

India Globalizing

My husband says that more and more the federal government is under funding sectors that are not deemed to be critical. So for instance, the scientists who have worked to deliver an early warning Tsunami system for the Pacific, or the ones who are tasked with predicting and warning against volcanic eruptions, are beginning to disappear; as are the scientists seeking and mapping our natural resources. Young people today are not readily finding employment, and the more seasoned veterans in these fields are retiring.

This was in response to my concerns that India's youth is getting funneled away from all other sectors; Engineers, scientists, blue collar workers, historians, archaeologists are all getting sucked in by the glamour and money of IT or Banking and Finance today.

The Chief Operating Officer of an IT training company which is reinventing itself continuously to meet the demands of a fast globalizing India, and perhaps responsible for a lot of the lateral movement into software in India today says that the greatest thrill in life he has is that he has lived through these past twenty five years. Earlier, India also had all these people but it was still an underdeveloped country with prohibitive licensing mechanisms and import taxes.

Today as we sit talking, about 1.6 million people in India are employed in the IT industry, and another 400,000 people of Indian origin are dispersed around the world in this sector. India would be employing another one million or so by 2011 and also by that time, projected by the Industry Association India will be short of 500,000 people.

So computers plus networking plus communication has unleashed a new kind of employment opportunity which was not even visible twenty five years ago, to the point that we are now talking of labor shortages and talent development. The new mission of his company today is not local but Global Talent Development.

The world today is no longer local, at least for India. "Every thinking we have now is global," he says. "Right from the time a manager comes into the company, we have to open his mind, make him think everything from a larger perspective."

He and his company are not alone in thinking this way. Across companies and individuals in India, the thought processes have liberalized and enlarged, become global. "Multinational" has become a basic word even for little kids. And the government is finally catching on, as it looks to sustain a 9% GDP growth and finds that there are issues across the board that need to be addressed.

"For a one billion country that today boasts of having the largest space in the world of young people, to say we don't have talent must never happen," insists the COO. "Once again here's an opportunity for India to invent that once right system where we can do this on an ongoing basis that should be adapted around the world."

On the flip side, even he thinks that probably India doesn't have good technicians and Civil Engineers up to speed on the latest techniques, even though construction is booming, because perhaps, we have created a definition these last few years, where we have moved all of them into IT. A Civil Engineer in college does banking after all.

Dr. M.R. Ravi, a Professor at IIT, the premier Engineering Institute of India, corroborates this with regret. He says that very small percentage of his students actually take to engineering as a profession. It's a straight question of money and IIT is a major picking ground for Investment Banks now.

"In a class of seventy, if I get ten students academically inclined, I should consider myself fortunate," he says. "I have told myself that to feel frustrated is no solution. Whatever we can do to sensitize these kids about the reality of this country, and see how many actually get inspired. If in a class of hundred, one gets inspired, that's good."

Dr. Vikram Kumar, director of India's National Physical Laboratory also laments that India's senior scientists are retiring and hardly any new blood has entered the field in the last decade. The government has done not much to help so far.

Just a year ago, I remember reading that in America the top job was also software Engineer. I think that policy makers and the citizens of this world need to stay cognizant of the fact that under all this software, the foundations have to stay strong.