A response to check urban migration

Around 50 km east of Haliyal is the Deshpande Foundation (DF), a not-for-profit skills centre in Hubballi. Set up by husband-wife duo Gururaj and Jaishree Deshpande, a Silicon Valley-based entrepreneur, DF is a private skills development centre that trains people from under-privileged sections of society.

Students in DF are skilled in areas such as technical (welding, machining), non-technical (communications, website building, social media) and social development.

One can see hundreds of men and women, mostly in their 20s, learning computers, making seats out of discarded tyres, welding or even English. “We take people who have dropped out of schools or colleges and train them on these skillsets,” says Viveck Pawar, Managing Trustee, Deshpande Educational Trust and CEO, DF.

People at the Foundation say that 85 per cent of students are from disadvantaged sections. While they are not taught free of cost, DF has figured out an interesting way to charge their students, most of them from families with income less than ₹10,000 a month. DF bears 50 per cent of the cost and the remaining is borne by Deshpande individually and grants from institutions,” says Pawar.

Till date, DF has trained around 6,500 students, of which, 55 per cent are from farmer communities of the 20 districts in North Karnataka. Not every student finishes the course. “On an average 2-3 per cent drop out but we are now seeing a lot of women enrolling and their ratio is around 40:60,” says Pawar. DF gets its students through NGOs, alumni and word-of-mouth.

While all this is heartening, how is DF helping people find employment or improve their employability at a time when companies are not hiring in large numbers? “We try to adapt our course as per the company’s requirements and since entry-level jobs have not yet been eliminated, our students do find employment,” says Rajabali Mangalgi, Center Head at Deshpande Educational Trust, DF India. Additionally, he says that companies can bring their curriculum and teach students if they want. DF says that its placement track record is 70-80 per cent.

Apart from this, DF trains students on entrepreneurship, which has helped in creating local employment at a time when cities like Bengaluru have seen a huge influx of migrants. “While it is too early to talk of reverse migration, we are at a stage when people prefer to stay and work here,” says Mangalgi.

While the initial uptake was slow, from 2014 till this year, DF has taught 5,700 students, pointing to some amount of success in it’s training model. The trainers are a mix of in-house faculty and people from the industry or academia who teach voluntarily. The training seems to be an anti-thesis of what goes on in schools, colleges and other skill development centres. There is no emphasis on rote learning and people are allowed to make mistakes.

As Pawar puts it, “We have 200 million people with disposable income, while around a billion people watch from the sidelines. So, we asked how can we help.”