

As evolving technology and other market forces challenge our educational system, a clutch of institutes in the south are trying their best to stay ahead in the game



EDUCATION WITH A PURPOSE

For many in this country, it has become a rite of passage to travel to a southern educational institute for quality education. This is no surprise because southern India is home to some of the country's leading legacy educational institutes, whether the Indian Institute of Science which was set up in 1909 or the Madras Medical College in 1835. There is a strong historical reason for this, feels Air Commodore Sajjad Rahim, who is the Director of the Bengaluru-based Hindustan Academy. He says the southern region, because of its close proximity to the sea, developed as a hub for industries as the British used the coastal route to develop trade. "As more industries grew and cities grew, the focus shifted to education. The missionaries also established convents and schools in the south first, letting this region gain the importance of education earlier than the rest of the country," he adds.

This edge continues in the contemporary era with a greater presence of IT and IT-enabled service, phar-

maceutical and other modern industries in the south, which require a skilled workforce to keep its engines running. This has naturally led to a greater number of technical institutes coming up in this region. It also helps that the educational indices of southern states is better at around 80 per cent, higher than the national average of 74 per cent. This means there is a high-level of awareness on the importance of quality education and increased societal recognition for higher learning, something that is conducive to a wholesome learning environment. The relatively better record of safety for women and girls than in the north also means that parents feel more confident to let their girls study in southern educational institutes.

The state governments in the south have also been more encouraging when it comes to development of education with a greater amount of expenditure on the field than its counterparts in the north. Dr Vaidy Jayaraman, the Principal and Associate Dean of the Great Lakes Institute of Management, also adds that institutes

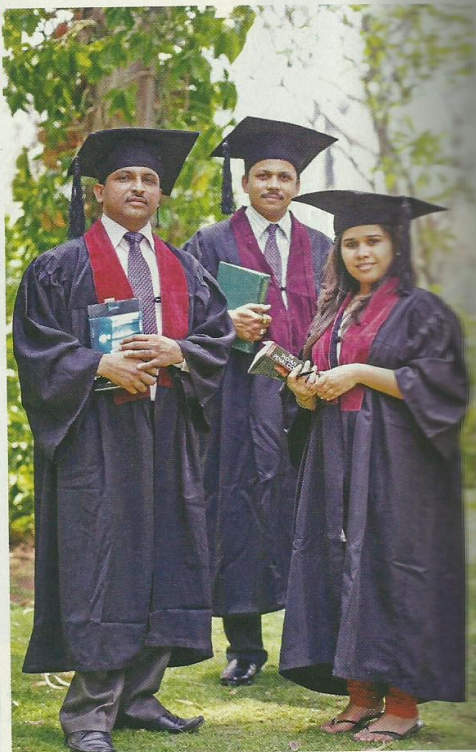
in the south also focus on key skills such as quantitative analysis, logical reasoning and communication abilities, which holds their students in better stead.

However, the professional education is especially challenging because it needs to be up to speed, perhaps even ahead of, market trends. There has been significant turmoil in this sector as it has been hit by a significant slowdown when it comes to the demand for professionals such as engineers. The B'Tech degree today has been greatly devalued and, according to media reports, more than half of the engineering seats were left vacant in the last academic year. This has sent alarm bells ringing through institutes that do not want to lose their standing. It also does not help that the quality of engineering education in the country is not up to mark at many institutes which results in graduates that are deemed unemployable by the industry. The challenge, therefore, for any education institute worth its salt is to ensure that its curriculum is in sync with the evolving market realities.

How does one keep up in this game? Gone are the days when parents could ask their children what they would want to become when they grow up knowing confidently that the jobs we know would still be around then. Today there is a growing likelihood that the jobs that exist in the market could no longer be around in another fifty to hundred years. Who can guarantee that one day robots will not take away the jobs of a pilot and fly a passenger jet liner? Or, who can assure that classrooms across the world will not be led by robots who will replace teachers?

Dr G P C Nayar, the Chairman of the SCMS Group of Educational Institutions in Cochin, says his institute seeks to keep its curriculum and their students ahead of the curve by establishing and developing centres of excellence in areas such as Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics and Entrepreneurship. It also involves ensuring that students are taught essential life skills to ensure they adept to learn in any situation, adds Dr Thomas P John, the Chairman of the T John Group of Institutions.

Walking step in step with evolving market reali-



ties is not only a necessity for technical institutes but also those that teach management and others. Based in Chennai, Great Lakes attempts to keep itself always updated by seeking advice from their Business Advisory Council which comprises of leaders of reputable Indian corporates. "With our transparent hierarchy which features minimal layers, we can introduce changes in the curriculum as and when desired," says Dr Jayaraman of the Great Lakes Institute of Management. The ICAI also holds industry conclaves regularly to review the curriculum. Its Board of Studies and statutory bodies also feature industry experts, which ensures regular exchange of valuable information from the outside world.

This means that institutes are introducing new courses in upcoming areas like additive manufacturing, artificial intelligence and machine learning, solid waste management and law, law on infrastructure development, cyber security, data science and digital supply chain and marketing. The Hindustan Academy, which is dedicated to learning in aviation, has planned to introduce B.Sc Honours in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering and B. Sc. in Aeronautical Sciences. Similarly, Dr John, the Chairman of the T John Group of Institutions says his group plans to tap more into the growing demand for courses in information technology, healthcare, financial management and hospitality.



Research is of great importance to the University. Every faculty member has an agenda for teaching and research

Dr. J. Mahender Reddy
Vice Chancellor, The ICAI Foundation
for Higher Education (IFHE) Hyderabad.

Air Commodore Sajjad Rahim Director – Hindustan Aviation Academy, Bangaluru feels that a change of curriculum may not be enough to meet the evolving demands of the market and technology. Rapid growth in technology, he adds, also requires a change in teaching methodology through greater use of multimedia that can replace inconsistent quality of teachers. “Use of digital platforms like multimedia also help students grasp academic concepts better. Machine learning and artificial intelligence also helps individuals with an improved learning experience,” he says.

However, the world’s best universities are known not just for imparting knowledge but also generating it. The MITs and Harvards are equally known for their outstanding research and the many laurels this brings them from across the world. This has made research



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Dr. Vaidy Jayaraman

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and innovation a key focus area for many institutes in southern India too. The SCMS Group has identified research as one of its utmost priorities, with dedicated research centres and centres of excellence in technology, engineering and management institutes. Its faculty members publish around 100 papers each year with an average impact factor of three. It is also worth noting that it has secured four patents and applied for another

15. Some of the technologies that have been successfully developed include the development of biofuel from coconut oil, muscle-to-machine interface for paralysed persons and a reconfigurable robot/vehicle load management system.

The Great Lakes also prioritises research by having in place an incentive system that encourages faculty member to publish in top-notch journals. It also has formed an in-house publishing house to further advocate research and publication. The T John College in Bengaluru has also instituted monetary support for faculty members as well as students to encourage the pursuit of research at their institution. Similarly, the ICFAI has dedicated agendas for each of its faculty member on teaching as well as research. They are also encouraged to further their engagement with research through faculty seminar, participation in national and international conferences, and publication of papers. In the last five years, its faculty members and students have together published more than a thousand research papers, with more than a third of them featured in Scopus (Elsevier) journals.

The ICFAI also prides itself on being among the top three contributors to the Case Centre in the UK



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Director – Hindustan Aviation Academy, Bangaluru

(along with Harvard and INSEAD), which is the largest repository of business management-related cases in the world. This means knowledge produced and shared by ICFAI is used as teaching material in more than 870 business schools around the world. Its alumni have gone on to occupy top positions in leading financial institutions such as Bank of America, Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank, HSBC and ANZ Bank. Campus recruitment at these institutes have drawn leaders from every sector, whether it is Singapore Airlines in aviation, consultancy majors like KPMG, Deloitte or banking firms like HDFC, ICICI and IndusInd. Great Lakes, in fact, boasts of a 100 per cent placement rate right since the start, with majors representing ITES, manufacturing, telecom, retail, FMCG and oil and energy.

One of the biggest challenges to running successful educational institutes is the ability to hire and retain quality faculty members. Most students will agree that it is their teachers, and not other factors like infrastructure or access to reading material, who make all the difference between an average and excellent education. Some of the important traits these institutes have highlighted as essential attributes in their faculty members are strong credentials with proven industry and academic record, **presentation and communication skills, clarity of thought, soft skills and adaptability.** "There is no compromise when it comes to faculty recruiting. Any recruitment will include a research presentation, in addition to teaching a module to our current students," says Dr Jayaraman of Great Lakes. Adds Dr Nayar of the SCMS Group, "We recruit ensuring a mix of both professionally and academically qualified faculty members who can develop our students in tune with our vision in providing value base education and mould our students to become globally competent and socially responsible leaders"

The adage "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" holds true even in the case of higher education and institutes have realised the importance co-curricular activities have in the wholesome development of students. This is why they are keen to provide ample opportunities for fun on campus. The Great Lakes has in



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Dr Thomas P John

Chairman – T John Group of Institutions

place several committees and clubs in the campus that are mentored by its faculty members. Students are encouraged to apply to get on these committees and are then selected with designated responsibilities. They are the ones who manage the organisation of key events, which also gives them a wide exposure on teamwork, leadership and crisis management. The ICFAI too has around 45 students clubs that complement learning in their classes. It requires every student to become a member of at least one club. Popular activities include sports, yoga, cultural and management tests and model United Nations events. Besides on campus cultural ac-



tivities, the SCMS Group also encourages study tours, **outbound trainings and industry visits.**

But is not just about having fun. These institutes also lay importance on making a social difference. The Great Lakes, for example, has a leadership experiential programme called "Karma-Yoga" that seeks to support locals in 24 adopted villages near the campus. Similarly, the T John College also lays importance on social initiatives like blood donation camps and on participation in national-level sport meets. Its students have been champions at the university-level Soccer League competition for three consecutive years and secured four gold medals at the university-level swimming competition. Together with the many beautiful tourism destinations in the south, ranging from Pondicherry's beautiful beaches to the lofty and verdant peaks of the Western Ghats, studying at one of these quality institutes can not only be fun but also a life-transforming experience. ■



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Dr. G.P.C Nayar

Chairman, SCMS Group of Educational Institutions.