

MARITIME EDUCATION IN INDIA

**No man will be sailor, who has contrivance enough to gel himself into a jail
For being in a ship is being in a jail, with a chance of being drowned.
A man in a jail has more room, better food and commonly better company.**
- Samuel Johnson. English poet and critic

The above words are reflection of the largely physical nature of seafaring, as it existed before the dawn of industrialization. However, as human innovativeness has steadily found its way into shipping, Skills required has evolved from being purely physical to being increasingly intellectual in nature. Newer technologies require knowledge about a wide era of subjects in order to become a successful seafarer. They have necessitated a more structured method of knowledge dissemination and selection criteria that examines not only physical capabilities but also mental prowess.

Increasing sophistication of vessels and associated equipments as well as rising concern about possible pollution that can be caused by ship accidents, has led to greater importance on a well-designed education system and a structured method of knowledge dissemination. Over the years maritime education has become a large industry, with an identity quite independent of the shipping industry it carets to.

The present article is to bring into focus various issues concerning maritime education in India.

Maritime education – a historical perspective

Going back in time, it will dawn upon us that shipping or sailing never required a lot of equipments or a plethora of knowledge, rather it needed courage and feel of adventure & ecstasy in playing with imminent danger. With time, navigation has changed from an art to a science. Initially it was stars and moon showing the position and time, which latter gave way to sextant and different chronometers. Even vessel making was not a big science till the 18th century. It was after the industrial Revolution, when vessel engineering underwent drastic change. Vessel size increased dramatically and the simple rowing was converted to propeller-based rowing and engine-based power. Both the structural side of the ship and the power plant side registered tremendous changeovers in the last century, steam power plant changed to diesel power plant then to gas turbine plant. I the meantime, sextant has given way to Global Positioning System (GPS) or Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS). Also the type of cargo carried across the continents has changed very much over the years. It was coal in early part of last century and petroleum in the later part of the century, may be Liquefied natural Gas (LNG) in this century.

These developments have necessitated presence of large number and variety of skills amongst seafarers importing these skills required a formal education system and this led to growth of marine education industry globally.

India has been a seafaring nation for centuries. India's maritime history goes back to Indus Valley Civilisation when an active trade existed with Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Eastern coast, then known as Kalinga, used to trade heavily with East Asian countries. Evidence of active seaborne trade from Western coast to Midde East also exists. The new era started with East India Company's trading between India and Europe.

Our first training institute was started by Ismail Yusuf, Then proprietor of Bombay Steam navigation Company in 1910 at worli, Mumbai, which latter got shifted to Nhava in the outskirts of Mumbai. It happened to be the first marine training institute in South East Asia. It

came to be known as training Ship Rehman in 1972. The first Government initiative came in 1972, when Royal Indian Marine's Largest troop ship, after many fittings, was converted to mercantile marine training ship named Training Ship Dufferin. TS Dufferin had trained 2,656 cadets by 1972 when it was decommissioned. It was replaced by Training Ship Rajendra, Which was meant for the training for 250 cadets at a time. Later when it was felt that the output needed to be increased, a shore-based structure-Training Ship Chanakya, came up in New Mumbai and TS Rajendra was decommissioned.

From (OECD) countries to Third world countries

The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have historically been the center of shipping and hence Source of seafarers. They have actually explored the whole world. So naturally, prior to colonization of Asian and African lands, both worker and master category of people came from the same European countries. With colonization of Asia, came the Laskars (natives of Asia) who were taken as seamen on the British ships, because of illness or mortality or 'wastage' of British people. Two Laskars were taken as a substitute for one British seaman although together they were earning far less.

Since the end of Second World War, concomitant to growth of maritime industry in East Asia and other developing nations, people of various nationalities joined the seafarer community. The shipping industry lost its sheen in the OECD countries due to the emergence of alternative career opportunities, which were equally compensating in a less harsh or even comfortable environment. The wastage of officers of OECD countries at the training level increased drastically and very few people preferred the on vessel assignment after the age of 50, even though they were capable of handling the ship as a Master.

The results of BIMCO-ISF 2000 report confirm that the centre of gravity of the manpower industry has continued to move away from most of the traditional maritime countries in Europe, North America, Japan etc. towards countries in the Far East, the Indian sub-continent and Eastern Europe. The share of OECD countries in total seafarers has come down to 27.5% from 31.5% in last 4 years from 1995. With the developed standard of living such a trend is not expected to reverse.

Well, the third world countries constitute more than half of the whole world and education standards in many third world countries have developed only in last 50 years. India in particular has developed a very high standard of education system. Thanks to Lord Macaulay, India is the second largest English-speaking nation only next to United States (US). Indian officers have done very well in ship operation across the world and they have already made a name for themselves. The Far East countries, more or less supply the ratings to the industry.

India is in a typical situation, where there is the largest pool of scientific manpower staying along with the largest pool of unemployed youth. India is also fast gaining the recognition as the Information technology (IT) hub in Asia. Notwithstanding the upcoming career opportunities, it is difficult to expect a substantial drop in unemployment in near future. So keeping all these things in view, India can be expected to provide a very large number of people both in officer and rating category because of the inherent advantages considered above. What does it mean for an entrepreneur in terms of opportunities?

He has to create awareness in the market. Shipping, as a career has so less visibility in the market that the mass of people staying away from the coast have hardly heard about the merchant vessels. Preference for a career in Merchant Navy has gradually declined since 1980s. Previously aspirants were drawn in by prospects of visit to various foreign lands and a handsome salary. Development of the "new economy" and growth in knowledge based firms made comfortable jobs, which were more rewarding, available offshore. Now the preference of the masses has changed from marine career to new economy jobs.

In earlier times, ratings used to come from coastal Gujarat and Tamil Nadu where people were quite accustomed to sea and sailing. The deck side and engine side officers usually came from North India and East India. Since the last two decades, the Gujarati communities have increasingly shied away from a shipping career as proliferation of chemical industries and consequent entrepreneurship has offered better alternatives. In today's times, when the demographic structure of Indian seafarers in the official hierarchy has almost remained same, the ratings are drawn from the states like Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

The interested entrepreneurs are typically from North India and West India who are trying to tap the talents in developed areas only. They can act proactively and open the same avenues in Eastern India, which we believe, would surely pay off in the future. So the latent demand in our country itself is very high. One needs to zero in on the actual areas in India. It helps to remember that India is far from uniform in nature as far as the economic standards are concerned. It will take all the campaigns and patience to convert the latent demand to the explicit demand.

Also such entrepreneurs can expect to attract the potential candidates from other third world countries like Philippines, Bangladesh etc. to study in the institutes here. Today, those people are going to institutes in United Kingdom (UK) partly due to the reason that they have been historically going there and partly due to the unavailability of such avenues in the vicinity. An Indian entrepreneur can advertise itself in such countries and try to draw them by offering them scholarship. In fact, an awareness campaign alone may suffice.

A competitive analysis would show that the biggest threat to Indian seafarer community, and hence Indian marine education sector, may come from the superfluous pool of Balkan area professionals who have been rendered unemployed after the disintegration of erstwhile United States of Soviet Russia (USSR). They are ready to take up assignments at a very lower level of emolument. They are from the naval background, so their quality is undoubtedly good. That could offer the competition in the officers' level.

In case of the Chinese pool, their technical qualification is as competitive as Indians, but lack of English knowledge impedes their entry into world market. However, they have developed high level of maritime education with three maritime universities. It is not easy to predict when they would become comfortable with English as communication medium. Steps are already being taken by the Chinese Government itself to promote English in the country.

Philippines not only possess a global seafaring experience but also an English speaking populace. However, the seafaring community from the country lacks requisite level of expertise on technical matters, an area of concern for the global shipping industry.

Based on the above factors, we believe that it would not be overoptimistic to establish a marine education infrastructure in India that caters to the seafaring community of many of the developing nations.

Indian regulatory practice facilitates or impedes?

The highest body of shipping regulation in our country, Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping), housed in Jahaz Bhavan, Mumbai is responsible for the operational development of the maritime industry in India and hence the marine education sector. India, being a signatory to International Maritime Organisation (IMO), implements all the guidelines through DG shipping. Continuous evaluation, persistent efforts and guidance of DG Shipping have played a significant role in India becoming a major maritime nation.

At the time of inception of IMO, India would have probably been a backbencher. The scenario has changed now-with Indian seafarers in great demand, Indian training standard highly recognised, Dr. C.P. Srivastava holding the highest seat in IMO for four consecutive terms, and India has now a greater say in affairs of IMO. However, there are many places where, as was pointed out by people interviewed during the survey, DG Shipping failed to keep up to expectations. Before the Standard for Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) guidelines in 1995, the government bodies were carrying out most of the education and training. Very few players, like big shipping lines including Shipping Corporation of India and Great Eastern were granted permission to carry out their own training institutes for captive use. With IMO-STCW'95 guidelines, DG Shipping liberalized the policy and invited the private players to take up the responsibility.

DG Shipping is taking the responsibility of approved institutes to the extent of inspection but do not concern themselves about what the non-approved institutes are doing or what the students of such institutes are facing. Few unfair activities spoil the impression about the standard of overall Indian Maritime Education. The youths once burnt could leave the marine career by stopping ten more aspirants to join.

The regulatory practice needs to be more vigilant and must be responsible for smooth conduct of action in the market. Liberalization increases their responsibility, does not decrease. Quality Standard in the evaluation process: links and interactions. (MET-Maritime Education & Training)

Source : UICEE

Free Market comes calling

After the liberalization ushered in Indian Economy in 1991 under the tutelage of Mr. P.V. Narsimha Rao and Dr. Manmohan Singh, the market autonomy has superseded the central autonomy and planning. Each and every sector is witnessing a sort of rebirth, new dynamism due to investment plans of domestic players and foreign players ready to grab a slice of market with opportunities galore. Shipping sector has also not been untouched by it. The first sign of allowing the free market in the maritime training and education came in 1997 when DG Shipping allowed the private players to set up the training facilities on a commercial basis so as to meet the huge training demand in the wake of STCW deadlines.

Before 1997, there were very few Government training institutes along with the training arms of big shipping companies like TS Jawahar of Great Eastern Shipping Company limited (GE Shipping), Maritime Training Institute of Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) etc., whose seat capacity was always less than the number of interested candidates So it obviously led to a big queue and backlog.

All the maritime courses can be broadly divided into three types namely the modular courses, competency courses and various familiarization courses.

Competency courses require high degree of infrastructure whereas the rest two types don't require much So in 1997, after the DG Shipping's decision to allow the private players to come into this field, people who had experience in sailing and had the critical amount of money to pour into investment captured the opportunity. Since there was a scramble for those courses, the initial players, after putting up minimum infrastructure started offering various modular courses at exorbitant fees. This led to mushrooming of such institutes in Mumbai area.

With an attractive market, arrival of many players saw the course fees crashing down and in the matter of two years many small academics became commercially unviable. Some of them are on the verge of closing down. The first fall out of free market was arrival of businessmen with short-term profit making goals without any dedication for the quality of Training. Guidelines were adhered to just in letter and not in spirit. Instances of certificates being issued for a fee without the actual training programme also existed. DG Shipping, having only recently liberalised the sector, had not yet developed the control mechanisms to prevent such a failure in the system.

In retrospect, one can see that free market itself is not as bad as its method of implementation. Allowing the private sector investment does not absolve the Government any of its responsibilities. In fact its responsibility increases to the extent that it has to supervise the modus operandi of so many players. Probably this aspect of market dynamics has not been fully ensured by the regulating authorities.

In future, maintaining the discipline in the market would be the full responsibility of the Government authority and it will dictate the quality and quantity of players. The free market would always be more favourable to the dedicated players delivering right kind of training, the students being its customers. It won't be unusual even to wean away the students from the Government institutes. This market in our country in near future may witness consolidation, which is quite logical and warranted. So it may result in the existence of very few numbers of big players who would be providing the courses covering the whole spectrum. They would be undoubtedly open to scathing attacks from not only the domestic players, but also the foreign players.

So success of the free market in future will depend upon the vigilance of Government and the maturing process of responding to the call of the market on the part of private players.