already doing this. What is important now is to popularize these events, and ensure participation. This serves another important purpose. As people strive for ideas, they do some basic research at the individual level, with the resources available to them. This increases the awareness levels in general. People would get to know about the practical difficulties to frame an idea, and would be able to study an idea and develop views on it. They might identify, depending both on the research and their personal user-end experiences, any gaping gaps left unfilled. The “idea” is almost there.

Providing Motivation:

There was none like Sachin Tendulkar before, and for few years after, his arrival. Now, there are many around him to share the burden. He definitely served as a role model to them. In software outsourcing, Infosys did this. So, role models play a huge role in influencing people. They should reach to the masses more. They can be invited to be part of the jury of the competitions, and personally interact with the enthusiasts, evaluate their ideas and share their experiences. Their success stories should be disseminated, through publicity and prizes, to help the people recognize how knowledge has been used to generate wealth and improve welfare.

Teachers are the most influential personnel of a country. For many years now, most of the Indians chose only the so-called top management jobs in big enterprises, and many others settled to the high paying software jobs. Hence, forlornly, only the left out ones who might not have set out to be a teacher, who couldn't make it to the top spots, became teachers. This scenario should change. We need people who know the vitality of teachers to build a society in the right way. They need to be passionate about the job, creative in its execution, and impartial in inducing the fervor to excel in their students. High-profile awards for creative teachers who greatly inspired creativity in their students, from primary and secondary school through vocational training and university education, might not just bring about the best in the teachers, but might also inspire some of their students to become passionate teachers.

Choosing Freedom:

The Indian democracy has always allowed us to voice our views, and has helped us learn to live with multiplicity of views. This creates the ideal environment for us, like in no other country, to innovate. But we, knowingly or unknowingly, have been losing our freedom. We have chosen the services industry where the work is on the implementation side. It would be an intrusion if we take freedom to dwell into design or development issues of the clients. So, we end up talking about the age old dichotomy of products vs. services. With promising capabilities of innovations like cloud-computing and SaaS, we should move on to practices that allow us the freedom of innovation.

We should strike a proper balance such that the Intellectual Property Rights in India should help in creating wealth, but at the same time, should not be a hindrance to

innovation and development. 70% of the software used in India is pirated which leaves a black mark on our conduct. And, the makers of the proprietary software have been charging huge amounts while one can do better without them as well. India should look to make big leaps in the open source sector, which not only solves these issues, but gives us the freedom to foster faster development of customizable solutions through innovation. Intellect is nobody's Intellectual Property.

Inclusive Growth:

The Indian entrepreneurship should put in more, creative, grassroots efforts. The ability of the informal enterprises, like local brands and roadside vendors who have more contact with the masses, should be improved. Existing pro-poor initiatives should be scaled up. More favorable grants and guidance to the pro-poor early-stage technology development can significantly increase collaboration among universities, nongovernmental organizations, national industries, and global networks. Increased support for grassroots innovators could be provided to the National Innovation Foundation to scale up impact. This would result in a huge development of the domestic market which would lead to a sustainable growth of the economy, and making it more independent, which, as the global downturn has proved, is very important.

Developing an Entrepreneurial Culture:

For any system or society to be sustainable, it should be built using sensible social standards. We should promote social norms to foster entrepreneurship. We should encourage new entrepreneurs, support them in every social aspect, propagate their success stories and most importantly be forgiving of failure. The will to win should be complemented by the courage to fail. Only then, we will get to see more people breaking the shackles to take risks. We need more influential Indian literature on innovation and entrepreneurship. People like A.P.J Abdul Kalam, Nandan Nilekani and C.K. Prahlad have been inspiring Indians with their social activities involving avidly delivered speeches and profoundly written books. This should be done at every individual family level, to make it a part of our culture, as parents are the first teachers. Children should idolize real-life heroes, who worked for social welfare, rather than just the movie stars or cartoon characters.

All these issues only involve simple alterations and additions to our fundamental outset, and do not demand any drastic changes or implausible implementations. Hence, with some sensible and immediate action, India would make a steady progress into a bright future. I hope.

Thus, I conclude.

I will innovate. I will lead.

“I” stands for "Indian".

I stand for India...