

Christian Educational Institutions for Technical Skill Training in Modern Democratic India

Mathew Thaiparambil is known among the Government and Non Government circles in India and abroad, for his unique contribution in imparting non-formal technical education especially to the marginalized and needy youth in society. He is at present the Director of Don Bosco Self employment research institute. Under his direction the institute has won Pascual Chaves award in 2012, for innovative youth ministry in South Asia. It also received best vocational Institution Award 2010 -11 from the national council of educational research and training, New Delhi. He is the recipient of number of national and international awards. He represented India in more than one international conference on self employment.

Abstract

India has 400 million work forces, the largest and the youngest in the world. However the prevailing situation in India is not that encouraging when work force and drop outs are taken into consideration. Work force is unequipped and untrained to meet growing demands because of fewer training institutes and lack of funds. A staggering 50 percent drop outs before class VIII is indication that there is emergency to find an alternative plan to educate younger emerging generation with the required skills which in turn contribute to the progress of the nation. This article explains the current scenario and challenges and highlights the contribution of Christian educational institutions towards the skilling India initiatives. The author shares his own experiences and success being part of the one such endeavor, Don Bosco Self Employment Research Institute. He calls for social and political commitment for change.

Keywords: Skills for Progress, Social Commitment, Don Bosco Tech, Skilling India

The post Independence emergence of India as the largest democracy in the world brought with it woes as well as boons. The geographical vastness, linguistic and ethnic diversity, high incidence of illiteracy, booming population and phenomenal poverty, have all contributed to the retarded growth of democracy that continues to challenge every citizen in India.

British Colonial presence in India left behind many good and some undesirable trends as a consequence of the strategies of governance followed by the colonial state. The investment in education as a whole was tailored to learning and practicing what was required for the white collar jobs the natives could aspire as to serve the British Regime in their offices, factories and the Army. The salary was meager and the concern to provide hands on training or skill development towards the collective uplift of a populace was not a priority for the British.

At the same time the then prevailing Brahmanical concept of work or manual labour did not encourage a demand for such skill training probably because it was considered as curse and set aside for the lower castes and the poor. Hence, initially, very few took to skill development. However, the higher classes and the Brahmins were the first to

break through this concept and take to skill oriented professions as the engineering professions opened up. Today they are at any undertakings where money generation can take place.

The lower classes and the poorer people are still sticking to the concept that manual labour is their lot. In contrast, a vast majority of the middle classes (upper and lower) are still dreaming of white collar jobs and as a result prefer to send their children for an academic qualification rather than to a skill acquiring institution. These general characteristics while true of an earlier generation are quickly undergoing changes in the present circumstances.

The Prevailing Reality

India has more than 400 million children below 15 years of age. Most of them are enrolled in schools but 50% drop out before passing Class VIII. Another 30% by Class X. It goes to say that only 20% of the children go above Class X. Yet, considering the financial allocations it can be seen that 80% of the investment for Education is lavished upon the 20% and 20% of the investment is sprinkled on the 80% drop outs.¹ This is the paradoxical reality that has woken up the current concern for technical skill training for the youth across the country.

The Salesians of Don Bosco who lavish much time and resources on the less privileged youth can speak volumes on some of the contemporary realities.

India has 400 million work forces. 65% are between the age of 15 and 29 years. This identifies India as a nation with the youngest work force, especially when compared to the developed countries, where the average age of the work force is 55 years and above. This would in effect mean that probably in another 10 years the advanced countries will not have enough trained and qualified personnel to work in their work places. This could result in a situation wherein the Indian qualified and trained personnel will be in high demand. While the higher pay and better living opportunities in these countries could drain the Indian trained manpower, an alternative plan to replace them with younger emerging generation with the required skills could resolve the job crunch it could create within the country.

The above mentioned reality gets a greater focus when the contrast between India and other developed countries are considered in terms of skill training: Only 2% of our work force have received some kind of professional and skill training; whereas South Korea has 96%, Germany has 75%, UK has 68% and Japan has 80% and even developing countries like Mexico has 28%.² It is a situation that is being responded to concertedly by the Indian government having chalked out very serious plans to generate skilled manpower to meet the present global scenario.

¹ Cfr. *Times of India*, 26th March, 2011.

² Ibid.

National Skill Development Mission under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister is one of the most tangible moves. Most of the ministries have drawn up strategies to launch out programmes to train skilled manpower. All the Education Boards are exhorted to start Vocational Education and Vocationalisation of Education. National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT), Government of India, the biggest vocational training machinery of the country is also launching programmes in the PPP (Public Private Partnership) mode so that the Corporates and NGO's can also start skill development institutions. There are 16 other ministries of the government also engaged in this mission of skill development as on today. In other words, the training capacity of our country, taking together all prevailing initiatives, stands at 2.6 million per year leaving a short fall of 10.2 million.

The Challenges of Skill Development

The main machinery responsible for producing skilled labor force is the Ministry of Labor and employment. This ministry works under two headings: first, the National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT); and second, the National Apprentice Training Scheme. NCVT runs 2300 ITI's (Industrial Training Institutes) under the government management and 4400 ITC's (Industrial Training Centres) under the private management and affiliated to the NCVT, Government of India. Hence the total training capacity in the country stands at 2.6 million. However, 12.8 million people enter the labour market annually. This brings about a huge shortfall of 10.2 million each year which in turn is recompensed as the untrained workers adding to the 400 million workforces.

A number of new initiatives, taken in the light of the above mentioned context, are highly commendable. Modular Employable Skills (MES) is one of the fast track solutions to identify, train, skill test and certify within a very short time period. The MES system also has the provision to examine the existing skills and certify the generic skills so that all potential job seekers can come under the same umbrella of the skilled category of people.

I am also glad to mention that there are a number of renowned organizations in the country that conduct excellent skill training programme like the Jesuits, Franciscan brothers, Gabriel brothers, Montfort brothers, the society of Agnel fathers, the Carmelite fathers, the congregation of St. Theresa and Ramakrishna Missions & Vivekananda Missions in the different parts of India, Don Bosco and many other organizations bring higher technical education like Polytechnics and engineering colleges. Despite adding the output of all these institutions and their concerted endeavours one can see that we are still in the red, not having met the required targets. Hence, it is self evident that there is an urgent need to step up the skill training possibility for the emerging youth population of the country.

Today the biggest job seekers are the school drop outs. They are the most disadvantaged population, often discouraged and demoralized and on the verge of

becoming the breeding ground of anti social activities and even militancy. Don Bosco society and its educational network having realized this situation are on the forefront within the Catholic and Christian Educational Institutions to set right the wrong through collaborative ventures with the government of India. It is the outcome of a pledge to be at the service of this vast army of unskilled youth.

Skills for Progress (SKIP)

By far the Church-run technical schools, formal and informal, are considered by both government and general public in India to be institutions of quality. Those who pass out from these institutes easily find job placements.

Most of these technical schools are members of SKIP (Skills for Progress), an all India Association of Private Technical/Vocational Training Institutions established in 1969 under the Non-Profit sector with the objective of enhancing the quality of vocational and technical trainings in institutes run for the socio-economic and marginalized segments of society. SKIP, with its 8 regional councils including all the States, has over 200 technical schools as regular members and 20 associate-schools. Many of these are NCVT affiliated and others are simple skill developing centers that are affiliated to the State boards or National Institute of Open Schooling for vocational training. Some of these have been founded more than a hundred years ago by some Christian missionaries who anticipated the industrialization of India.³ SKIP is a registered society.⁴

At the national level SKIP coordinates and offers technical assistance and other useful services to its enrolled members. It empowers its members with renewal programs in the technical field. Every year nearly 35,000 young boys and girls, more than 50% of whom hail from rural areas, receive technical and vocational training in over 50 different trades. Around 40% of the students are girls.⁵ In 1980 SKIP began to offer non-formal technical education especially to youngsters who do not manage to complete the normal curriculum of the high school.

The Don Bosco technical schools, spread all over India, form an important part of SKIP. The Salesians of Don Bosco are actively engaged in the technical formation and training of youngsters. The first industrial school of the Salesians was founded in Thanjavur more than a hundred years ago. Today there are more than 120 technical schools, formal and non-formal, managed by the Salesians in different cities and regions of India, offering technical and vocational formation to more than 23,000 young people.

Don Bosco Tech India (DB Tech) has launched out an all India Mission in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development to train up skilled manpower in various sectors. With a network of 125 Technical Schools and 100 more Skill Centres, having a target

³ URL: <http://www.skipindia.net/> (accessed on 19.01. 2014).

⁴ Societies Registration No. S-134/69-70.

⁵ URL: <http://www.skipindia.net/> (accessed on 19.01. 2014).

to train 20 Lakhs youth in the next 10 years and have them established with lucrative employment.

The Don Bosco Tech initiative with a clarion call of Skilling India, is producing results as large companies and corporations are absorbing the trainees who pass out in increasing numbers. It is indicative, one could say, of an acute shortage of skilled man power. The 10% GDP growth has had a direct impact on employment market. And as it was said earlier there is going to be a shortage of skilled labour. This is the time when we, Christian Institutions, as well as every concerned agency, can join hands to create a sea of skilled youth.

We need to long for that day yet, when every school and college in our country will have a department for skill development, encouraging every student to do practical work with one's own hands. Our collective thinking along these lines for the past decade has contributed to it becoming a policy initiative on the part of the government. The National Skill Development Mission is one of the best practices as of today to meet the present day crises and the pressing demand of tomorrow. Modular Employable Skill (M.E.S.) is one of the outcomes of this mission. A worker can opt to take up several modules as per market requirement for his upward mobility; with the Government Certification. The total labour force is expected to reach 623 million by 2022. The ambitious plan of the Government, as a result, is to train at least 50% by 2022. The 12th Five Year Plan is all set to clear the path for this and make room for training 16 million per year, by engaging in full time and part time training activities.

Don Bosco Self Employment Research Institute (DBSERI) Kolkata,⁶ from where I come, is a peculiar training centre. We basically teach, train and rehabilitate school drop out boys and girls with wage employment and self employment. Many of our passed out candidates have launched out into Micro Enterprises. Today they are happy running their little enterprises earning good income and also providing jobs and employment to other needy youth. All the major producers such as Philips, Samsung, Godrej, Nokia, Blue Star, Voltas, Siemens, Bridge and Roof, Ambuja Realities, TATA group of companies, L&T, Accenture and such companies are seeking after our trainees

We have also set up a project to conduct vocational training at +2 levels. We are affiliated to ICSE Board to conduct CVE (Certificate of Vocational Education). Under this programme, we have Civil Engineering Technicians, Mechanical Engineering Technicians, and Computer Technicians, Electronic Technicians, Printing, Air Conditioning and Interior Designing, etc. All these are highly market oriented trades. Industries come for campus interviews and selection takes place even before the course is completed. Though these lucrative programmes are on offer by ICSE the sad truth

⁶ Mathew Thaiparambil, is a religious member of the order of salesians of don bosco, who has dedicated his entire adult life in Kolkata to the cause of Technical education and DBSERI is his own innovative project. He was a consultant to the Planning Commission of India, and also appointed Visitor to the Ambedkar Technical University, Lucknow.

is the insufficient awareness about its inclusion into the prevailing programmes of the schools even among some of the Heads of Schools and administrative personnel who seem to be still living under the influence of the bygone colonial mindsets.

Negotiations are going on with various Higher Education Institutions for an upward mobility for those who opt for CVE-12. AICTE has allowed a +2 Tech. candidate for a lateral entry to the 2nd year of Polytechnic. The Indira Gandhi National Open University is also opening the doors for the +2 vocational candidates for an upward mobility with Advanced Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, B.Tech., etc. Today, a 10 + 2 vocational candidate from our vocational schools (boys & girls) start with a salary anything between Rs.8000/- and Rs.12000/-, while a simple graduate can be hired for Rs.6000/- to Rs.10000/- and that too if they are proficient in language and soft skills.

Notwithstanding these options and opportunities, there is a prevailing reluctance to encourage a child/student to go for a Vocational Study and/or Skill Development and one may wonder as to why so? My own hunch, as mentioned earlier, is that we are succumbing still to a mindset that was ingrained as a consequence of the colonial legacies of academically oriented minimalistic education. Yet, if we courageously heed to the demographic profile of the country we cannot but exhort all concerned to stretch out their hands on a mission mode, to launch skill training initiatives on a war footing. or else, I for one would also consider siding with the state of the nation as reported by Rajinder Puri in the newspaper Statesman on April 16th:

The tsunami of corruption that is drowning democracy does not need reminding. Enough has been written about that. The insurgencies, the separatists' movements and terrorism tearing the nation apart does not need to recall. Enough has been said about that. The collapse of law and order in which public lynching can occur with police standing by does not shock. It is considered normal. The ugly disparity to reach the microscopic rich adorn the pages of Forbes magazine while the rural millions starve and are driven by debt to suicide no longer bring tears. Our eyes are drained and dried by now. And the latest revelation by the election commission that hundred of crores are spent by candidates to buy votes in just one assembly polls no longer jolts us. We are too familiar by now with the ugly face of Indian democracy. Our democracy is not working. Our political system has failed. Our constitution needs to be rescued from its self serving politicians who have subverted it. India needs its revolution.⁷

Conclusion

Finally, in conclusion, it cannot be denied that despite the academic institutional initiative coming from the higher educational background of research into the contribution of Christian education in the making of modern India, the fact and the ground realities

⁷ Rajinder Puri, "State of the Nation", *The Statesman*, 16 April, 2011.

are such that the continued making of the modern India depends not only on higher education, nor only on academic colleges and schools but on the strength we are able to give to those at the sidelines and margins of society. Seated as we are - high up on the Himalayas - surrounded by intellectuals of our society, we might seemingly feel far from those who, at one time, sat on our right and on our left and have fallen out by the way side. While we might count ourselves among the fortunate children of God, those who dropped out (and continue to do so from the numerous schools across the country) are beyond our vision: they, let it not be said, due to our neglect or negligence, are children of a lesser God.