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Interview with Professor Chitta Baral of Arizona State University

Q: Why does it matter where an IIT is located?

A: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) serves as an engine of growth and it has huge impact within 100 km. take the case of Stanford and Berkeley's impact on the Silicon Valley of California; Harvard and MIT's impact on the Boston corridor and our own IISc's impact on Bangalore are testament to this. (Stanford University and MIT have spawned many top-notch companies such as Google, Yahoo, and Bose electronics, all in the vicinity of the university.)

Q: Many IIT do not have much impact.

A: True, many of our existing IITs do not seem to have that much local impact. But that is changing. The example that is often bandied about as an IIT with no local impact, IIT Kharagpur, is now leading in this. It is helping in the development of a Biotech park near it and has also decided to create a super speciality hospital and start a medical college in Kharagpur. All our IITs will soon have similar and much more local impact and a few decades down the road. Moreover, many companies would like to be in a location with an IIT because that provides opportunities for their employees to pursue a higher degree, and because they can collaborate with the IIT faculty and students on cutting edge research. Thus having an IIT makes an otherwise good location a bigger attractor to companies for establishment of branch or for relocation.

Q: How IIT will help in providing qualitative growth ?

A: At present IITs are India's best graduate schools in engineering. They are the best place, and often are the only place within hundreds of miles, with a comprehensive array of M.Tech and Ph.D programs. In the last decade Orissa has developed 40+ engineering colleges mostly private ones. However, only handful of faculty in these colleges have Ph.Ds or M.Techs. In contrast, the faculty in most engineering programs in US have Ph.Ds. Several efforts are being made by AICTE, UGC and other organization to improve the quality of faculty in engineering colleges across India. Such efforts include QIP (Quality improvement programs) in various IITs and selected NITs. However, such efforts are not enough as often faculty at a private engineering college, say in the Bhubaneswar area (with 26 and growing engineering colleges), would have to take leave and then pursue a higher degree as the nearest IIT and NIT are more than 300kms away from Bhubaneswar. However if there was an IIT within an hour and half of Bhubaneswar then many of the faculty in the 26 (and growing) odd engineering colleges in and around Bhubaneswar would be able to pursue higher a degree in that IIT without taking complete leave of their job and without relocating. Here we want to state that we do not subscribe that an IIT in Orissa should have any preference or quota for students from Orissa. Its just a fact of life that, especially at the graduate level, for QIP, and for industry sponsored candidates, more local people join take advantage of the opportunity as it is easy for them to do that.

Q: Why then should Orissa get preference.

A: IITs are funded by the ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) of India. A rough calculation detailed at <http://equitableindia.org> showed that MHRD was scheduled to spend Rs 4.07 on fully funded HRD institutions (like IITs, IIMs, etc.) per person in Orissa, while it will spend Rs 183.08 in Delhi, Rs 41.20 in West Bengal, Rs 33.4 in Karnataka, Rs 27 in Tamil Nadu, Rs 28.38 in Maharastra, Rs 17.73 in UP, Rs 16.05 in Andhra, Rs 33.27 in Punjab, Rs 8.13 in Haryana, Rs 7.90 in Kerala, Rs 9.02 in MP, Rs 4.87 in Gujarat, Rs 2.59 in Rajasthan, and Rs 1.87 in Bihar. In other words Bihar, Rajasthan and Orissa were at the bottom of per-capita spending by MHRD in its fully funded higher education institutions. Now that IITs have been allotted to Bihar and Rajasthan, it is imperative that the next IIT should have been allotted to Orissa. Since Orissa was skipped over, to correct this injustice an IIT should be immediately allotted to Orissa.

Q: But the central government is already establishing a NISER in Bhubaneswar so an IIT ?

A: NISER (National Institute of Science Education and Research) will have mainly science disciplines. An IIT's focuses are technological and engineering disciplines. So having a NISER does not overcome the need for an IIT. NISER is funded by Dept. of Atomic Energy and not by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Not only most other states have multiple fully MHRD funded institutions (such as IIT, IISER, IIM and Central University in West Bengal; IIT, IISER and Central Universities in Maharashtra, etc.) but two of the three states that have been picked for the greenfield IITs have been simultaneously granted other institutes that are funded by MHRD or other ministries. For example, Andhra Pradesh has been granted two MHRD funded IESTs (Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology), which are referred to as IIT clones, a Ministry of Chemical and Fertilizers funded NIPER (National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research) like institute and an Indian Institute of Public Health. Similarly, Bihar has also been granted a NIPER like institute.

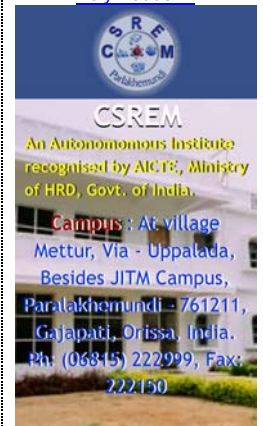
Q: Some people question that there are so many issues in Orissa, and why should the people pick establishing an IIT as a high priority item at this point of time.

A: More demand we make there will be fair chance to receive the same. So there should be continuous demand in this regard. In case of Orissa MHRD has done

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injustice by whisking away the proposed Orissa IIT to AP. Till the injustice is corrected, we must continue to press for it.

Q: Some people say that one of the main goals of making an IIT is to create world class institutions in India and the locations should be based on that.

A: We agree and will argue that a location within an hour or hour and half of Bhubaneswar will a perfect location for an IIT as the city is well connected with the cities and towns all over India. Bhubaneswar has 5 daily flights to Delhi, 3 to Calcutta, 3 to Hyderabad, 2 to Mumbai, 2 to Chennai, 2.3 to Bangalore, 1 to Visakhapatana and partial connections to Ranchi and Raipur. Bhubaneswar has multiple daily direct trains to Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, a daily train to Mumbai, and trains to all corners of India (Guwahati, Kerala, Goa, Gujarat, Jaipur, Punjab, Rishikesh, Kanpur, Lucknow, Benras, Patna, Raipur, Bhopal, etc.) The Bhubaneswar area has sustained high quality research and educational institutions such as Institute of Physics, Institute of Life Sciences and Xavier Institute of Management, and has many universities such as Utkal University, Orissa university of Agriculture and Technology, Utkal University of Culture, Ravenshaw University. Moreover, recently several high profile higher education institutions have found the area to be suitable. This includes the proposed NISER (National Institute of Science Education and Research), the proposed Vedanta University (near Puri) and the proposed university by the Art of Living trust of Shri Shri Ravishankar. Thus there is no reason why an area within 1 to 1.5 hours of Bhubaneswar will not suitable for an IIT.


Q: Is Orissa industrialized enough? Are there industries in Orissa that will be benefited by an IIT?


A: In recent years there has been tremendous inflow of investment for industrial growth in Orissa and an IIT is necessary to nurture, support and amplify that growth. Besides presence of public sector like SAIL, NALCO, NTPC and MCL new industries are coming up in Orissa during last three years: (i) Metal Sector: 45 projects over 70 mtpa of steel (22 of them partly commissioned) with more than US\$45 billion investment; 4 new aluminum complexes and 1 mtpa aluminium smelter capacity under implementation with US\$10 billion investment and rare earth projects worth US\$0.5 billion. The investors in this sector include POSCO, Arcelor-Mittal, Tata Steel, Bhusan, Jindal, Essar, Hindalco, Vedanta, L&T Dubal etc. (ii) Chemical and Petrochemical: 15 mtpa US\$6 billion mega petrochemical by IOC; Deepak Fertilizers implementing 2 chemical projects at Paradeep, etc. (iii) Energy and power: 13 thermal power projects under implementation with capacity of 13,500 MW with investment of US\$14 billion and Reliance Industry hydrocarbon based power generation and gas grid (US\$1.5Bn). The investors include Tata Power, Reliance energy, Sterlite energy, Mahanadi Aban, Monnet Ispat, Essar power, Lanco group, NavBharat Power, CESC and GMR energy. (iv) Ports: 2 new ports are under construction at Dhamara and Gopalpur and three others at Jatadhari, Kirtania and Astaranga are in the pipeline with MOUs on them signed. (v) IT: Infosys, Satyam, TCS, Wipro, Genepact, Mindtree, Hexaware, etc.


Q: Since you have mentioned Bhubaneswar so many times, are you saying that the Greenfield IIT in Orissa should be located in Bhubaneswar. Is Orissa just Bhubaneswar?

A: My personal preference for a Greenfield IIT is a place in the Ganjam district of South Orissa (which is one of the most backward area of India) at a place within 1-1.5 hours of Bhubaneswar on NH-5 and 30-40 minutes of Berhampur on NH-5, the major town in South Orissa. This location will be the best of both worlds, close enough to Bhubaneswar to avail of all the opportunities there and help the 29+ engineering colleges in the Bhubaneswar-Berhampur corridor and yet in south Orissa and close to South Orissa's major city so as to impact the backward South Orissa region in many other ways. An IIT at such a location will help build a Bhubaneswar-Berhampur hi-tech corridor. Moreover, the other major metropolitan area of Orissa, Rourkela has an NIT. Among the other larger towns and locality, Sambalpur has the Burla Engineering College, which the state and the people are pursuing to make into an IIST (Indian Institute of Engineering Sc. And Technology) and the North Orissa towns (Balasore and Baripada) are within an hour and half of IIT Kharagpur. The KBK districts and Gajapati are still left out. Gajapati is adjacent to Ganjam. In the future this proposed IIT in Ganjam may establish small branches and extension centers in KBK towns such as Rayagada, Koraput, Bhawanipatna and Titagarh. Moreover, for these districts the Orissa government is pursuing and will continue pursuing a multi-campus KBK Central University.

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