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KGPian EXTRAORDINAIRE

Reflections of a former Director

The Mother of all IITs, that is how the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur (IIT-KGP)- the oldest, the largest and the most diverse of all IITs- is known. The ageing mother got rejuvenated by a unique and philanthropic gesture of one of its Agricultural Engineering alumnus, Vinod Gupta who offered a donation of 2million dollars for setting up a Management School in IIT, Kharagpur. As an unconventional Director of the Institute, I took up the offer as a challenging opportunity and established, against all conventions and unwritten rules of the Government of India, what is now famously called Vinod Gupta School of Management (VGSOM). This unique venture ultimately became a template for all IITs to follow suit in establishing Management as well as other privately funded professional Institutes. Thus, once again, the Mother of the IITs assumed a new and pioneering role model.



Shri Vinod Gupta

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One of Our Faculty

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When he proceeded to USA for higher education, the experience of education in rural India, followed by an experiential and holistic training in the very first IIT at Kharagpur, were undoubtedly etched deep in the memory of Vinod Gupta. Nurtured in USA as a visionary entrepreneur, Vinod resurrected a small bankrupt IT company based in a garage. With his extraordinary management skills, he has propelled the nascent company to a very successful 600 million dollar company, called InfoUSA. At the back of his mind, the learning experience in India and the knowledge debt continued to stir his conscience. And, thus, he wrote to me (being the Director of IIT at that time) that whatever he is today is due to IIT Kharagpur and that he is keen to repay the debt by doing something for the IIT-KGP. He asked if IIT-KGP would consider his proposal of a donation to set up a business/management school. While we were making good progress in normalizing the academic environment of the Institute, Vinod's offer appeared as a lightning rod to bring a new dimension to the image of an old Institute. I informed Vinod immediately that his proposal was acceptable "in principle".

I was, of course, vaguely aware of an unwritten rule of the Government of India that the IITs were not supposed to get involved in a formal management education programme. Further, there was no question of a public-private partnership in any venture in such Institutes of National Importance. I reasoned that with changing scenario ushered in by globalised knowledge era and flat management, the aspirations of Engineering graduates to manage and lead industrial and professional organisations would be better served by a management school which lays emphasis on technology management. Therefore, I went ahead full speed to justify the creation of a Management School with a difference to our Senate and the Board of Governors. More importantly, I justified the need for a public-private partnership in setting up such a School which will be financially self-sustaining and thus will be no burden on the MHRD or the Institute. I was quite apprehensive that MHRD will never approve such a proposal under the existing unwritten rules. Therefore, I took the benefit of the fuzzy "autonomy" vested with the Board of Governors of the IIT for approval.

Vinod Gupta monitored the progress passionately and was very excited with the formal approval of our Board. He suggested a formal agreement to be signed between IIT and the Alumni Foundation (which he set up in USA as a Trust for funding the proposal and which had the IIT Director as one of its members). My predecessor and Emeritus Professor G. S. Sanyal (who knew Vinod well) and I were invited to formalise the agreement. Vinod agreed to place 2 million dollars in the Trust which will pay \$200,000 annually as interest to IIT for 10 years and