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'Institutions are trivialising education'

Co-founder and chairman of MindTree, a leading software services company, and author of several best-sellers, **Subroto Bagchi** is among the few success stories from Odisha. Straddling a corporate career and the vocation of a writer, Bagchi says the future of the state lies in 'creative economy'. In a freewheeling chat with Sandeep Mishra, Bangalore-based Bagchi says it was his responsibility to create 'intellectual infrastructure' for the next generation through writing

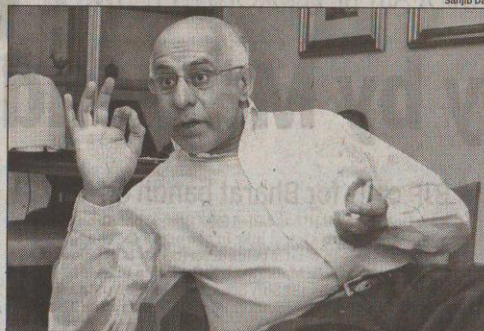
Q-Being a corporate bigwig, what prompted you to take to writing?

A-When I grew up in Odisha, the idea of writing was a respected one. Unlike now when playing cricket fetches you recognition, young children writing a good essay used to get appreciation then. Early on, I used to contribute for a publication called 'Youth Times' and even earned up to Rs 40 a piece. That was then a big deal and that is how my interest in writing evolved. Information Technology is a thinking industry and people who are part of it, are willing to read. A writer initially looks for positive affirmation and I got from my IT colleagues when I started writing columns for newspapers/magazines. It was a flattering experience, but gradually it became a responsibility. I realized I could create 'intellectual infrastructure' for the next generation through writing.

Q-Tell us something about your graduation from writing columns to books.

A-It was after a publisher friend approached me to write a book on setting up a business that I lapped up the idea and wrote 'The High Performance Entrepreneur' around seven years ago. It was successful and translated into several languages. My next book 'Go Kiss the World' was based on my experiences of growing up in small-town Odisha; it is an inspirational book for young Indians, especially those from small towns and rural areas, to work on their strengths and achieve their goals. The 'Professional', focusing on what is meant to be a professional, followed. These three books are a trilogy of sorts.

Q-What inspired you to write your latest book, 'MBA at 16'?



Sanjib Das

A-The idea is to introduce 16-year-olds, who after 4 to 5 years would be charting their professional courses, the world of business. It is not a textbook, but something more palatable akin to a Harry Potter book which takes you to a world of fantasy and from where you will return more informed and inquisitive. The book is meant to give access to teenagers to information about the world of business that is not biased. This is imperative because people either have a 'I, me, myself' view of private jets, oak-panelled boardrooms and helipads atop 28-storey buildings on businesses, while others consider all businesses as bad, anti-sustainability and profit-making at the expense of others.

Q-How did you go about writing the book?

A-In 2010, I had completed half of the draft for the book when I realized I was doing a fundamental mistake: I had not interacted with anyone in their mid-teens for over a decade. Our younger daughter had left home 11 years ago. I needed to know what today's 16-year-olds want before I

write a book for them. That is when I requested two schools to allow me to work with teenagers. We conducted a programme 'Business with Bagchi' spread over four weekends for 31 school-children in Bengaluru in January 2011. Thereafter, I threw away my old manuscript and wrote the book afresh.

Q-Is the book aimed at drawing kids to the world of business?

A-No. It is about explaining to children that business is an important force. Whatever they become in life, be it policymakers, journalists, green activists, judges or corporate guys, they need to know about business. This is of huge national interest. Whether you are in business or not you are a consumer. Today a judge cannot deliver a verdict on 3G spectrum sale without understanding business. That is *raison d'être* of 'MBA at 16'.

Q-You were born and brought up in Odisha, how have your writings been received in your state?

A-My works have been translated into other Indian languages and

even to Korean and Chinese, but unfortunately sharing with Odisha has not happened much. Which is why, I am keen that boys and girls in Odisha should read my books, especially the latest one. I would be happy if someone renders my works into Odia.

Q-But you have a translator at your home (his wife Susmita is a noted Odia author)?

A-Laughs...yes, but she keeps busy with her work. A lot of literary stuff gets translated into Odia, not the type of books I write.

trivialised in many institutions in India and the kind of output is not world-ready.

Q-What is the IT industry doing about it?

A-IT industry captains like Azim Premji and Shiv Nada have led the way by contributing personal wealth to set up educational institutions. Some others like Nandan Nilekani have donated to their alma mater. The industry is doing its bit for capacity building of their workforce, but I should say more needs to be done, especially in the field of long-term research.

Q-What about MindTree's Bhubaneswar project? Why has it not materialized even after seven years?

A-The project got delayed because of land issues. But now it is on schedule and our academic block should be ready by August 2013. We will train our personnel at the academic block while three other software blocks will also come up in phases. The total investment would be around Rs 250 crore.

Q-What ails Bhubaneswar as an IT destination? Why has it failed on its promise?

A-It's a complex issue. Bhubaneswar certainly has it to make it big, but somewhere we have not been able to make it to the top. You cannot blame the government alone. IT is an industry of the youth. Unless you have the facilities to accommodate the youth and Bhubaneswar becomes more cosmopolitan it is difficult to get the talent pool. Moreover, air connectivity has to improve. We also need to invest in metro rail. But IT is not enough. For Odisha to grow, we have to have an eye on what is called 'creative economy', we have to concentrate on creating skilled manpower.



Q-Now, tell us about the IT industry. Is the sector facing tough times?

A-Overall it is a good time to be in the industry. It's a \$90 to \$100 billion industry in India and NASSCOM predicts three-fold growth in eight years. Even if there is two-fold growth during the next eight years, it will be something we have seen very few times in history.

Q-But we hear of layoffs, 'on-the-bench' and et al. What then are the challenges?

A-We simply don't have enough good people. We are not adequately focused on human resource development. Education is being