

ASTHA LEADERSHIP UNFURLED

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CASE ABSTRACT

Er. Bankim Mohanty's life has been a roller coaster ride. His journey of edupreneurship is an agglomeration of challenges. Starting his career as an engineering lecturer he was passionate about teaching mechanical papers. This was the very foundation which taught him to teach concepts with simple pedagogy. The formation of Orissa College of Engineering and Management was the stepping stone to the edupreneurship world but experiences were very soul searching. Business environment's dubious nature succoured him to explore his best traits, and his acumen helped him survive in testing times. But his dream to build an institute was fulfilled with the genesis of ASTHA School of Management. State of the art infrastructure, innovative methodology, pragmatic programmes, research-based seminars and symposiums, tailor-made training program gave him a sense of accomplishment and paved the path for future endeavours.

Introduction:

Er. Bankim Mohanty, Secretary to ASTHA School of Management, sitting in his office was outlining the future course of action. When he looks back, 25 years of struggle and accomplishments dances before his eyes. Born in a traditional family, he is the youngest son of Sri Bhagabat Prasad Mohanty and Smt. Swarnalata Mohanty. Value of education and ethics of a teacher is deeply ingrained in him as his father is simultaneously an academician, a preacher and a spiritual practitioner. His journey from a contractual lecturer earning Rs 80 per class

to founder of a management college has been invigorating. His wife, Smt. Bishnupriya Biswal has not only been his soulmate, but also his companion in this journey of edupreneurship. His initial expedition has made him stronger as a person, and has developed his never say die attitude. He has tried to revolutionise the management education by invoking new management ideas. But path was not easy as new ideas are not accepted easily. During this journey of struggle, fortunately, he found a friend, a younger brother, Er. Santosh Jena, who appreciated his ideas and stood with him during testing times.

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Inception:

In 1990, students in Odisha were interested in technical courses but there were very few engineering colleges both government and private. Students preferred professional engineering programmes from professional bodies like AMIE (Associate Member of the Institution of Engineers), IETE (Institution of Electronics and Telecommunication Engineers) and IME (Institute of Mechanical Engineers). Chennai was the epicentre for coaching for clearing papers of these professional courses. Few edupreneurs in Odisha took this model and tried to replicate it. Faith of students and quality deliverance were the challenges. In this testing time, two young edupreneurs, Er. Niranjan Nayak and Er. Bankim Mohanty formed a trust in the name of Orissa College of Engineering and Management (OCEM) in the year 1996. It provided professional coaching to the young aspiring engineers. Student's success in their programmes paved the way for OCEM. It became an epitome of success with more than 1500 students per semester getting a platform to access knowledge for their degrees. In 1999, Er. Santosh Jena joined the trust. But the educational environment of Odisha was changing rapidly. A lot of private engineering colleges were cropping up at that moment of

time. So students' inclination towards these professional courses was declining. There was a steep downfall in the interest of students for the professional engineering courses.

In 2000, Government of Odisha was focusing on starting Integrated MBA & Integrated MCA programmes with the approval of Government of India and AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education). The courses, after due clearance from the government bodies, could also run from rented buildings. OCEM got the letter of intent (LOI) for these courses. But starting an MBA college needed a seed capital of Rupees 25 lakhs which was a huge investment at that time. Subsequently AICTE objected the IMBA and IMCA programmes designed by Govt. of Odisha. This was the most testing time for Er. Bankim Mohanty. His partner, Mr. Niranjan Nayak after decline of professional courses had left the institution for pursuing higher studies. An institution which became a brand in educational arena was now facing the challenge of survival. Meanwhile, the Government of Odisha introduced Bachelor of Computer Application (BCA) course and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)

course. Er. Bankim Mohanty was quick to sense the market and brought permission for 30 BCA seats. But the mass of Odisha was unaware of this course. It was a difficult task to educate people about a new course as the traditional courses had a deep impact. His persistent efforts to promote these courses bore result and all the seats were filled. But giving quality education with course fees of Rs15, 000 per year was a herculean task. He needed an alternative source of income to run this programme initially. Distance education was creating a lot of buzz. Working professionals preferred these courses and Er. Bankim Mohanty was quick to respond. OCEM became the nodal centre for a lot of programmes. He was successful in creating a pool of funds through these courses which helped him to sustain the regular programme and provide quality education. After getting temporary affiliation for BCA, he was eyeing BBA course. He got an approval for 30 seats, and in subsequent times he increased the seat to 60 for both the courses. But the norms from Department of Higher Education stated that the colleges should have a permanent infrastructure as in 0.5 acre land in urban area or, 2 acres in rural area. In subsequent years, it was increased to 2 acres land in urban area and 5 acres in rural area. It was a difficult

proposition for the edupreneurs to arrange such a land bank with heavy investment and run a programme for a paltry amount.

ASTHA in the Making:

In 2005, Er. Bankim Mohanty was getting ready to build a 5 acre campus for BBA and BCA programme. Distance education was giving him a good return. So fund was not at all an issue. He was emotionally attached to OCEM and he was ready to invest. But his business acumen was questioning his decision. On the one hand there was the compulsion of infrastructure development, and on the other hand the mandatory low fee-structure. He realised that these undergraduate courses do not have a great future and he had to look beyond them. Meanwhile, due to public pestering, Government of Odisha gave permission to a number of colleges, who were in the process of developing their permanent infrastructure, to run BBA & BCA courses in rented buildings as well. This was viewed by some new players as an opportunity to make some quick money (as they would invest less but harvest good returns). So the market had become competitive and it was difficult to sustain with undergraduate courses.

Engineering colleges, Diploma schools were

the obvious extension but he had different plans. During his early days, while teaching Industrial Management, a lot of management facets excited him. Therefore the seed of management institute was already in his mind. But it took him two long years to finally nail the coffin. He initiated a group of old friends to come together to start a management college. A trust was formed in the name of Shree Panchamukhi Educational and Charitable Trust, comprising Sri Bijay Kumar Patra, Sri Bankim Mohanty, Sri Prasanna Kumar Sahoo, Sri Santosh Kumar Jena, Sri Ali Kanta Baral, Sri Krupananda Choudhury, Sri Subharanshu Patnaik, Smt. Bishnupriya Biswal, Smt. Debamita Chakraborty and Sri Samir Chakraborty.

There was a lot of brain storming regarding opening of college. Different members had different views as all of them belonged to middle class family and had struggled hard to become successful entrepreneurs in various fields. Myopic vision had its spell on everybody as profit looked so evident in technical courses. As technical education was on a high, everybody was inclined towards it. But like every successful entrepreneur, Er. Bankim Mohanty foresighted the saturation of the technical

course and he took a determined and insightful step of opening of Management college. The theory of Theodore Levitt on marketing myopia was truly visualised in his decision

The Turmoil Period:

A dream doesn't become reality through magic; It takes sweat, determination and hard work.

Dream was big but the ground reality was different. The 5 acres land acquired for the institution was in a semi rural area. The very first problem was electrification. The plot was 1.2 km away from the national highway and for an institution a commercial line was a must. To take 11 KVA line, he had to spend Rupees 16 lakhs, which was a huge investment. He understood from his past experiences that state of the art infrastructure was the need of the hour. So he didn't want to compromise on this aspect. Architect suggested that a horizontal construction will give the building a unique identity. In the initial phase, half of the seed capital was invested. Then the Trust thought of taking a loan of Rupees 1.5 crore from State Bank of India for infrastructural development of the

college. Er. Santosh Jena, the partner of OCEM Trust and an active member of Shree Panchamukhi Educational and Charitable Trust took the responsibility of infrastructural development.

As the course was on the high, he was upbeat. In the very first year, all the 60 seats were filled up and he got a wonderful response from the students. His decision of opening of an MBA institute was in the right direction and his dream was converting into a reality. But by the start of 2009, the credit crisis resulting from the bursting of U.S.A. housing bubble brought recession in the United States. The entire world was affected by sub-prime crisis. The job market was badly affected. The entire management education of India was badly hampered due to the job crunch, and Astha School of Management was no exception to it. Only 38 out of 60 seats were filled up that year. Challenges had become a part of Er. Bankim Mohanty's life, and it always brought the best out of it. More focus was given on quality of academics and placement. In that period of turmoil a placement of 65% was achieved.

In the very next year different career counselling programs were done in different

parts of Odisha to educate students about management as a career path. At the same time he gave a lot of importance in selecting faculties having a blend of industry rigour and academic wisdom. He started liasoning with various esteemed government and private organisations not only for placements but also for training. It gave his faculties an all round exposure and at the same time an alternate source of revenue. In 2012, his efforts paid off. After getting an affiliation for 120 seats, he successfully exhausted it. It was never an easy task but with persistent efforts and coordinated activities he was able to achieve it.

Under dynamic leadership of Er. Bankim Mohanty and intellectual guidance of Prof. (Dr.) Sharmila Subramanian, Principal of ASTHA School of Management, a new era started. Both of them with their innovative thinking, creative style of working and ability to take risk organised programmes which were new in the Odisha Management arena. All Odisha Lecturers Meet: An intellectual congregation, Prakalpa: A Research Bout, Shuttle Smashers: A Sporting Extravaganza, YUGMA: a Spiritual Discourse was all distinct programmes which got appreciation from academia as

well as corporate.

Future Vision:

Er. Bankim Mohanty always believed that innovation is the key in this dynamic environment. He in his life time has witnessed the rise and fall of great institutions and therefore he believed that one should never be hubristic. Even after winning accolades like Bharat Sikshya Ratna Samman, Rashtriya Pragati Award and 13th Odisha Ideal Award, his thirst to innovate remains insatiable; his vision for his institution is very perspicuous. He is focusing on three distinct areas to make his institution, an institution of distinction.

Entrepreneurship is something which is very close to his heart. He wants to develop an Entrepreneurship Development Centre which will provide platform to young eco-entrepreneurs. ASTHA premises will act as a catalyst which will help in generating new ideas. He has collaborated with Wadhwani foundation, which is actively working in the field of Entrepreneurship.

Being a practitioner of technical education, he understands the importance of skill. He wants to develop competency incubators for youth to fill up the skill gap and make them industry ready. He has built a state of the art Language Lab to equip students with the art of speaking English.

As a hard core teacher he wants to create a Centre of Excellence for capacity building of trainers and educators. Chetas, a Behavioural Lab is a potent addition to understand and develop pedagogies.

ASTHA's vision is to venture into other academic formats so that it can contribute in the holistic development of students and nurture them from an early age. ASTHA Public School is an extension in that direction.

ASTHA is not an institute but it's a dream; Dream of a person, who with his grit and determination has challenged the odds and has created an institution with a difference!