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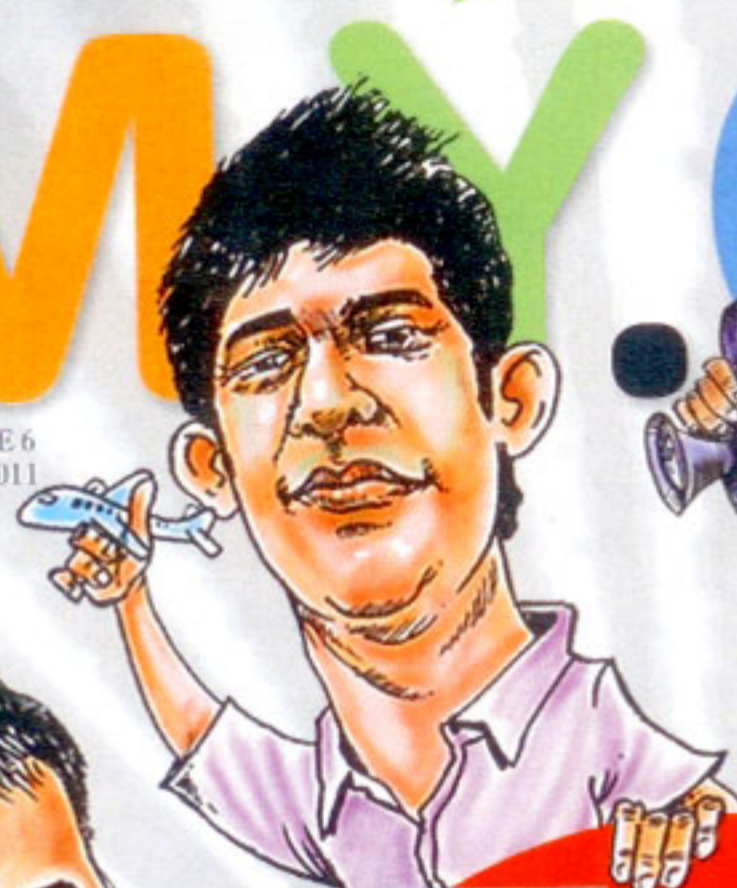
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MYOOD

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BHUMIKA H BHATIA
PHOTOGRAPHER



EDUCATING THE FORGOTTEN

DR. ACHUTYA SAMANTA IS A NOTED SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR; HIS ACHIEVEMENTS MATCHED ONLY BY HIS HUMILITY. CONSTANTLY TRYING TO BETTER ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR THE MARGINALISED, HE SPEAKS TO PRIYANKA RAI ABOUT WHY HE DOES WHAT HE DOES.

He runs the largest free residential institute for tribal children, but his own educational journey began with a 16 kilometre daily walk to school. From scrounging for food to mortgaging his wrist watch, Dr Achutya Samanta has come a long way.

The founder of the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) and the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), Dr Samanta is both an educator and a philanthropist.

A boy from a small Orissa village who lost his father when he was just four years old; he knows what it means to struggle for a livelihood, for food, for sustenance. When his father died, the family was left with no means of income, but with eight mouths to feed.

His mother took up odd jobs in order

to feed her seven children. She grew some seasonal vegetables in the backyard of their one roomed half-thatched house and husked paddy in other people's courtyards to arrange for some broken rice for the family. "Rain used to bring added misery; though the wild spinach growing near the village pond supplemented the little rice soaked in rice gruels. Summer was not pleasant either. Then, the leaves of the drumstick tree took the place of the spinach," recalls Dr. Samanta.

Initial education

His first school was the village school where he impressed his teachers sufficiently to be exempted from paying the fees. His strong will to succeed fetched him a merit scholarship to study further. The high school he would

go to study in was 16 kilometres away from his village. A daily commute, he didn't have a bicycle, which meant he covered this distance mostly on foot.

He did well in high school as well and secured another scholarship to complete a B.Sc. degree. He finally managed to make it to Utkal University in Bhubaneswar where he completed an M.Sc degree in Chemistry. Even though he was on a scholarship, it wasn't enough to cover his basic needs. As a result, he would sell coconuts and bananas in the local "subzi mandi" to pay for his clothes and books. After his studies, he started teaching at the same university as a lecturer.

He was relatively comfortable at this stage, but Dr. Samanta had big dreams. Never forgetting his days spent in his village, struggling for an education, he





HIS MOTHER GREW VEGETABLES IN THE BACKYARD AND HUSKED PADDY IN OTHER PEOPLES' COURTYARDS TO ARRANGE FOR SOME BROKEN RICE FOR THE FAMILY.

wanted to make access to education a reality for others like him. And he dreamt these dreams with just Rs. 5000 in his pocket.

Beginnings of KIIT

He gave up the teaching job in college and started the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) in a two-room rented premises with 12 students. The money came from his savings, friends and money lenders. But it wasn't a straightforward journey. Always short of money, he recounts a time when he had to mortgage his

wrist watch and bike helmet with a roadside mechanic so he would fix his bike. The debts were mounting and he even contemplated suicide.

But his sincere efforts paid off and the same two roomed institute which started with twelve students in 1992 has now grown substantially to become one of the finest universities in the country .

The ultimate goal

Dr. Samanta believes that 'illiteracy causes poverty and literacy drives it away'. In order to achieve the ultimate

goal of removing poverty, Dr. Samanta used all the goodwill, fame and resources mobilised through KIIT to establish the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS); the largest free residential institute from kindergarten to post-graduate, exclusively for 15,000 tribal children.

The institute provides food, health care and all the basic amenities of life absolutely free, besides a job on completion of study. These children have established a record by securing 100 per cent results consecutively for the last nine years in the examinations conducted by the state board and council. The US Government granted 100 scholarships to the students of KISS in its English Access Micro Scholarship Programme. The United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) has selected KISS to run its Life Skills Center.

Awards and recognition

With so much work put in, awards and recognition haven't been far behind for Dr Samanta. He was the recipient of the Young EDGE – 2010 award for his pragmatic approach to education. He was conferred with Asia's Best Social Entrepreneur Award 2010 by the World HRD Congress in Singapore. He's also been made a commission member of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and executive member of the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE).

Dr Samanta however has more initiatives planned. He hopes to open up KISS branches in most of the Naxal affected areas in the country. In the near future, he will also be organising an international world education summit. Through it all, Dr Samanta hasn't lost touch with the ideals he ingrained in himself when he was living in the village. He simply says, "a great human revolution in a single human being can bring a change in the destiny of a nation." Something he's been working on for more than a decade now. **M.Y.O.D.**