

'Indian colleges must become the window to the world'

MADHURIMA DEY

Professor Bibek Banerjee began his academic career at Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) where he spent nearly two decades as professor of marketing and economics, contributing to a wide range of academic arenas.

At IIMA, he introduced and popularised the simulation methodology in his curriculum and was recognised for his significant contributions to learning. He chaired the marketing area; co-founded the Centre for Research in Retailing; and provided leadership to create and operationalise IIMA's successful collaboration with Duke University's Corporate Education Centre for customised Executive Education.

Currently, he is the senior dean of Strategic Initiatives and Planning at the Ahmedabad University. Excerpts:

Q What kind of universities does India need right now?

Indian universities urgently need to bring the student back in the centre of its universe. Whenever we think of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability in university education, the stakes of the students need to be positioned in the vertex of all strategic considerations. This interdisciplinary approach opens up opportunities for students to study a variety of subjects before homing in on the one they wish to major in. By way of breaking the cookie-cutter structure of existing disciplinary silos, liberal education makes it easy for students to understand and make connections across the multiplicity of specialised disciplines and acquire skill-sets that help them solve complex problems effectively.

Interactive in-class discussions, studio and field experiences, open seminars and presentations, multimedia and hands-on creative assignments are some of the ways in which good universities are creating transformational student experiences. Indian universities must also be the window to the world for our young people, in providing them opportunities for international exposure.

Q What are the major structural defects prevalent in Indian educational system?

India has grossly under-invested in education over the last 40 years, relative to its other strategic priorities. Also, we had a protectionist and conservative mindset governing education policy - that has kept Indian higher education to compete on equal footing with its global peers. By way of physical signs, we see reputable institutions besetted with decrepit

Bibek Banerjee, senior dean of strategic initiatives and planning, Ahmedabad University, speaks about the need to modify the country's education system and make it student-centric

facilities, negligible investment in Research & Development, laboratories where equipment sit idle.

In case of certain states, there are a lot of unfilled seats in institutions. The challenge therefore is to improve our gross enrolment ratio, while also ensuring that institutions created for providing higher education fully utilise the capacity created. And the only way out is to bring a 360 degree focus on quality in the ecosystem of higher education. We need to understand that higher education is a specialised ecosystem - it needs investments into specialised expertise and intellect, specialised scientific and managerial resources, and most importantly it needs autonomous and quality focused governance process that is free from any kind of interference.

Furthermore, India over the past several decades has seen vocationalisation of higher education. Most are structurally limited in their scientific and intellectual bandwidth for disruptive and cutting-edge research. We know that large problems and opportunities that face the world today (such as Climate Change, Terrorism, Livelihoods, etc) cannot be solved by any disciplinary silo. We need multiple lenses from relevant disciplines to intensely scrutinise and propose solutions to these complex issues.

Q Which countries are doing the right things in terms of higher education?

Over centuries, prioritisation and strategic investment in scientific and academic excellence with a focus on research (coupled with underinvestment in India) have propelled the top international universities ahead of their Indian counterparts. However, not all foreign institutions provide uniformly superior quality of education - in fact quite a lot of the middle

and lower ranked institutions operate as fronts for immigration dynamics, rather than education.

Destinations such as the US, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand have been popular for Indian students. In addition to academic creativity and cutting-edge research driven relevance in curriculum, the major value of the top US universities (especially in US) is their focus on the overall quality of student life.

Notably, there are a few superior alternatives in India emerging as viable ones to so-called "foreign education". These progressive universities are offering holistic, inter-disciplinary, research-oriented education that is rooted in the context of 21st century. These universities often have collaborations with reputed foreign universities that help them offer curated international exposure to their students.

Q What are the basic changes required to make higher education student-centric?

The stodgy and canonised structure of traditional higher education institutions are faced with the debate today if university degrees have relevance in getting people out of poverty or improve overall quality of life. In effect universities need to find for

themselves their existential ethos.

Student-centric space need to be created to look at the what, why and how of higher education in general, and the programmes and their curriculum structure in particular.

Q What role can a teacher play to ensure student-centric education?

The role of the faculty is paramount in this entire schema of guiding the students through this transformative phase. In today's age of technology, the role of faculty has undergone a transformation. A faculty must not only understand their domain meaningfully, but also understand the learning style of each of his/her student. It is important for a professor in the 21st century to be a customiser, mentor and facilitator. It is important that rather than being the 'sage on stage', faculty members walk beside and guide their students along their individual paths of learning goals and outcomes in this diverse and fast-changing workplace environment.

Q What inspired you to start this kind of initiative at Ahmedabad University?

Following my doctoral degree in

other critical business areas.

■ **Arts:** Liberal Arts and traditional areas of arts education like sociology and humanities are increasingly getting the attention of the business world. One reason is that business is increasingly becoming integrated, people-driven, and complex. A growing population of business leaders acknowledges that lessons are drawn from the above areas and subjects like history help add a unique perspective to business decisions.

On the face of it, arts and business education are completely unrelated. However, it is precisely for this reason that they could be synergistic. The best proof of this comes from the fact that a growing number of CEOs come from an arts background, even in industry.

■ **Design/architecture:** A hard skills background like design or architecture complements management education well, especially in industry segments that require such a skill set. Think of an architect in a real estate business. The architect may be extremely talented and would logically rise high functionally. However, a ceiling is hit when the job role at a senior level demands people, strategy, commercial, and operational skills. This is where a management education can help remove barriers.

■ **Communication /journalism:** In the realm of communication and journalism, there is a growing need for depth in content. Business writing is a

thriving segment within journalism, and it is clear that depth cannot come from limited knowledge of the language or just creative writing. A deeper understanding of business matters acquired through a management program helps a writer to not just delve deeper into the issue through better questioning, but also to communicate in a manner that connects with the professional reader.

■ **Hospitality:** Business travel will continue as long as the business continues; tourism is not going to end. What is happening and will continue to happen is that the need for differentiation, better positioning, and more effective strategy will grow.

■ **Ex-defence services:** The trend started a few years ago with candidates as young as in their mid-thirties and going up all the way to their mid-fifties looking for a change in career track from the services. The stint in B-Schools helped these candidates with deep operational, leadership, and stress management experience to position themselves well for roles in the industry.

The benefits of a quality management programme can thus extend to candidates from almost any background. This comes from thorough training in areas like innovation, teamwork, decision-making, creativity, and technology, besides specific vocational skills.

The writer is director, FORE School of Management, New Delhi

PLUS POINTS

Making talent prosper



M-Scholar is a part of Magma Fincorp's student empowerment initiative that aims at helping academically meritorious students from economically disadvantaged families to chase their aspirations. The company recently announced M-Scholar 2019 that will provide scholarships to 100 deserving students. Besides underprivileged students, scholarships can be accessed by physically challenged ones and can be renewed every year.

Those of 20-year-old as on 15 August 2019, scored 80 per cent in +2 examinations and have a monthly household income of less than Rs 10,000 are eligible to apply. It is also mandatory for applicants to be a citizen of India. The scholarship will be granted to students pursuing three-year degree courses in general stream or four years and five years in engineering and medical respectively. Eligible candidates can send their application letters along with a few necessary documents at the office of Magma Fincorp Ltd. "The foundation of M-Scholar is laid on the idea of "Padhega India, tabhi toh badhega India", said Kaushik Sinha, head CSR, Magma Fincorp. For details visit: <https://magma.co.in/about-us/activities/csr-activities/m-scholarship-magma-fincorp/>

Pratishtha Ghosh

Enlightening students



The third edition of Voyage Education Fair 2019 presented by Infinity and Eduglobal was inaugurated by Nirmalya Nag, director, Infinity at Rotary Sadan auditorium recently. The two-day fair was a platform that offered pre-counselling sessions and career guidance to students focusing primarily on medical science, para-medical, engineering, pharmaceutical, management, technical and non technical courses etc, in India and overseas.

It provided students an opportunity to interact directly with overseas college representatives. The fair witnessed participation from more than 30 universities and many renowned colleges from India and abroad. The colleges and universities conducted various workshops and counselling sessions to encourage students.

Personal finance literacy



Money-Wizards organised an award function to felicitate the winners of the Youth Money Olympiad 2019 at Crowne Plaza, Chennai recently. Shyam Sekhar, the founder of iThought was the chief guest. Gaurav Arora from Shri Ram College of Commerce became the winner.

Anirudh Tumuluri from IIM Udaipur and Kuldeep Singla from IIM Rohtak secured the second and third positions respectively.

The Youth Money Olympiad (YMO) conceptualised and rolled out by Money-Wizards, a senior IIM alumni venture completed its 6th edition last month. With over 30,000 students participating from above 400 colleges across the country, the YMO is the largest personal finance Olympiad for college students in the world.

Academic skills



Association of Professional Academic Institution (APAI), West Bengal organised an annual pre-counselling event and seminar at Netaji Indoor Stadium recently. In its 15th year, the event showcased a variety of options in the state in the fields of engineering, management and technical education to give aspiring students clarity and help them gain perspective by conducting workshops and sessions. The event was inaugurated by Partha Chatterjee, minister for education and minister of parliamentary affairs of the government of West Bengal. The occasion also witnessed a panel of other notable guests and dignitaries.

Kritika Basu

Across multiple disciplines

As businesses are becoming comprehensive, quality management education can extend to candidates from almost any background



JITENDRA K DAS

Traditionally, engineers have dominated intakes at most B-Schools. The rationale for combining a management programme with an engineering degree is known to many. However, non-engineers are increasing their presence in management education, and this is not without reason. As business is becoming multi-faceted with greater integra-

tion across borders and functions, the requirement from business managers is also evolving. Let us look at what a quality management education has to offer for students and/or professionals from various streams.

■ **Commerce/finance:** Efficient utilisation of capital, selection of the right investment opportunities, accurate calculation of costs for pricing, deploying surplus efficiently, and

keeping adequate controls in business processes are some of the areas where finance professionals add tremendous value to the business.

Combining management education with financial skills result in holistic talent that can marry diverse but related perspectives. This is especially true for critical business management areas like strategy and even operations. The exposure helps the finance professional to imbibe the nuances of

