

[Print this](#)[Email this](#)[Facebook](#)[Twitter](#)

0

Keya Acharya: Payback by the 'creamy layer'

Pampered by subsidised education, IITians make a small start in helping the underprivileged. Is it enough?

Keya Acharya / May 21, 2011, 0:45 IST

This is not the commonly-known "creamy layer" hierarchy within India's dalits, but the group long known as the face of India's "brain-drain": the IITians.

The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), 15 in all, continue to receive disproportionately high government grants compared to other engineering colleges. The undergraduates are subsidised nearly 80 per cent by the government while master of technology students receive full scholarships.

Pampered and elite, IITians, in India at least, are successful entrepreneurs and industry-leaders. A majority of them, however, have a history of hotfooting it to the US after being educated at tax-payers' expense. Any paybacks have traditionally been in the form of financial donations from IIT alumni to their alma mater institutions, much in the tradition of American Ivy League institutions.

This tradition, however, appears to be now on the threshold of some change. At a gathering of IIT Kharagpur's Bangalore-based alumni, Harish Hande of Selco-India, motivated Kollur Dhananjay, the secretary of the Bangalore association, to coordinate funds for a rural electrification project named Light for Education. The project, implemented through Selco, provides impoverished tribal children in Karnataka with solar lamps for studying at home. These can be charged daily through a centralised system set up in the children's secondary school, thus saving them the cost of buying kerosene for lamps. The project aims to spread to other states too.

Hande, whose work on rural electrification has won his organisation several awards, including the Green Oscars or Ashden award, says he told his audience that it was high time they started paying their debt of a subsidised education.

"It is not only of giving back to society," Hande told his alumni audience, "but about contributing as a partner, not just a giver."

Dhananjay took Hande's idea on rural education through electrification to another senior IITian, Arjun Menda, whose corporate real-estate industry, RMZ,

[Click here to visit SME Buzz](#) new

Free IIT-JEE 2012 Help

Prepared by India's Top IITians
Tests & 1000s New Pattern
Questions

www.topchalks.com

Engineering from UK-2011

Apply Now in Well Known
Engineering Colleges in United
Kingdom Today!

www.StudyPlaces.com/Study-In-UK

AdChoices 

Also Read

[Related Stories](#)

[News Now](#)



Most Popular

[Read](#) | [E-Mailed](#) | [Commented](#)

- CAG to go public with audit reports on flagship schemes
- Facebook set to surprise on July 6
- Top IT firms raise temp hiring for skilled jobs
- Jyoti Malhotra: A historic moment in the AfPak region

has been funding education through the Menda Foundation for the past 15 years. Menda, who disburses 220 higher-education scholarships every year, says he will match all grants the alumni association garners for the Light for Education programme.

Another IIT Kharagpur alumnus and former director of Motorola S Venkatesam ("Sam") has tackled rural electrification, which is lacking in 56 per cent of rural households, according to a 2010 World Bank report. The company he floated, Energy Plantation Projects India (EPPI), now has a ready 500-acre "energy forest" in the Madurai district and is looking for funds to set up the first of five 2Mw biomass power plants to be sourced from plantations of the indigenous *neem* family's *Melia Dubia* and seven other local species. EPPI changed its work-timings to accommodate local village women into their workforce and has won acceptance from the villagers.

"I felt the need to do something socially relevant and economically useful," says Venkatesam, "but our 'CSR' (corporate social responsibility) is our business survival requisite."

In Mumbai, IIT Kharagpur alumnus Puneet Kumar now coordinates a pan-IIT company – Ekalavya Creations – set up by well-known Kharagpur alumni. One of them is the now-retired B K Syngal of VSNL, known as the father of the Internet in India. Another is Arjun Malhotra, co-founder of the leading technology group HCL. The company aims to use IT for educational development for the underprivileged and has several e-learning initiatives set up through its laboratory in IIT Bombay.

Ekalavya has begun by traversing 2,000 km around the country, looking at IITians working in the field. There are, among several case studies, Ravi Chopra of IIT Bombay, founder of the People's Science Institute in Dehradun, working in watershed development and rural empowerment in Uttarakhand, Brij Kothari, an IIT Kanpur alumnus, who devised "same language subtitling" in TV for mass literacy in India and Kharagpur gold-medallist, now spiritual leader, Soumyendranath Bannerjee who has set up several schools in Deogarh, Madhya Pradesh.

Ekalavya now plans to take these case studies to the next pan-IIT meet to motivate alumni.

However, these instances are few and far between and do not reflect an awareness in the IIT faculty and curricula for the need of applying technology in the mass sector. And IIT alumni have also criticised this.

In Bangalore, Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Rajeev Chawla of IIT Kanpur, who designed the e-governance model for land records in India, now being replicated elsewhere, says even IITians in the IAS, let alone in civil society, are not achieving enough, given their intelligence and training.

"IITians within the IAS are our cream. We don't need to blame the government system or the lack of motivated faculty in our *alma maters* to achieve. It's purely the indifference, the seeking of conventional success, of power, prestige and money," says Chawla.

"And in all my years in the IAS, I have not had any IIT alumni coming to me for help in collaborating on any work in the public sector," adds Chawla.

Nevertheless, IIT Kharagpur Associate Professor Joy Sen, does blame bureaucracy within the governance system as having stifled leaders in the public sector, but agrees that mindsets in IIT faculty need to change, especially to incorporate modern relevance to environment and development.

Chawla blames Indian society, rather than faculty inadequacies. "The rush for power, prestige and money is a social malaise that has included IIT graduates," he says.

- IIT-Delhi among top 30 on world rankings for technical subjects
- Tax benefits to AID research in iits
- Consortia of 7 IITs, ParisTech sign MoU
- Students expected to be spoilt for choice
- IIT reforms committee to submit report by year-end
- Full-time medical courses fail to enthruse most IITs

Find us on Facebook

facebook



Business Standard

Like

1,511 people like **Business Standard**.



Ashraf



Rahul



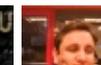
Ajay



Syed



Htoo Aung



Facebook social plugin

The younger generation of alumni, however, are circumspect about the criticism.

"We are technical guys, so this 'social front' has come late to us," says Bombay-based Kharagpur alumnus (class of 2002) Puneet Kumar.

"This is a start," says Dhananjay, speaking of the Light for Education programme.

"I encourage every IITian to think hard on how many engineers, scientists and people we need to get rid of poverty in India," says senior IITian Ravi Chopra.

"And then, take a leap," he adds.

The author is Vice Chair, Forum of Environmental Journalists of India

50Lac Life Cover@Rs.561/M

Make: A Promise to Protect Your Family
From Any Mishap
www.PolicyBazaar.com/TermInsurance

All-New Ford Fiesta Sedan

Advanced Blue-tooth voice control
Voice controlled Auto AC
India.Ford.com/All-NewFiesta AdChoices ▶

➤ Other Stories

- Weekly Review: Markets advance 3%, FMCG rallies
- Zynga plans \$1bn IPO, Facebook crucial for gaming co's biz
- MF industry assets surge 6% to Rs 7.43 lakh cr
- REC looks to equity market for higher returns
- GM crops save billion kg of CO2 gas emissions

Tags : Indian Institutes of Technology | Harish Hande | Kollur Dhananjay | S Venkatesam |

➤ [Read Business news in हिंदी](#)

- A seamless blend of Genius Performance and Gorgeous Style. Click here
- Smarter Banking for a Smarter Planet. Click here
- The World's First Professional-grade tablet is here. Know more
- Ever heard of a home loan that pays you back? Know more.
- Memories of Two continents in a country – Turkey.
- Enhance business productivity with cutting-edge technologies....
- Choose your markets: Commodities, equities & Currencies...
- CFA Institute, Enroll Before 24th August.
- Give your Health the Max Bupa Protection.
- Steel lending Strength to the nations's defence. Click here

Advertisements

Business Standard on Twitter @

bsindia



innovamumbai RT @smoptions: IIT Indian Institutes of Technology Graduates Salary Per Year <http://t.co/DQj3Hz0>

21 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite



products2buy RT @smoptions: IIT Indian Institutes of Technology Graduates Salary Per Year <http://t.co/DQj3Hz0>

21 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite



Join the conversation

Tweet here on this story



Follow **Business Standard** on Twitter

- Giftwithlove.com: Anniversary/ B'day/ Midnight Flowers & cakes delivery in India
- When we heal the earth, we heal ourselves.
- **Ads by Google**  India IIT Breaking News India Share Market India

➤ **Share this Story** »

-  [Print this](#)
-  [Email this](#)
-  [Add to favorites](#)
-  [Twitter](#)
-  [Google Buzz](#)
-  [del.icio.us](#)
-  [digg](#)
-  [newsVine](#)
-  [Reddit](#)
-  [Facebook](#)
-  [orkut](#)
-

Discussion Board/User Comments (0)

Display Name **Email-Id**

Post your comment



Latest Messages

➤ **Hot Searches**

[Baba Ramdev](#) | [Speak Asia](#) | [Dayanidhi Maran](#) | [Rohan Murthy](#) | [Cairn India](#) | [Sun TV](#) | [Ten Cricket](#) | [iCloud](#) | [Dainik Jagran](#) | [Silver](#) | [iPad 2](#) | [Vedanta](#) | [Provident Fund](#) | [income tax refund](#) | [Anna Hazare](#) | [Libya](#) | [iPhone](#) | [Air India](#) | [Reliance Industries](#) | [3G](#) | [SEBI](#) | [BSNL](#) | [Copper](#) | [BSE](#) | [NSE](#) | [Amitabh Bachchan](#) | [Mukesh Ambani](#) | [Anil Ambani](#) | [Bollywood](#) | [TCS](#) | [Infosys](#) | [Pranab Mukherjee](#) | [Sonia Gandhi](#) | [Rahul Gandhi](#) | [New Pension Scheme](#) | [Service tax](#) | [Reliance](#) | [RBI](#) | [GDP](#) | [Gold](#) | [Ratan Tata](#) | [ICICI](#) | [B-School](#) | [Sensex](#) | [Tax calculator](#) | [Home Loan](#) | [Personal Finance](#) | [inflation](#) | [oil prices](#) | [Barack Obama](#) |

 **Member Area**

 Write to the Editor

 RSS

 Archives

 Advanced Search

 **Subscribe to**

 BS print product

 BS e-paper

 Newsletter

 Portfolio Tracker **new**

 **BS Products**

 BS Hindi

 BS Motoring

 BS Books

FOR HOT PRODUCTS

[BS Bazaar.com](#)

[Home](#) | [Markets & Investing](#) | [Companies & Industry](#) | [Banking & Finance](#) | [Economy & Policy](#) | [Opinion](#)
[Life & Leisure](#) | [Management & Marketing](#) | [Tech World](#)

[About Us](#) | [Partner With Us](#) | [Code of Conduct](#) | [Careers](#) | [Advertise with us](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Contact Us](#)