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India needs mavericks who can think out of the box: Chenraj

by Sivanand Vyas

Call him a promethean in the field of education, not many would be surprised. Having started his own textile business at an early age, life could have been as easy as a pie for R Chenraj Jain, today the Chairman of Jain Group of Institutions. But there was something else destined for this young man. Having nickle and dimed his way, a 27-year-old Chenraj managed to open up a college with six teach-



ers and 35 students in 1990. Pursuing learning today, his group includes 59 schools and colleges, employs over 3,000 people and has taught over 30,000 students in the last 20 years.

Inspired by Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and spiritually by Sathya Sai Baba of Shirdi, he says it was Madan Mohan Malaviya, the educationist who planned Banaras Hindu University, which instilled confidence in him considering the dire requirement of the country at that time.

"The focus of his arguments were on the prevailing poverty in India and the declining income of Indians compared to Europeans. The plan called for focus on technology and science, besides the study of India's religion and culture."

Chenraj's dream is an authentically futuristic Indian dream, that of an integrated approach of subsuming education. With a syllabus that does not change till three years, Chenraj feels that it should be made dynamic and should be reviewed every six months. Attenuated by a definite lack of mentoring and continuous comprehensive evaluation, the higher education is in need of inclusive knowledge.

Apart from these, it is also essential that students in universities are exposed to various fields of study. To facilitate cross learning, universities need to be encouraged to shift from the existing 'plate-meal' approach where courses for each programme are fixed to a 'cafeteria' approach where students have op-

portunities to choose from a variety of courses under broad guidelines.

"The gross enrollment ratio of our country in higher education is also not even 10 per cent while that of developed countries is 70 percent. To address these concerns, I feel an amalgamation of visionaries - be it corporates or social entrepreneurs, knowledge banks - high career growth areas and skilled force is a must in a per centile of 3 per cent, 15 per cent and 72 per cent respectively," asserts Chenraj.

A future potential that he identifies is the population. By 2020, 65 per cent of the country is going to be populated by the youth and India will be the most youngest population in the entire world. "With our heritage, culture, philosophy, customs, technological bent, thinking banks and a population of 30-year olds - imagine the potential. We cannot stick to rote learning, pass certification and social certification and live our life. We have to grow and for this the start can be in clusters. For

example,

within a radius of 30 kilometers, if every local industry, corporate, SMEs, community, etc. come on a common platform of interaction at least twice a week and work on how to better their community through knowledge, then there can be a huge change. That is when we can have empowered communities which stresses on one-third theory, one-third practical and one-third hands-on experience and values. We have to incorporate ethics, yoga, constitution and humanities into our syllabus. If these are interspersed with Science and Commerce, then there will be a holistic learning," says Chenraj.

At 50, Chenraj feels that he has not even made a beginning in changing the landscape of education. "I believe that it takes a person 25 years to completely understand a business. I am in the business for 22 years. I think, I will take another three years to actually begin," he says.

JGI has incubated about 46 businesses so far. The group has committed ₹500 crores to incubate 350 businesses by 2015 and create 8,800 entrepreneurs in another 10 years.