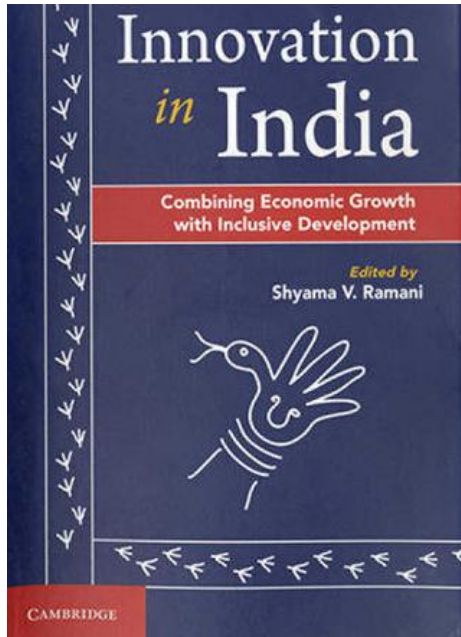


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Innovating for economic growth

• [R. Devarajan](#)



INNOVATION IN INDIA: Edited by Shyam V. Ramani; Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd., 4381/4, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002. Rs. 795.

R. Devarajan

Fourteen years ago, at the watershed of the two centuries, the world witnessed the ushering in of a new era, a new environment, which was a far cry from what had been experienced earlier. Although, by then, people had become alive to the imperative and inevitability of change, the process of actual and physical changeover was not easy and simple.

Moving from the known to the unknown was a different ball game altogether. Looking at the reality behind the rhetoric, and in order to derive the optimum advantage, it was essential to embrace and espouse the evolving norms, wholly and willingly.

Innovation is a critical component in improving individual and institutional performance. *Real* innovation is not easy to come by. More often, establishments tweak compensation systems; tinker with organisational structures; or make marginal improvements in some functions. *Innovation* is more radical and transformational than an *improvement*. Innovation is content-oriented, whereas improvement is process-oriented.

It is not possible to countenance a high and increasing standard of living merely by long-in-the-tooth tools of development. Every now and then, organisations confront situations that warrant radical changes, which call for out-of-the-box thinking. It is only through innovation that we can bring about such avant-garde transformation.

Inspiration for innovation usually stems from a combination of three factors: an urgent and nagging necessity to bring about a change; how people perceive and pursue that change to the ultimate; and a congenial environment to accomplish that change.

Innovation is always driven by self-induced passion, pressure of compelling circumstances, and undying perseverance for achievement. The assiduous application of technological improvement in transport and communication worldwide has created an unprecedented growth in global connectivity and transmission of information. Globalisation itself is a product of innovation.

Current and contemporary economies are more influenced by ideas and concepts, than they are governed by capital and labour. Empirical evidence across nations suggests the existence of a definite link between technological innovation and inclusive economic growth. Inclusive economic growth implies that the advantages of development are equitably distributed to all sections of the society. It ensures that the economic gains generated by growth are not monopolised only by the high and mighty, but the marginalised sections in the society also derive the benefits.

Innovation reformulates conventional economic theory in such a way that knowledge, technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation are positioned at the centre of this emerging model. As the developed countries have already achieved inclusive economic growth by implementing the above model, the still developing countries have the advantage of being the beneficiary of *diffusion* — a process of adoption and absorption. It is a kind of “free ride” for the developing countries, who have no need to reinvent the wheel. Innovations in India have substantially contributed to income and employment generation in the country. The corporate sector as well as the National Laboratories functioning under the aegis of the CSIR has been operating under severe resource constraints. This has, however, not hampered the development of cost-effective products and new technologies.

During the pre-liberalisation period in India — from 1950s to 1990s — the main thrust of economic development was on alleviating poverty

and crating a better standard of living. This development agenda was carried out in four stages. It commenced with land reforms that abolished skewed land ownership, and brought in the philosophy of 'Land for the Tiller'. Then, a series of public sector undertakings were started in the semi-urban areas, besides providing encouragement and support to the small scale industries.

The third phase introduced a public distribution system to provide essential commodities to the people. Simultaneously, primary health care was also brought in as a common community service. The fourth and final stage saw the implementation of a deliberate and purposive reservation policy in respect of education and employment opportunities to the deprived and the downtrodden.

Innovation has proved to be an effective stimulant in our country for building front-runners in international trade and commerce. It is the sure thing for progress and prosperity. Innovation has also bred and brought about an abiding collaboration between the academic portal and the factory shop floor. Indeed, this avenue has become a much sought after space, where the future is invented.

There is a strong correlation between language and innovation. The way leaders make use of language to encapsulate an idea among their people determines its success rate — whether it will be a flash in the pan, or an enduring phenomenon.

The fear of failure often forbids people from attempting innovation. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. People must be counselled that failures are stepping stones for success.

Willy-nilly, there is always an element of "luck" and chance in innovation. But aggressively positive persons create their own "luck", which follows exemplary planning, preparation, perseverance. Louis Pasteur famously wrote: "Fortune favours the prepared mind."

This book is a compendium of 12 well-researched articles, some authored by individual writers, and some by teams of two. While all these articles deal with different themes, in effect they address a common cause viz., how "Innovation in India [is] combining economic growth and inclusive development".

The editor of the volume, Shyama V. Ramani, has co-authored three pieces, besides writing the prologue, and the concluding remarks. The remaining eight chapters describe the impact of innovation on different sectors of the national economy such as university-industry collaboration, seed and biotech industry, software technology, pharmaceutical industry, Nanoscience and technology, energy/power generation, indigenous medical systems, and innovation in low-cost toilets in rural India.

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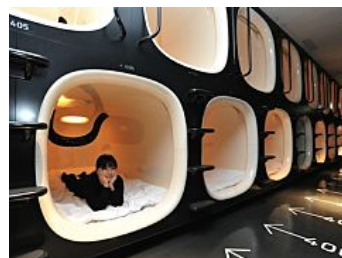
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