

INDIA BEYOND 2020 CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

DIGITAL CONFERENCE



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EDUCATION

Dr. Vishwanathan began by addressing Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam sir's college background both as a student of Madras Institute of Technology as well as that of a visiting professor at Anna University. He recounts that Dr. Kalam, during his first Presidential year in 2002 had set a target for the government: "By 2020 India should be an economically developed and advanced country." Dr. Kalam maintained that the same were not his vision but rather the nation's vision "India's Vision." He placed his hopes on the youth for this; by 2020 the youth would bring the Vision into reality. In his last ten to fifteen years he met nearly 6 crore students.

Dr. Kalam had two targets. First, by reaching the status of 'Economically developed' he wanted to eliminate poverty from our country. No citizen should fall below the poverty line. Second, he had stated that "No one should sleep on a platform everyone must have a house to rest in." Dr. Kalam considered this the most fundamental, for the achievement of which would be development of other sectors: technology,

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industries etc. Elimination of poverty and homelessness was to be the first target to be achieved. Dr. Kalam also stated that should we be unable to achieve this target by 2020, then we must do so within five years that follows.

Dr. Vishwanathan opines that education is key to achieving this and remarks that it is unfortunate that education lacks quality at both the basic as well as higher levels. On a national level, our higher education enrollment is only 28%. He cites examples from his experience: many engineering graduates are taking up jobs not related to their field; some even end up as taxi drivers. This is attributed to the poor quality of education that the present system imparts to them. Another side to this is that none of the teachers have any industrial experience. Dr. Vishwanathan suggests that industrial interaction must be included as part of teacher's training. This will enhance their ability to prepare students for industry.

Presently very few aspire for research. Dr. Kalam had said that “Development of our country should be based on technology. And that technology should be developed within our own country.” He points out to the lack of funding for research in Private Engineering Colleges. To address these issues, Dr. Vishwanathan advocates establishment of research centres in each state in a public-private partnership. These centres would offer skill training to teachers who would in turn impart the knowledge to students. Moreover

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these centres would also operate as EDP Centres (Entrepreneurship Development Programme Centres).

The centres would serve as technology incubators and students in turn could take technology from these centres and start enterprises. There are a lot of government schemes at present to promote enterprising such as 'Make in India'. Dr. Vishwanathan is confident that Make in India will be a 100% successful if there are a hundred such centres established throughout our country. He estimates the cost of setting up such centres at nearly 200 crores in the beginning with an additional 100 crore required every successive year for five years. However, with this investment we would be able to beat every other country in the world in Research and Development. Dr. Vishwanathan proposes that through these centres, over 80% of the students will be employable as opposed to the present 20%. As for the remaining 20%, they can be trained to set up small scale enterprises and this would help us meet Dr. Kalam sir's first target.

Dr. Vishwanathan concludes by touching upon the agriculture sector. Dr. Kalam had shared ideas on interlinking rivers as well as listed which all rivers may be linked. He adds that if the Prime Minister takes an initiative to link rivers such as Kaveri, then it would give rise to a huge employment potential and moreover, enable agriculture dependent of it to be sustainable.