

Sushil Khanna

Professor, IIM Kolkata, India

Skilling is needed for a knowledge economy, to go back on it, we have some very renowned international scholars. The focus here is to improve, what we call, the ecosystem. Here, we are looking at the educational, skill level for a knowledge economy.

We should not focus too much on just digital issues or remote work and teaching. I think many of these trends will be short term and reverse. I do think universities and everybody wants to go back the old the face-to-face kind of thing. Offices will be working in an year or two, but I want to go back to the whole idea that Mr. Balagopal was talking about in the earlier session that we need to have a system for high tech manufacturing, high tech production in Kerala.

Roughly we have tracked about Rs. 4000 crore worth of shipment out of Kerala, high tech products and high tech is fined by OECD, What is high tech is that they have some HSN codes they call the high tech industries. But Kerala, like in other products has a huge deficiency in high tech products including aerospace and stuff like that must be going to ISRO.

But there is a great opportunity to enhance that sector which requires new kinds of skills and new kinds of innovations. I will talk a little bit about the education system in Kerala. We have the highest literacy in this country. We are very good primary and secondary education but Kerala actually has not been able to keep pace with the tertiary education. This is a major setback, I think needs attention from the policymakers .

Kerala has very few accredited colleges compared to your neighbors, for example, roughly about 200-250 colleges. It has a disproportionately large number enrollment. The higher education survey from 2011 to 2018 shows a sharp increase of 10-12 per cent in enrollment.

Some very interesting facts come when you look at it. Firstly, the enrollment of woman in undergraduate colleges are twice that of men and in post-graduation education, it is three times higher. But a very few women then get into the labor force and more than 35 per cent of them stay out of the labor force and have a higher unemployment rate. Only 9000 postgraduate students Kerala produces, which I think is very small compared to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The State's population is double, but the number of accredited colleges are four times or five times higher. Post-graduate education is far more widespread. So, I think, the kind of skills that these colleges are imparting are disproportionate to what I want to call general education. While we do fairly well with respect to B.Ed, nursing and the like, with respect to science, technology and higher education, there is much to be desired. There are more than 100 engineering colleges. None of them are not known nationally. So there is a great need to improve the quality of higher education, tertiary education in Kerala. Then also an opportunity to the large number of Kerala scholars spread all over the world and outside in other universities in India and there is an opportunity to attract them back.

There is a burst of new innovative industries, artificial intelligence. Industry entrepreneurs, I met around Kochi and they were not the people who are returning from the Middle East, most of them are Kerala NRIs from North America and Europe. Many of them have come back and starting, some are collaborating with their former employers in USA and starting the hardware production using artificial intelligence and advanced chemicals and stuff like that. So there is already a small trend during the last five to ten years and this needs to be strengthened. It needs a substantial improvement in the tertiary education. Kerala spends a lot of money on the budget. All private colleges also get grants and support, but I think we need to use this support more judiciously to push them towards to get better standards, to get accredited, to change the kind of courses and curriculum that they do and so on.