**Can India create next Google or Apple?**

Last month, appointment of India born Sunder Pichai as CEO of google Inc. generated quite a buzz in social, print as well as electronic media. Let’s rewind back to few more months. Satya Nadella, another Indian origin technocrat was appointed as CEO of Microsoft. If we go further in the past, there are bunch of technocrats who had made headlines. For example, Mr. Ajay Bhatt revolutionized the portable mass storage devices. Because of his invention of universal serial bus (USB) devices, the whole era of floppy disks is now in distant memory. There are many more Indians or Indian origin technocrats are making meaningful impact on ever emerging tech scene, more so in 21st century. These examples poses an interesting contradiction.

Indians have been phenomenal as a manager but we have failed in creating the path breaking innovative companies like google, apple, facebook to name a few. Recently there have been string of startups launch catering to domestic demands. Some of the analysts/proponents of Indian innovation growth stories confuse themselves by comparing flipkart, snapdeal and likes with Amazon etc.

Yes, these new age startups have solved many problems of domestic market. Many of them have leveraged the innovative strategies and captured imagination of urban Indians. But if we look closer, most of them have just implemented successful ideas of west with suitable modification in sync with domestic environment. For Amazon, we have flipkart and snapdeal in e-commerce. In transportation segment, after success of UBER, two IITians have started Ola cabs. There are startups in the area of hypermarket like Groffers and Pepertap. All these startups have one common thread. They modified the original idea according to Indian market. Many of them have been phenomenal success with valuations more than a billion dollars. But none of them have produced any path breaking technologies or the organizations like Google or Apple.

**Why it’s not happening?**

We have been successful in implementation of the idea, but why are we failing in having the very idea at first. There are number of factors for this scenario. Lack of resources, red tape, no availability of supporting eco-system, almost non-existent industry-academia collaboration etc. are some of the factors hindering the growth of Innovation spree in India. Govt. have started focusing on improving some of these factors like, provision of funding for startups, improving ease of doing business, provision of innovation funds etc. Even our PM outlined the slogan “StartUp India” during his recent Independence Day speech. It’s heartening to see that govt. has realized the importance of startups in putting the economy in top gear. Govt. initiatives to spur innovation are laudable, but the most fundamental problem which is impediment for the self-sustaining innovative ecosystem is structure of our educational system.

From the primary education to higher education, major emphasis is on rote learning, thanks to our faulty evaluation exercises and marking system. Even our temples of learnings, IITs & AIIMS are no where near the top 100 University global rankings. Major reason for dismal performance of our higher educational institutes is no significant research papers. Major thrust of research in india is on selected handful central science Institutes like IISC and Defence research institutions like DRDO.

Apart from out lackadaisical education system, another major hindrance to innovation is, lack of industry-academia collaboration. There is hardly any partnership between private sector and our central research Institutions or Universities. Whereas in western world, universities are pioneers in path breaking innovation. The mighty google was developed by two PG students of computer science, Lary Page and Sergy Brin, during their college years. The darling of social media, facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg from his university dome. It means the universities must be at the forefront in bringing the tectonic shift we need to create the Innovative companies.

**Way Forward:**

Steven Jhonson in his book, **“ From where Does The Good Ideas Come From?”** analyzes the process of idea genesis. He lucidly explains that phenomenon of growth of an idea. Idea is not just one Eureka moment. It’s the amalgamation of different pieces of idea, which leads to the path breaking innovation. For these kind of Amalgamation, thoughts from different kind of people coming from different background is necessary. It will then lead to an interesting array of new ideas and ultimately one of them will be a path breaking innovation. We need to take cue from this analysis to foster more robust relationship between Industry and Academics.

We already have our own version of Apple, “Micromax”. It has revolutionized the indian mobile handset industry by innovating number of features and providing low cost handsets to millions of people. Today it is the number one mobile seller in India pushing the likes of Samsung, Apple down the ladder. Success of ISRO in space Technologies is also world known. To sum up, we have the **affordable excellence**. But If we want to have the organizations like Google or Apple on Indian soil, we need to have paradigm shift in the way our education system works and the way collaboration happens. Improvement in the earlier outlined factors are also essential, but the main thrust should be to fire the imagination of young mind. We shall be better placed if we pay heed to Einstein’s famous quote.

**“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”**