



## Naukri-chaakri.com

Rural job portals are trying to help rural youth find placements, but the task isn't an easy one

Siddharth Chaturvedi has his finger on the pulse. "It is estimated that more than 75 per cent of the Indian working population is employed in the unorganised sector," he says. "It consists of hundreds of thousands of jobs which have not formally been captured and recorded. What makes it difficult is the fact that the vast majority of these jobs come from rural India. Lack of knowledge of this information causes continuous migration of rural job seekers to cities of India." Chaturvedi is director, AISECT, one of India's pioneer educational, training and services network.

Chaturvedi is currently busy getting his new portal, rojgarmantra.com, up and running. Being set up under the AISECT-National Skill

Development Corporation Partnership Programme for skill development, the portal, Chaturvedi feels, is a logical forward integration to bridge the yawning gap between the vast number of jobs available in rural India and the large skilled workforce, which does not necessarily want to migrate to cities in search of employment.

Given the plight of the employment exchanges in India is an open secret, the rural youth truly have few avenues of employment search to turn to. Rural job portals at least provide one small window! This is true, despite the fact that the Internet revolution seems to have largely bypassed rural India. Less than half a per cent of families in rural India have Internet facility at home as against 6 per cent in cities.

Irrespective of the dismal figures, there is no denying that the penetration of the Internet in rural India has been on the rise. "As per a research carried out by us, the current number of netizens in India is 156 million. Our prognosis for December 2013 estimates 320 million Indians online. Of these, 21 per cent will be rural Indians. This is a big opportunity that can be tapped robustly," says Harish Bijoor, CEO, Harish Bijoor Consults Inc.

"We are trying to use technology-enabled placement services to cater to the industry demands for entry level jobs. Rojgar Mantra will attempt to place trained youth in a job in his/her location, which could also be a district or a block level location," adds Chaturvedi. In the first year of roll out, Rojgar Mantra is targeting to place at least 20,000 rural youth.



Chaturvedi: bridging the gap



*Gupta: teaching a few lessons to rural folks*

There are quite a few lessons that Ajay Gupta can share in this context. Having launched ruralnaukri.com about a decade ago, Gupta figured out early on that the real problem wasn't lack of jobs or the knowledge about them thereof. Rather, it was the rural youth lacking the hard and soft skills required at a workplace.

"On several occasions a job was offered to a rural youth on the assumption that s/he shall pick up the strings by obtaining on-the-job training... but post hiring roadblocks would emerge on the employer's as well as the employee's end. A village bred person is habituated of staying in an open environment but a beginner level job permits the new appointee slum-level living standards in large cities and no hope of major improvement in near future. Additionally, a fresher from a village gets petty jobs and many a time the disrespect accompanied with such jobs. They want to flee from such opportunities. From the employer's point of view, they tend to get intolerant to see someone talking loudly, missing common office etiquettes, etc,"

explains Gupta.

The need to train them was therefore imminent. Employers were however reluctant to pay for the training. Charging the unemployed appeared unfair to Gupta as he wasn't in a position to assure jobs. Relying on grants wasn't a sustainable option either. Hence, around 2004, he shifted focus from the unemployed youth segment to the executive talent pool for foods, agribusiness and the development sector. After a hiatus of three years it returned to its primary focus and launched villagenaukri.com. Gupta also had to tweak his business model quite a bit.

#### **New revenue streams**

While he continued to rely on a network of NGOs to source candidates and do online placements for development sector at highly subsidised prices, he added couple of other revenue streams such as offline placements, training, consultancy services and an online education programme that offers courses in agri-business management. For instance, a candidate can avail of service combo

packs such as displaying resume to employers on the portal, sending CV to 1,500 NGOs or 1,000 consultants at a subsidised rate of ₹750-2,000. Ruralnaukri has helped candidates find placements with agencies and companies such as Oxfam, Sa-dhan, Unilever, etc.

Gupta, who started his enterprise with an initial investment of ₹4 lakh was able to recover the amount in two years. Since inception, Ruralnaukri has been able to place over 30,000 candidates and has a candidate base of little over half a million resumes. Gupta honestly admits that villagenaukri.com "has not been successful. We have not yet given up though. We are now trying to find a corporate that can support us with ₹1.5 crore for an end-to-end project to identify, screen, train and place some 3,000 youths. It works out to ₹5,000 per person and can make a candidate worthy of gainful employment. This model takes care of concerns of employees and employers and includes our service charges. Execution of a successful pilot can help us gain the confidence of scaling up."

Sanjay Modi, MD, Monster India, an online career and recruitment solutions providers, too agrees that the real issue is of employability. In August 2009, Monster launched rozgarduniya.com as a joint initiative with ITC eChoupal. Rozgarduniya had eChoupal's existing brick and mortar network to capitalise on. The Sanchalak at the centre could help the job seekers in the village finetune their CVs and refine their job searches.

"In the last three years, we have conducted about 15 job fairs, resulting in 700 job offers being made to candidates. We don't track the online offers, as doing that is not entirely viable. However, the potential is indeed huge. We are in the investment mode and are just on the tip of the iceberg. Right now, we are trying to figure out how to leverage technology to train and make the available pool of talent readily deployable," says Modi. Rozgarduniya's business model is essentially driven by subscriptions of companies. "At any given point in time there are 8-10 companies associated with Rozgarduniya," adds Modi.

### Gainful employment

Around the same time as Rozgarduniya, in May 2009, Srei Sahaj e-Village Ltd launched Chaakri.co.in through the Common Service Centres that it was already running across the states of Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The idea was to reduce dependency on agriculture and at the same time provide gainful employment to the villagers. Srei Sahaj, subsidiary of Srei Infrastructure, has already set up 50 Training Centres and is in the process of scaling it up to a 100 in near future.

These Centres source semi-educated villagers (mainly from BPL), carry out an exhaustive skill-gap analysis and arrange for employment with the corporate sector as per their demand for security guards, salespersons, carpenters, plumbers, fitters, welders, courier boys, etc. Most jobs belong to the blue collar segment. The quantum of demand in this segment can be gauged from the fact that there are 4,000 vacancies listed for a fitter's job and 2,880 for security



guards on Chaakri at present.

At Chaakri, all employers pay the minimum wages of the states. According to a 2008 study by the Boston Study Group, India will have surplus of 1.3 million un-trained and under-educated people over the next five years. India will fall short of real talent by about 5.3 million! We will have a surplus that we will not need and a deficit that we cannot fulfil. The crises will deepen further due to mismatch between jobs available and skills shortage. So far, the portal has amassed over 75,000 vacancies in various organisations catering to a varied array of profiles.

By the end of the current financial year, this figure is expected to touch over 150,000. The response from the corporate sector so far has been good, with over 130 companies having extended their support. Chaakri so far has put together a database of 22,000 candidates, with companies such as Eureka Forbes, IFB, Khadims, Tops Security, Sodexo India, DLF Pramerica, India Infoline, etc, are using its portal to source trained manpower. Most importantly, it saves the candidates the trouble of relocating in search of a sustainable livelihood.

Incidentally, the attrition rate still continues to be well over 90 per cent, as per Chaakri data. It has closely

tracked the new recruits for at least six months after they take on a new job in order to assist them with settling down. Since its inception, Chaakri has been able to place 6,800 candidates only. This is, however, the number of candidates, who stuck to their job for more than a year.

Employment in rural India has been on a steady rise. As per labour force surveys conducted by National Sample Survey Office, the total estimated persons engaged in employment in rural areas have risen from 342.9 million in 2004-05 to 336.4 million in 2009-10. The trend persists across gender: during 2004-05, the number of male and female workers employed in rural areas was 218.9 million and 124 million respectively. During 2009-10, 231.9 million male workers and 104.5 million female workers were employed in rural areas.

With corporates increasingly eyeing the bottom of the pyramid to expand their market reach, rural job portals seem to have a good future ahead.

*Modi: making them employable*

♦ KIRAN YADAV