72 A Field Worker's Diary

Title: A Solution or a Symptom?

About two years ago, we went to Vizag as part of our learning process. Our aim was to visit the various skill development centres being run by different organisations and understand the various programs that they are implementing.

Firstly, we visited the Skill Development Institute located in the Arilova area. This centre was together founded by 8 oil public sector companies, which are under the auspices of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. These companies had established such skill development centres in various parts of the country, with each company managing one centre. The centre in Visakhapatnam is run by HPCL. We have all witnessed the scenario where youngsters who stopped their education due to various reasons not being able to find employment because of lack of employable skills. In fact, there is a lack of employable skills even in youngsters who have managed to complete their education. For such youngsters, this institute runs short-term courses in 25 types of skills. This program, which provides free training, food and boarding to trainees, is attended by thousands of youngsters every year.

Apart from providing courses that are regularly run by other such institutes, this institute specialises in giving skill training for employment in the hydrocarbon sector. Oil and gas sector is one of the eight primary sectors in the country. After analysing the complete value chain of hydrocarbon from production to usage, the government has identified around 137 types of skills in it.

As per one estimate, this fast-developing sector is said to provide employment opportunities to more than 15 lakh people in the coming 10 years. The government recognized that a large segment of the employment opportunities are going to be for entry-level jobs only and that there is a need for well-trained employees, especially since it is a high-risk industry. Therefore, it started conducting necessary training sessions for youth for getting employed in this sector through the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). Skill Development Institute is also one of the large number of Corporation-empaneled centres. Hundreds of youth are getting trained for this sector here and dreaming of a better future.

Next, we visited the Indo-German Institute of Advanced Technology in Kancharapalem. It was a finishing school type of institution that provided training in advanced technologies to youth who are studying at various levels, job seekers and those already employed. They were providing courses related to high-level technologies in diverse sectors such as control and automation, design and manufacturing, information technology, environmental engineering, etc. In addition to free courses, this institution was also conducting some paid courses. We could observe many students who had completed engineering doing paid courses here.

Another interesting aspect that I noted here was that they were conducting a course called 'Building Services'; under which, youth were being trained in various skills such as plumbing, AC repairing, electrical works, etc. to cater to people living in multistoried buildings. The thought behind it was to provide skill training in different services so as to improve the trainees' chances of employment. It is the right course for people who want to be self-employed.

On the first day, we tried to understand the courses offered by these two institutions. The next morning, we started for the Redox Laboratories located in the Parawada Pharma City. This is a pharma finishing school. They provide training to interested youth in assistant manufacturer courses. This is the one and only organisation which is providing the skills necessary for entry-level jobs in the country's pharma sector. The staff there informed us that the fast-spreading pharma industry is in shortage of employees with adequate skills.

All these institutions are targeting people who had to discontinue their education due to various reasons. Their rationale is to provide various short-term skills training to those youth and facilitate them to get employed in the organised sector. Besides those who discontinued their education, we could see that many people who had completed technical courses like ITI and polytechnic and even those who completed engineering or graduation were getting trained there. Although visiting those three institutions and talking with the young trainees there gave us an opportunity to understand many aspects, it also raised many questions in our minds!

When there are institutions that are able to provide employable skill training in 3 to 4 months, why aren't we able to provide the same skill set in 15 years of education? Instead of establishing special institutes & policies for professional educational skills under the Skill Development Mission, doesn't it make more sense to improve the educational system itself? If there is such a severe shortage of skilled human resources in various industries on one hand, why is there an alarming level of unemployment on the other? Why is the educational system not able to deliver the necessary skills needed in industries? At the same time, some intellectuals state that our education system only creates workers necessary for industries, but doesn't help in the holistic development of the students. Neither working on personality development nor providing employable skills, what exactly is our educational system doing? Should we look at these professional educational institutions and the lakhs of youngsters being trained there as a solution to our sick education system? Or, should we look at them as a symptom of increasing ailment?