

STRENGTHENING TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

Tourism has long been recognized as a critical driver of economic growth, cultural exchange, and employment generation. In Jammu Division, the sector holds immense potential owing to its scenic landscapes, historical landmarks, religious sites, and cultural diversity. From the sacred temples of Vaishno Devi and Raghunath, to the serene beauty of Patnitop, Bhaderwah, and the Chenab valley, Jammu has all the ingredients to emerge as a leading tourist destination in India. However, despite its natural and cultural advantages, the region's tourism infrastructure remains underdeveloped, hindering its full potential.

One of the primary challenges is connectivity. While the Jammu-Srinagar national highway links the division to the Kashmir Valley, internal road networks connecting remote tourist spots are often inadequate. Limited public transport options, and insufficient last-mile connectivity deter visitors, particularly domestic and international travelers seeking convenient and safe travel. Enhancing road infrastructure, introducing efficient local transport services, and ensuring year-round accessibility should be prioritized to make travel seamless.

Accommodation and hospitality infrastructure also require urgent attention. While larger towns like Jammu city offer hotels and guesthouses, smaller destinations often lack quality lodging facilities. Promoting eco-resorts, homestays, and budget accommodations can attract a broader spectrum of tourists, providing them with immersive experiences while generating income for local communities. At the same time, investing in modern amenities such as clean drinking water, public toilets, and healthcare facilities is essential to enhance visitor satisfaction.

Tourist safety and information services remain another area needing improvement. Tourist help desks, signages in multiple languages, GPS-enabled guides, and emergency response systems can significantly improve the overall experience. Digitalization of tourism services, including online booking systems, mobile apps for navigation and information, and virtual tours, can further modernize the sector and make Jammu Division more accessible to tech-savvy travelers.

The promotion of local culture, crafts, and cuisine can complement physical infrastructure development. Integrating cultural festivals, handicrafts markets, and culinary experiences into the tourism ecosystem not only enriches visitor experience but also empowers local artisans and entrepreneurs. Such initiatives encourage sustainable tourism that benefits both the economy and the environment.

Collaboration between government agencies, private stakeholders, and local communities is crucial for the successful implementation of tourism projects. Public-private partnerships can mobilize investment, bring in technical expertise, and ensure professional management of tourist destinations. Simultaneously, local community involvement ensures that development is inclusive, culturally sensitive, and environmentally sustainable.

Skills Before Startups: A Realistic Path to Entrepreneurship

SALEEM AHMED

In the dynamic landscape of modern India, the electronics sector is no longer just a vertical industry; it has become the horizontal foundation upon which our digital future is built. As we move deeper into the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the traditional boundaries between an employee and an entrepreneur are blurring. At the Electronics Sector Skills Council of India (ESSCI), we witness this transformation every day. We see young individuals who started with a soldering iron or a basic coding module and went on to build repair service networks, drone startups, and indigenous hardware brands. The core catalyst in this journey is not just financial capital, but technical skill.

The prevailing narrative often suggests that entrepreneurship is purely a byproduct of business acumen or risk-taking appetite. While those traits are undeniably important, in the technology sector, entrepreneurship is fundamentally an act of solving a technical problem. When a person masters the nuances of a semiconductor value chain or the intricacies of an Internet of Things (IoT) ecosystem, they gain the "technical confidence" required to identify gaps in the market. This confidence is the bedrock of the entrepreneurial spirit.

The Power of Technical Confidence

Technical skills provide a unique kind of clarity. A person trained in the assembly and testing of printed circuit boards (PCBs) does not just see a piece of hardware; they see a modular system with possibilities for optimization. This deep understanding allows them to move from being a consumer of technology to a creator of solutions. In our experience at ESSCI, we have found that once the fear of the "black box" of technology is removed through rigorous training, the mind naturally shifts toward innovation.

Consider the burgeoning drone industry in India. Through our specialized training programs for Drone Manufacturing and Assembling Technicians, we are not just producing workforce for large factories. We are empowering individuals to understand drone

flight controllers, sensor integration, and power management. Armed with this knowledge, a technician in a rural area can become a local entrepreneur providing drone based services for precision agriculture, crop monitoring, or infrastructure inspection. This is a classic example of how a high tech skill creates a micro-entrepreneur who serves a local need while contributing to the national economy.

Bridging the Gap Between Policy and the Shop Floor

Union Budget 2026-27 has been a defining moment for our sector. With a massive 62 percent increase in the outlay for skilling and the launch of the India Semiconductor Mission 2.0, the government has signaled its ambition to make India a global powerhouse in electronics. From the perspective of ESSCI, this is more than just a financial allocation; it is a mandate to create a future ready workforce that can lead the next phase of innovation.

Programs like Samarth 2.0 are designed to equip workers with contemporary manufacturing and design skills, supporting productivity gains and the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies. However, the real success of these initiatives lies in their ability to foster "enterprise." When we align our National Occupational Standards and curricula with next generation manufacturing, we are giving our youth the tools to compete globally. A student who masters VLSI design or advanced packaging today is a potential founder of a fabless semiconductor startup tomorrow.

From Repair Technicians to Service Network Owners

One of the most immediate paths to entrepreneurship through technical skills is in the domain of repair and maintenance. The "Right to Repair" movement and the sheer volume of consumer electronics in India have created a massive demand for skilled diagnostics and repair. ESSCI has been instrumental in upskilling thousands of electricians and electronics retail youth through partnerships like the "Crompton Project Samruddhi" and the "Samsung DOST" initiative.

While these programs significantly enhance employability, they also plant the seeds of

entrepreneurship. A certified technician who understands the latest electrical best practices and smart home technologies often graduates from being a freelance worker to owning a service center. They eventually hire two or three more people, thereby transitioning from a job seeker to a job creator. This "micro-entrepreneurship" model is vital for sustaining livelihoods in semi-urban and rural India.

The Digital Edge: AI, IoT, and Big Data

The modern entrepreneur cannot afford to be technologically illiterate. To address this, ESSCI has introduced "Future Skills" courses in higher education institutions, covering AI Embedded Product Development, Essentials of IoT, and Big Data. These skills are the building blocks of the digital economy.

An entrepreneur who understands how to harness AI for predictive maintenance or how to use Big Data to analyze consumer trends has a significant competitive advantage. For instance, in our collaboration with the Samsung Innovation Campus, we have trained over 3,000 candidates in these emerging critical domains. Many of these trainees are now exploring how to integrate these technologies into traditional sectors like healthcare and logistics, effectively creating "tech-enabled" startups that were previously unimaginable.

Sustainability and Green Energy Entrepreneurship

The shift toward a green economy is another fertile ground for tech-led entrepreneurship. Our efforts in the solar energy sector, particularly through programs for Solar Panel Installation Technicians, have shown remarkable results. Solar energy is decentralized by nature, which makes it a perfect sector for local entrepreneurs.

A youth trained by ESSCI in solar LED technology or battery system assembly is uniquely positioned to start a solar consultancy or a maintenance firm. As India scales its electric vehicle (EV) and battery capabilities through 2030, the demand for such technical expertise will only grow. By providing NSQF-aligned qualifications in battery assembly and EV diagnostics, we are preparing a new generation of "green

entrepreneurs" who will drive India toward its net zero goals.

Building a Collaborative Ecosystem

The journey from skilling to entrepreneurship does not happen in a vacuum. It requires a robust ecosystem of industry partners, academic institutions, and government bodies. At ESSCI, we take pride in our role as a bridge between these stakeholders. Our partnerships with leaders like Marvell Semiconductors and ABB are focused on building future ready labs and training centers that replicate real world industry scenarios.

Furthermore, our participation in global platforms like the Bengaluru Tech Summit allows us to connect our innovators with investors and markets. This exposure is crucial for any aspiring entrepreneur. It teaches them that technical skill is the "what" of their business, but networking and market alignment are the "how."

The Road Ahead: Viksit Bharat 2047

As we look toward the vision of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047, the role of technical skills in creating a nation of entrepreneurs cannot be overstated. We are no longer content with being the "back office" of the world. We want to be the design house, the fabrication hub, and the innovation center.

At ESSCI, our commitment is to ensure that every youth who walks through our training centers leaves with more than just a certificate. We want them to leave with a sense of agency. Whether they choose to work for a multinational or start their own venture in a garage, their technical skills will be their greatest asset.

Entrepreneurship is often described as jumping off a cliff and building a plane on the way down. Technical skills provide the blueprints for that plane. They ensure that the leap is not a gamble, but a calculated step toward a sustainable and successful future. By investing in skills, we are not just building a workforce; we are building the economic foundations of a self-reliant India.

(The writer is Officiating Head, Electronics Sector Skills Council of India)

Silicon Chinar: Kashmir's Women Code Their Way to the Future

From traditional crafts to tech startups, a new generation of women entrepreneurs is rewriting the Valley's economic narrative

VEDICAA MANOJ SAWAL

Sana Aftab lives in a small apartment in Srinagar, where she mixes her MBA smarts with a business idea that most wouldn't expect. She started out making soap in her own kitchen, and from those first homemade batches, launched Perdex, a brand for natural beauty products. What began as a side project now ships orders across India, all fueled by social media and online buzz. And honestly, Sana's story isn't unusual anymore. This is what's happening all over Kashmir.

The numbers back it up. In 2019, there were just 12 women-led startups in Jammu and Kashmir. By 2024, that number jumped to 333. Government data says that out of 917 DPIIT-registered startups in the region, over a third are run by women. But this isn't just about statistics or paperwork. These are daughters of a region shaped by conflict, deciding they won't let geography or history box them in.

Tech is at the heart of this quiet shakeup. From 2021 to 2024, 52 tech startups with at least one woman director have popped up in Jammu and Kashmir. Eighteen of those started in just the last year, which shows

things are speeding up. It's not just e-commerce or digital marketing, either women here are building software, creating apps, and coming up with tech solutions for problems both local and global.

So, what's pushing this change? Government policies definitely help. The Jammu and Kashmir Startup Policy 2024-2027 spells out real incentives for women, seed funding up to Rs 20 lakh, cheaper co-working spaces, help with patents. They want to see 2,000 new startups over five years, and women get priority. Women-led startups here have already received Rs 1.55 crore under the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme.

But policies alone don't spark ambition, role models do. When girls in Kashmir see women like Bilquees Bano, who chose mushroom farming over the usual career paths, or Aneesa Iqbal, who juggles student life and her own soap and candle business, they start to picture new futures for themselves. These aren't Silicon Valley dreams imported from somewhere else. They're local, built on what's available, and driven by grit.

Zoom out, and Kashmir's story fits into a bigger national picture. By 2027, India's tech

industry expects women's participation to reach almost 15 percent, up from about 11 percent in 2022. Right now, nearly two million women work in India's tech sector, and demand is soaring for roles in cybersecurity, cloud computing, and AI, fields where women are making their mark. Kashmir's women entrepreneurs are riding this wave, but they're also dealing with hurdles most people in Bangalore or Mumbai don't think about: patchy internet, weak infrastructure, tough markets.

Still, these challenges force people to get creative. Look at Sheikh Asif. He dropped out after eighth grade, started Themes Infotech, and now teaches tech skills to others who missed out on formal education. Some of his students are young women from rural villages, picking up web design and development from home, turning digital know-how into financial freedom. Tech education is spreading through YouTube, online courses, and informal groups, you don't need a fancy degree or city address to join in.

The real test now is reaching girls in schools, before old stereotypes take root. Research shows parents and teachers in

Kashmir often believe boys are naturally better at STEM, so girls get nudged away from technical fields. Changing that means starting early: coding clubs in schools, female mentors in tech, lessons that put women's achievements in science front and center.

Programs like Girls Who Code have already proved that when you give girls the right tools and support, they dive into STEM fields in huge numbers. Kashmir needs homegrown versions of these programs, shaped for its own cities and villages. Thanks to smartphones, reaching even the most remote places is finally possible.

Entrepreneurship platforms like Startup Kashmir are building real communities. They host meetups where women swap stories and advice. These gatherings matter, they make it normal for women to be in business, and they offer networks that replace the old boys' clubs.

The economic argument is clear. Women-led startups aren't just building their own futures; they're creating jobs and helping Kashmir's economy grow. Plus, they bring fresh perspectives to the table, solving problems that all-male teams might miss.

A Childhood Growing Up on Garbage: A Question Mark on Our Development Story

ASHUTOSH PANDEY

On Saturday February 8 something sad happened in the city. It was a morning but then people saw something that made them feel very uncomfortable. A little kid was sitting on a truck that carries garbage and he was eating his food from a plate. The sad thing was that he was sitting in the middle of all this rotten trash. This was not something that you see for a second and then it is gone. The kid on the garbage truck was a clear picture of how hungry some people are and how some people have to do things they do not want to do because they are not equal to others. The scene with the kid on the garbage truck showed us the truth, about our society. It is not a nice truth.

That child is always looking for food because he is very hungry. The bad smell, the streets and the risk of getting sick are things he sees every day. When you are a kid you should feel safe learn things and have fun playing. For this child every day is about trying to survive. People who live there say they see the child with the garbage truck a lot. He is probably the son of the person who collects the trash. The child's life is very hard, like his parents lives. It shows how when parents have a life their kids often have a tough life too. The hardship that the parents face is passed down to the child. It happens without anyone really noticing.

This is not a story about people being poor. It is clear that some people are not being taken care of. When cities are getting better and have new roads and buildings and people are making more money a lot of people are still struggling to be treated with respect. Today we can see that some people are not equal to others not because of how much money they have but because they do not have the same chances in life they cannot get medical help when they need it and they do not have people to protect them. When kids have to sit in trash they can get sick easily they can get diseases that affect their skin. They can have trouble breathing. Poverty is a problem and people are still fighting for basic dignity and poverty is not just about money it is, about poverty of opportunity poverty of healthcare and poverty of social protection. The safety of sanitation workers is a problem that people have been talking about for a long time. When their families also have to work in these bad conditions it is really bad. This shows that there is something wrong with the system. Sanitation workers and their families are in danger because of this. The situation is very serious. It needs to be fixed. Sanitation workers deserve to be safe, at work.

The government has a lot of plans to help people with education, food and other basic needs. When you actually go to the places where these plans are supposed to be working you can see that there is a big difference between what the government says it will do and what is really happening. Many families do not get the help they need because they do not have the papers they do not know about the plans or the people, in charge do not come to their area. This means that poor families stay poor for a time and their children and grandchildren are also poor and it is a very sad thing that keeps happening over and over. The government plans for education, nutrition and welfare are not working for everyone and this is causing a lot of problems.

People who know a lot about this say that just giving some help for a while is not going to fix the big problems. The problems are down. What people really need is health care for the families of the people who clean up our streets and handle waste. The kids of these workers need to be able to go to school and get an education. We also need to make sure that people who are poor and live in cities have a safety net to fall on.

The lives of people who work hard every day need to get better in ways. Until that happens we will keep seeing sad things, like this happening over and again.

That child on the garbage truck is not an isolated story - he is a symbol of our times. He reminds us that in the race toward progress, many have been left so far behind that even their childhood has been buried under inequality. The real question is not whether development is happening, but who it is truly for. Until every child can eat in a safe, clean, and dignified space, our claims of progress will remain incomplete. And that incompleteness is a shared moral burden.

(The writer is Student, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Jammu)

Nature, money and health: a balanced view

DR. PRIYANKA SAURABH

In today's world, our perceptions of health have rapidly changed. Modern lifestyles, technology, expensive medical facilities, and rising incomes have created the belief that money is the key to better health. People living in big cities believe that if they have access to good hospitals, renowned doctors, private insurance, and modern equipment, illness will be insurmountable. But when we see prominent figures from across the country and the world with access to wealth, resources, and the best medical facilities-suffer from serious illnesses, this belief begins to waver.

It's natural to question why, despite so much care, caution, and resources, people haven't been able to escape cancer, heart disease, and other complex illnesses. Is modern lifestyle truly making us healthier, or are we unknowingly weakening our bodies' natural strength? This question isn't limited to the rich and famous, but concerns everyone who lives a fast-paced, artificial, and stressful life.

The human body is a gift of nature and the result of millions of years of evolution. Our bodies have evolved in harmony with natural foods, pure air, clean water, sunlight, and physical exertion. When we stray from this natural balance-eating highly processed foods, spending hours in closed rooms, and spending our lives in front of mobile phones and screens-the body's balance begins to deteriorate. Diseases don't come suddenly; they are the result of years of bad habits, stress, and imbalance.

Today's food is a prime example of this. Packaged, long-lasting, and laden with flavor-enhancing chemicals have taken over our plates. Fruit juices, frozen vegetables, and processed milk have become part of our daily diets. While convenient, they're not always healthy. Nature provides us with food in its complete form-a balanced diet of fiber, vitamins, and nutrients. When we alter that form, its effectiveness also changes.

In the name of cleanliness and safety, we've made the environment around us highly artificial. There's a race to disinfect everything. Life seems incomplete without soap, sanitizer, and chemical cleaners. Undoubtedly, cleanliness is essential, but excess is always harmful. Scientists also agree that exposure to natural bacteria, even in limited quantities, strengthens our immune system. A body that is protected from every small challenge can become vulnerable when faced with a major one.

Rural and urban life are often compared in this context. Elderly people living in villages eat simpler food, engage in more physical labor, and live a slower pace. Mental stress is also relatively low. This is why they can tolerate minor illnesses without medication. Meanwhile, urban residents lead comfortable lives, but even a simple fever can confine them to bed. This difference



is not only about medical facilities, but also about lifestyle and mental state.

However, it would be wrong to assume that connecting with nature is the cure for every illness. Many diseases are genetic, many are caused by infections, and many come naturally with age. Modern medical science has made unprecedented progress in these areas. Vaccines, antibiotics, surgery, and modern diagnostic techniques have saved millions of lives. It would also be a dangerous thought to dismiss science simply in the name of "natural."

The real problem arises when we go to one extreme. Either we become completely dependent on machines, medicines, and conveniences, or we reject science and seek solutions to every problem solely through home remedies. Both approaches are incomplete. Health is a balance-where both nature and science have their respective roles.

Mental health is another important aspect of this balance, one that is often overlooked. Today's human being may be physically surrounded by comforts, but mentally they are insecure, anxious, and stressed. Competition, fear of failure, social pressure, and worries about the future keep our minds constantly occu-

ried. This mental stress gradually affects the body and leads to serious illnesses. Money cannot completely eliminate this stress.

It's also important to understand that the illnesses of wealthy people are more visible to us because they are in public life. Ordinary people also suffer from the same illnesses, but they are not discussed. This doesn't mean that wealth automatically brings illness, but rather that wealth cannot provide complete protection against illness.

Today, we need to understand health not just from a medical perspective, but from a lifestyle perspective. A simple and balanced diet, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, time with nature, and mental peace-these are no less effective than any medicine. Furthermore, it is equally important to consult a doctor in a timely manner and take advantage of modern medicine when needed.

Ultimately, we must accept that neither money can make us immortal, nor can a natural lifestyle alone protect us from all diseases. The real solution lies in balance. Only when we combine science with an understanding of nature is a healthy and meaningful life possible. Perhaps this is the path we can take to live not only longer, but also better lives.

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