

Ganesh Natarajan



Going forward, the Digital Study Hall aims to take its efforts across to a far greater number of children across the country.

## Finding *Bharat Mahaan*

It was International Women's Day and one of India's most enterprising women entrepreneurs was taking us on a whirlwind tour of her ventures in education. The Study Hall in Lucknow is a school like any other on the surface but reflects the quality that the caring Principal and her team could generate in the pedagogy process which uses technology to deliver interesting concepts in Math and Biology.

One of her projects is the Digital Study Hall - a simple innovation that can transform the fortunes of the underprivileged! The project seeks to improve education for underprivileged children in slums and in rural schools in India, by enabling regular pedagogy with technology. Classroom sessions, by the best grassroots, teachers are digitally recorded and distributed to a large database of rural and slum schools in India. This approach involves computer science and education experts building the content and local teachers actively 'mediating' the video lessons - a team that wishes to change the face of education in our Country. As of 2007, the Digital Study Hall has run pilot 'hubs' in three cities in India (Lucknow, Bangalore, and Pune), covering approximately 30 schools and have accumulated about 550 recordings of lessons in English, Math, and Science, in multiple languages - Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil, and English. Going forward,

the Digital Study Hall aims to take its efforts across to a far greater number of children across the country. This is a massive drive by small efforts of a single entrepreneur in Lucknow, and holds huge potential for the ecosystem to drive education through to the grassroots by optimal usage of resources. This hub-and-spoke model involves content generation at a single epicentre driven across spokes to various rural centres through mediators! The Digital Study Hall is repurposing live classroom sessions into digital content to serve a hub-and-spoke format that can expand the reach of quality education today while we wait for universal broadband access to deliver internet based education on a country-wide scale.

The same central Study Hall's infrastructure and study material also serves 'Prerna' where a number of girls from underprivileged backgrounds get access to the same teachers and technology and an emotional support system that is building new stars, everyday.

---

The project seeks to improve education for underprivileged children in slums and in rural schools in India, by enabling regular pedagogy with technology

Half an hour away in the village of Kanaar is Vidyasthali, a school that caters to seventeen villages with dedicated teachers from the city creating a clean atmosphere for rural education that shows what the tens of thousands of schools in rural Bharat could be with the right levels of passion and commitment.

The problem with our education system is that it has either focused on high quality elitist residential schools catering to the top strata of society or left smaller schools to rot and decay with low commitment of teachers or the powers that be to deliver employable skills to our young millions



Urvashi's final innovation takes this story beyond education to deployment - Grameen India Corp is a software product testing centre that employs rural youth with a basic school education, trained on manual testing and test script automation. This model is one of the most scalable ways of village resource creation that all of us in IT and BPO have started talking about over the last few months. The potential to take this integrated model of live and technology enabled education in urban and rural India and to combine it with low cost resource creation in a majority of skill areas which are becoming expensive in the traditional IT centres of the country, is staggering, and is waiting to be tapped by the local and global industry. The problem with our education system is that it has either focused on high quality elitist residential schools catering to the top strata of society or left smaller schools to rot and decay with low commitment of teachers or the powers that be to deliver employable skills to our young millions. The demographic dividend that we hear about will remain on paper if we do not improve the scale of quality education and the opportunities for gainful employment which is the primary imperative for a responsible government and society.

The solution to the digital divide will not be found by theory and pontification - the IT industry and indeed many other sectors like Retail, Construction and BPO need to look at Bharat as a commercially viable alternative to India and to find and fund a thousand 'Urvashis' to transform our country's landscape and capabilities into real value - for individuals, communities and the country!

Similar efforts to give scale to educational efforts to the larger Community are being made by NASSCOM Foundation. An area where much has been spoken and

written about but not enough action seen on the ground is the ability to reach out to and include the underserved sections of the population with training and job opportunities that enable them to participate in the success of the IT and BPO industry. The NASSCOM Foundation through its Knowledge Network program has enabled the power of Information and Communications Technology to touch the lives of tens of thousands of people in a dozen states but a full fledged movement is required to provide technical and soft skills and job opportunities at multiple locations around the country and spread the prosperity not just on demographic but only on a geographic dispersion basis. The creaking infrastructure in urban locations and the absence of capacity in the educational institutions around the country can only be addressed by reaching out to 'Bharat' as a real alternative to the few urban Indian cities where the knowledge industry today proliferates.

In a year where the slowdown is likely to affect the aggressive growth plans of many firms, a concerted inclusiveness movement will prepare the foundation for the next wave of growth which is not far away as the India story continues to be watched by the world. Inclusiveness enabled by simple yet robust technology is what will give our Country the necessary impetus and will scale education of the less privileged by leaps and bounds - lending unabated growth to more Kanaars, Kharadis and Nagapattinams of India!

---

**The creaking infrastructure in urban locations and the absence of capacity in the educational institutions around the country can only be addressed by reaching out to 'Bharat' as a real alternative to the few urban Indian cities where the knowledge industry today proliferates**

Dr Ganesh Natarajan,  
Global CEO - Zensar and  
Chairman - NASSCOM can  
be contacted at  
[ganeshn@zensar.com](mailto:ganeshn@zensar.com)