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Posted: Sun, Aug 24 2008, 11:17 PM IST

Economy and Politics **RSS**

A B-school leveraging education and spiritual

Historically, religion has played a dual role in expounding knowledge

Business case | Premchand Palety

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Corrections & Clarifications

The column incorrectly described faculty member Shobhana Madhavan's previous work experience. She has worked primarily with international development organizations as a consultant. Her first name as well as the name of Berkeley, California, were also misspelt in another part of the column.

Going through my earlier few columns, some readers have pointed out that I have become too cynical of B-schools. It isn't all that bad out there. I agree even though we all know there are quite a few bad apples still out there.

In the nine years that I have been visiting Indian business schools, I have come across many B-schools that are ethical to the core. Some of them are very low-profile.

One such is Amrita School of Business in Coimbatore, part of Amrita University. The name of the institute is eponym of chancellor of the university Amritanandamayi Devi, popularly known as Amma. She is considered god incarnate by her many followers. Leveraging her global cult status she has set up highly respected educational institutions in different parts of India. Besides donating money, her followers, who include renowned faculty worldwide, have also offered their services without any financial motives to her educational institutions.

Historically, religion has played a dual role in expounding knowledge. During the Renaissance period in Europe, the Church discouraged scientific thinking. For instance, it allowed Galileo, the famous astronomer, to preach all his discoveries provided he did not speak about the most revolutionary of them all, that the earth revolves around the sun, as it was contrary to the then belief of the Church. In India too, orthodox Hinduism discouraged dissemination of knowledge beyond upper caste men for many centuries. But, for the past some decades, different religious sects, such as the Society of Jesuits, have done a commendable job in promoting education in India. In the management field too, we have many institutes promoted by them that are ethical and are doing a great job, such as XLRI in Jamshedpur and XIMB in Bhubneswar. In India, religious beliefs have also motivated many good teachers to work in the most backward areas, especially among tribals .

The Amrita School of Business is another example of the positive impact even religious bodies can have in society by promoting quality education.

Some three weeks ago, I visited Amrita's B-school campus in Coimbatore. Located on the outskirts of the city close to the Kerala border at the foothills of an elephant-shaped hillock , it is perhaps India's most picturesque campus. What struck me most, though, was the faculty there, both permanent as well as visiting teachers. Most of the faculty members are highly qualified, with degrees from IITs, IIMs and reputed foreign universities. They also have an impressive list of publications in reputed national and international journals.

The director, Sanjay Banerji, is an unassuming person who likes to move around the campus on his bicycle. A product of IIM-Calcutta, Kellogg School of Management and a former faculty member of MDI-Gurgaon, he says he is there because of his devotion to Amma. So are many of his colleagues.

For instance, Deepak Gupta and Shobhana Madhavan work there as full-time faculty. The couple have, between them, degrees from IIT-Delhi, IIM-Ahmedabad, a master's degree from Cornell University and PhD from University of California, Berkley. Both of them have taught abroad and Shobhna also has 12 years' corporate work experience in the US They could have easily got much better paying jobs elsewhere. But they are as dedicated to academics as to Amma.

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There are also many visiting faculty teaching on the campus from reputed universities abroad, again most of them devotees of Amma. The school also follows its religion-led discipline. No intoxicants or non-vegetarian food are allowed on the campus.

They are very ethical too. "No bribes here, not even to All India Council for Technical Education officials," says Banerji. There is no siphoning of money, no back-door admissions, no auctioning of seats and no commercial exploitation of students.

Besides world class faculty, Amrita Business School has almost everything that can make it a great B-school. It has one of the best infrastructure for a B-school in India that I have seen.

The Wi-fi-enabled campus is also eco-friendly, with extensive use of solar and other renewable sources of energy, such as biomass. Students are given single-occupancy rooms and they don't have to step out of the campus for day-to-day needs. They have a bank, departmental stores, a clinic with an ambulance, facilities for sports, including a large swimming pool. The faculty also stays on campus. The placements too have been reasonably good so far.

Perhaps because of its low profile, it has not been able to attract many students from other states. It sells about 1,100 applications, rather small for an Indian business school (<http://www.amrita.edu/asb>). Being located in one of the well-known industrial hubs of Tamil Nadu, the school could do a much better job in interacting with industry. And, for now, it does not have many management development programmes and consulting assignments with industries in Coimbatore. It has also not marketed itself well. Maybe it needs to also pay more attention to the mundane aspects of running a B-school.

Premchand Palety is director of Centre for Forecasting and Research (C fore) in New Delhi, from where he keeps a close eye on India's business schools. Comments are welcome at businesscase@livemint.com



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COMMENTS



Sanjay Said:

I would like to offer just one clarification. By AICTE 'officials' one means those coming on behalf of AICTE for inspections etc. Sadly enough, they are also academic members of other academic institutions.

Posted On 8/25/2008 9:03:27 AM

[Reply](#)



Kamal Said:

Yes they need to position themselves well. I did not know about this B School before. I did a search for Mr. Sanjay Banerji on LinkedIn and found some more information about the school. I will do an article on such schools at www.kollace.com/wisewords.php

Posted On 8/25/2008 11:07:40 AM

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ashish Said:

Sir i would like to say that in your article you have mentioned that ASB is a Wi-fi enabled campus but I am sorry sir it is not like that.ASB is not a Wi-fi enabled campus it even does not have a net connection in the hostel.

Posted On 8/25/2008 1:16:09 PM

[Reply](#)

Re: sapana Said:

Dear Ashish, ASB has got a Wi - fi connection now. Regards, Sapana

Posted On 8/29/2008 11:10:32 AM



ashish Said:

Sir i would like to say that in your article you have mentioned that ASB is a Wi-fi enabled campus but I am sorry sir it is not like that.ASB is not a Wi-fi enabled campus it even does not have a net connection in the hostel.

Posted On 8/25/2008 1:16:09 PM

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Re: premchand Said:

Well, I stayed in the campus, in the guest house and could work on my lap top using wi-fi connectivity.The director told me that most of the campus is wi-fi enabled.Its possible that some hostels are not. Premchand Palety

Posted On 8/26/2008 7:14:22 PM



shobhana Said:

It was a pleasant surprise seeing ASB covered in the Mint. Deepak and I really enjoy teaching here. Just a small clarification - my work experience was more with the international development sector and I worked as a consultant with CIIFAD (Madagascar), WWF (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) and ADB (Sunderbans).

Posted On 8/27/2008 10:54:20 AM

[Reply](#)

Re: George Said:

Good to see ASB covered in the Mint.Lot of value-adds during my 2 years spent on this campus.

Posted On 8/28/2008 2:54:37 PM

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