

The Sunday Statesman

Kiss of change in
Naxal-infested Odisha

8TH
DAY



KOLKATA NEW DELHI SILIGURI BHUBANESWAR

www.thestatesman.net | e-mail: thestatesman@vsnl.com

12 JANUARY 2014 12+4+12 LC Rs 3.50

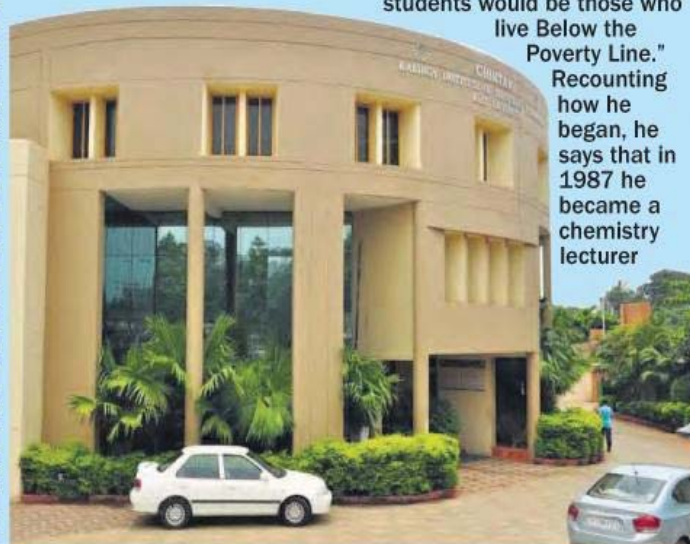
Kiss of social change

sri krishna reports on one man's mission to turn things around for tribal children in Naxal-infested Odisha

IT hasn't been an easy ride, but determination and willpower have resulted in Achyuta Samanta bringing light into the lives of thousands of tribal children in Odisha. Even the Naxal-infested districts have not deterred him and as he says, "They, too, are keen on seeing their children get an education." Elaborating on his focus on tribal children, he adds, "The kids living in tribal areas need to be exposed to the real world. Children living in slums in a city have some idea of what is

kindergarten to postgraduation, as he puts it, at his Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences, based in Bhubaneswar. Kiss is home to 20,000 tribal (indigenous) children and Samanta plans to expand it beyond the 20 districts in Odisha. "I started Kiss in Delhi and plan to start in 30 states in the country in the coming days for I want the benefit of education to reach not only tribals but children from other sections of society and the only criteria for taking

students would be those who live Below the Poverty Line." Recounting how he began, he says that in 1987 he became a chemistry lecturer



going on but these tribal children, especially in the Naxal-infested areas, are constantly faced with the possibility of becoming Naxals themselves. Education helps them to overcome this and so I am giving them free education which will help them to get a better life."

Asked whether he has faced any problems due to the Left extremism prevalent in Odisha, he shrugs and says, "You will be surprised to know that many of these children who are coming to study at my institute are children of Naxalites."

What is indeed remarkable is that Samanta himself had been through as difficult times as his students, having had to struggle for two square meals a day. He lost his father when he was four years old and his mother had to support seven children.

"Illiteracy causes poverty and literacy drives it away," is the 48-year-old Samanta's credo and he has kindled the hopes of thousands of tribals in Odisha of having a better life by providing free education from

and worked for 10 years but wanted to do something for society. That got him to start the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology in 1992 with 12 students in a rented building. A year later he launched Kiss, ploughing into it the money he got through the KIIT.

Kiss students have gained admission to prestigious national-level institutes like NIT, IIT and IIM and even jobs in leading companies. "We incorporate vocational training with formal education, thus helping a child to acquire an education as well as self-sufficiency," says Samanta. His wards have also excelled in sports. They were crowned Under-13 Champions at the International Rugby Tournament held in Manchester, UK, in 2011, and even excelled at the Asian Games in Guanzhou, China, and the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010. Like Samantha says, "Each student passing out from the institute is becoming a Change Agent for the future."