THE YOUNG BRIGADE OF IIMB
Dear Alumni,

The IIMB Alumni Magazine is back with lots of stories of our alumni from around the world. In this edition, we focus on our young brigade. They are doing some very exciting, top notch and unconventional stuff. It was great fun to shape this edition with them and I’m sure we have a great many things to learn from them.

A lot is happening at the Institute. The new Director, Prof Sushil Vachani, has brought a new way of thinking in the Institute and is committed to making the alumni relations stronger. A great news for all of us is that Prof Vasanthi Srinivasan FPM 96 has joined as the Chairperson of Alumni Affairs. Her vision and energy will add great value to the Alumni Association. Prof G Shainesh FPM 96 has taken charge as the Dean Administration of IIMB and Prof Sourav Mukherjee FPM 03 has become the Chairperson of the Post Graduate Programme (PGP). This alumni trio are faculty members who have taught many of us. I am very excited to work with them along with you to take the Alumni Association to the next level.

We have a gala reunion weekend coming up on 26th to 28th December. I look forward to meeting all the batches from PGP 84, 94, 99, 2004 and EPGP who are celebrating their 30th, 20th, 15th and 10th year reunions.

The new classroom complex was inaugurated recently and I thank all the donors from our alumni community who stepped forward to help us with this project. I invite you all to come by and see how the project has come through. The building will be fully operational by the next academic session.

I would like to thank Sandeep Runwal PGP 93 and Mohan Gundu PGP 93 for their contributions to the Institute. Sandeep Runwal has gifted a scholarship every year for a PGP student with financial constraints. Mohan Gundu has offered donations towards IIMB's library resources.

The Alumni Council met on Foundation Day for our Annual General Body Meeting. We are focused to get the alumni directory to a 100% level, do more events in the chapters to engage and energize the community and enhance IIMB's leadership in management education.

Wish you all a wonderful 2015.

Rakesh Godhwani PGSEM 04
Head, IIMB Alumni Association

Message from the ALUMNI OFFICE
Dear Alumni,

Diverse. Challenging. Exciting – That's how I would describe my experience at IIMB in the last 12 years as a faculty. These years have been a period of great personal and professional satisfaction. As an alumna of the Institute, it is a privilege to now take on the role of Chairperson Alumni Affairs. I hope to connect with several of you with whom I have engaged as a batch mate, a senior, junior or a faculty.

Rakesh Godhwani and his team have made the Alumni Office a vibrant function of the Institute. I now have the task of thinking creatively and working innovatively to take the Alumni Office to a new realm.

We will be looking at making the alumni connect stronger with more programs that will bring you back to your alma mater. We will make all efforts to reach out to those alumni whom we are missing in our network as well.

I urge you all to get in touch with me and Rakesh with your ideas on how we can strengthen our Alumni Association.

Wishing you all a happy and a prosperous 2015.
I am honoured to lead this great Institute and am excited at the opportunity to transform IIMB from a leader in management education in India to a global leader. I hope you will join me and the Institute’s faculty and staff in this journey of transformation.

- Dr. Sushil Vachani, Director, IIMB
what does it take to defy age, time, logic and perceptions? Is it talent, grit, destiny or luck – or all these put together? If we are able to decipher and extract the reason, we would strike gold! Because the results that can be achieved are unparalleled. We have among ourselves a set of young disruptors who have enviable achievements to their credit. They have made constraints seem like the best things that can ever happen in life and will make you wonder if so much can be done in so young an age.

We bring you the stories of five young alumni of IIMB, under the age of 40, who are doing exceptional work in their chosen life and careers. We have a mountain boy born into a poor family founding a 200 crore company, another is a bestselling author who carries the disposition of a yogi. One is a social activist who vigorously works for the society leaving behind the challenges that his bi-polar disorder puts him through, another is an alumni who has pushed the envelopes of limits, and yet another is a high achieving CFO who treks to the Himalayas every year to overwhelm himself with the vastness of nature. Vibrant and profound, their stories will leave you feeling richer and younger. Read on.
If you ever happen to drive down the Western Ghats in future, here’s one story you can tell your co-passengers - of someone who made it big being born in a quaint little village hidden inside those forests. PC Musthafa PGSEM 07 is an extra-ordinary story of success that is made in the grassroots. No one would have expected him, a student who failed in 6th standard and dropped out of school, to reverse his fortunes and build a company that is worth 200 crores.

Musthafa’s father was a daily wage worker in a village in Wayanad who had to fend for a family of five. The family income was sparse which meant it was absolutely logical to stop Musthafa’s schooling when he failed in his 6th standard. The young boy stopped going to school until the first intervention into his destiny came from his school teacher. Mathew Sir, as Musthafa calls him, came down to Musthafa’s house and voiced to his father that the boy should be sent back to school. He coerced, convinced and even took it upon himself to pay the boy’s fees. This generous act brought Musthafa back into school, back to repeat his 6th class along with his juniors. Now, the latter part was rather unsettling. For, the new classmates made Musthafa a subject of ridicule. They made fun of his failure and humiliated him to their heart’s content. The hurt they caused was immense but what came out of it was an absolutely determined Musthafa, who strived hard and emerged as the best student of the school in 7th standard.

From then on, academics became Musthafa’s forte. He topped his school in the 10th standard, emerged at an excellent Rank 63 in Kerala’s competitive entrance examination, enrolled in REC Calicut (Now NIT Calicut) and walked the corridors of IIM Bangalore to secure his PGSEM. But at the backdrop of all this was his family’s meagre means. Musthafa’s father could not afford to
educate his son. He made it to his pre-university through a scholarship and lived in a hostel for poor students. Another teacher, who took special tuitions to prepare students for entrance examinations, asked Musthafa to come along and attend the classes without having to pay. Rank 63 was Musthafa’s return gift to this teacher’s gift of education.

Post his engineering Musthafa got a job that would pay him a monthly salary of Rs. 14,000. “My father thought that was my annual salary!” he exclaimed. And when Musthafa took home his first salary and handed it over, tears welled up and rolled down his father’s face, soaking up all their past miseries and making way for new dawns.

Musthafa wanted to reverse the fortunes of many others like him. Entrepreneurship was his new goal. Before reaching there, Musthafa made a corporate career for himself and enrolled in IIMB for his PGSEM course. While working at Intel and pursuing the course, Musthafa got into intensive brainstorming sessions with his cousins on what business they should get into. Many ideas came up and got dumped, but one of the simplest ones survived – that of selling Idly/Dosa batter. Musthafa’s cousins were running grocery stores in Bangalore and had really bad experiences dealing with the suppliers of Idly/Dosa batter. Their frustration instigated the eureka moment ‘why not package and sell good quality Idly/Dosa batter, well packaged and well distributed!’. They decided to test it out.

Musthafa and his cousins found a small 50 square feet space and bought a single stone wet grinder to make their first ever batch of batter. They had tied up with 10 stores and to their own astonishment they sold 100 kilos every day in the first few weeks. Undoubtedly, this was the business that they would start!

iD Fresh Foods, as they called the enterprise, made their foray into the market with just an investment of 14 lakh rupees which Musthafa had saved from his corporate jobs. A year later Musthafa became a full time entrepreneur in 2008. The response to iD batter was so incredible that within few years they established a full-fledged factory in Bangalore and were selling over 25,000 kilos of batter every day.

The company has now added more products to its suite and set foot in five more cities. The net worth of the company is at a whopping 200 crores with a million customers to its credit. Musthafa happily says he is realising his dream of changing the fortunes of many people. “Our employees come from marginalised families who once earned a 6000 rupees a month. Now they are taking home a handsome 30K, there lies our success”, says a beaming Musthafa.

If you go down to his village now and engage in a small talk about Musthafa, they would have a hundred stories to tell in his glory. And one of those would be of how young Musthafa used to run a little sweets shop in the village when he was just nine years old. The sweet shop would come alive during his vacations using the money borrowed from his uncle and the supplies that he procured by walking many kilometres to the nearby town. “That child made me what I am today”, smiles Musthafa.
It’s often more than a challenge to write about a writer. And that too when the writer is someone with a myriad hues to his life. Karan Bajaj PGP 02 is our very own bestselling author with two contemporary novels to his credit and a third scheduled for release soon. Karan’s protagonists are individuals who find themselves in extra-ordinary life situations and experiences that are perennially transformational. His stories are fast paced, humorous, entertaining and introspective. A story cannot originate from anywhere else but from the mind of the author and Karan has leniently let his characters borrow from his own life. For Karan completely believes we should fill our life with as much experience as possible. “What makes a good book? The story, with the lofty goals of the characters, the hurdles, the struggles and overcoming of it all. We should treat our lives just like that, fill it with all that it takes to make a good story”, that’s what Karan believes and what Karan does.

Travelling the world, meditating in the Himalayas, teaching Hatha yoga in a South Indian Ashram along with his wife, spending two months in a silent retreat, taking two year-long sabbaticals, living among monks in a Buddhist monastery, writing books that have sold a million copies - and all the while staying atop a marketing career – overwhelming isn’t it? Through all these, Karan is on a pursuit to fulfil one motive, to better himself. “I have always sought personal growth and never rested on that front. As a writer, as a marketing professional and as an individual, I focus on how I can grow and become better.”
Karan has had a nomadic school life, moving places where his father’s army postings took the family. When you keep moving places, neither the world is same nor the way how you look at the world. With this perspective in mind, a ‘well settled’ marketing professional that he was, decided to take a year-long sabbatical while working with P&G. He backpacked to South America, Cambodia and Brazil - travelling frugal, living in unconventional settings and speaking to people from various ethnicities. “It was like a light switch went off in my head”, said Karan recollecting the experience. “I saw that the things that people did and valued were different everywhere. And people defined success very differently in each place I went to. I was able to feel deep emotions that were outside of my comfort zone.” Karan was no longer wanted to fit into any pre-defined moulds of success or achievement.

Liberated from any kind of pattern or convention, Karan explores various avenues of his interest. He is a natural writer, who writes only because he has a story to tell. He has no other compulsions to write, whatsoever. But when he wrote, success followed. His two books, Keep off the Grass and Johnny Gone Down have sold more than 2 million copies in India. The first book is soon to become a Hollywood movie. His third book, The Yoga of Max’s discontent, is pitched for worldwide release. Karan has a typical ingenuity for marketing. Though he has always explored his talents outside of work, he never believed in quitting his job. For that is yet another part of him that gives him great satisfaction. He featured in the Top 40 Under 40 Marketer in the US by Advertising Age (2008) and is now the Chief Marketing Officer at Aden and Anais.

Integrating Karan the writer and Karan the marketer, are his deep rooted inclination for travel, yoga and meditation. ‘A striving yogi’ is how Karan would describe himself. Every pursuit of his, falls in place to serve this central goal. “All life is one stream of purpose” says Karan who tries to infuse the same level of energy into everything he does. This attitude helps, he says, to shift from playing a balancing act to a mode of integration. Through this integration process he is on an inner journey to become selfless. Letting go of his ego, becoming a channel for work to be done and remove himself from the actions - a beautiful personal goal which Karan is evolving into.

Karan shows us how mindful living expands the possibilities of life. “It’s not time that is passing by after all, it is you and I”, says Karan’s protagonist in Keep off the Grass. Let’s wake up to our own selves.
ABHISHEK THAKORE
PGP 05

THE SOCIAL CHANGE ENGINE

We cannot wait for accidents to happen to create change leaders, we have to create them” – walking this talk is 32 year old Abhishek Thakore PGP 05, who is on a mission to mould leaders who will impact the world. For Abhishek, leadership does not stop with himself. He believes in creating a ripple effect to carry the dream of social change that he holds dear. Making this happen is Abhishek’s social enterprise, the Blue Ribbon Movement (BRM). Till date, over 10,000 young leaders have been trained and transformed to address social causes across the world. That’s Abhishek Thakore for you, our promise to the world of social change!

At the international stage where social change movements take shape, Abhishek’s voice is heard loud and clear. Abhishek represented BRM in civic, democracy and sustainability issues in various international forums. BRM has been rated as the world’s second best initiative for building democracy by the World Forum for Democracy. Last year, Abhishek spoke at the UN Assembly urging world leaders to take a serious look at climate change.

Abhishek was all of 18 when this idea of engaging young people for socio-political and civic movement came to his mind. Along with some friends, Abhishek founded the Blue Ribbon Movement (BRM), engaged part time in it to keep his social commitment alive while he pursued his academics. Meanwhile he authored three books on personality development, founded a start-up, completed his PGP at IIMB and got into a consulting job in top corporate. All was well, until life decided to take a slump, a rather deep one.

Three years after his graduation from IIMB, Abhishek was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a mental illness that bore down heavily on Abhishek. The disorder hauled him into severe depression, hospitalization and a long road to recovery.

“I want to make use of all my time, energy, skills and experiences to create a peaceful, sustainable and loving planet for all of us.”
It took him three long years to come to terms with highs and lows that the illness put him through. Coming to terms meant that he accepted the condition as one truth of his life. He did not want to brood over it or let the illness take over his life. He woke up, in full comprehension of his illness, in full conviction that he has no time to waste in life. The social inclination that he always carried within, now had to come to the forefront. He had to do things that he truly considered worth doing. He wanted to fully align his life to social causes and in his own words “make use of all my time, energy, skills and experiences to create a peaceful, sustainable and loving planet for all of us”. Life had to restart with full vigour.

Abhishek revived BRM in 2011, much stronger and much more spirited. He roped in a team of like-minded people and gave it the vision “Together we are stronger.” Within four years of its re-launch, BRM has created an international impact. There are no protests, no agitations - it’s all about peaceful and coherent work with all the stakeholders so that change can happen. Be it BRM’s leadership development programme for young women, or a local civic initiative to solve issues of Mumbai city, or trans-national dialogue programme involving youngsters from South Asian countries – the impact has been commendable. Abhishek says, “If you look at the challenges that the world is facing as opportunities for change and act towards it, you will be left transformed.”

Abhishek is proud of the team that makes up BRM and says they are among the ones who have felt the transformation happening within themselves. Abhishek is a devout team player who believes in Vinoba Bhave’s words that a leader should not become the moon that drowns the light of the stars. Instead he should create an arena like that of the galaxy on a moonless night, where all the stars light up the sky. Each one of us is a star.

As Abhishek shuttles between various programmes - from Japan to Brazil to rural Jhunjhunu to corporate Mumbai – he is moulding himself for a leadership role that can impact the society at a larger scale. Apart from his plans to expand the scope of BRM’s social work, Abhishek is seriously contemplating politics too. The fuel for his spirit and energy comes from silence, meditation and spirituality. His spiritual grounding helps him focus on the purpose of his life and manage his inner turbulence. Although the disorder continues to be the biggest challenge of Abhishek’s life, today he has the courage to come out and speak about it. He says “I want to tell people that it is not only possible to lead a normal life with a mental illness, but you can actually live an extraordinary one”. And he’s living it up quite brilliantly!
REEMA MUKHERJEE
PGP 12

WHAT’S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF LIMITS?

Here must be a distinct mettle in someone who became the second woman to take charge as president of the IIMB Student Council in 40 years. Fourteen long years after the first woman president, Deeptha Khanna PGP 98, Reema Mukherjee PGP 12 took the reins. Many of her friends thought Reema was ‘president material’. When they told Reema this, she thought ‘why not give it a try’. Many others told her ‘this is not something that normally happens, so don’t even try’. Now there was more reason to give the election a shot and challenge the ‘normal’. And she did it, winning the elections in style.

Winning was one thing, and living up to the expectations of being the President was a totally different ball game. The challenges of a PGP at IIMB by itself calls for sleepless commitment, and Reema was on double duty. She survived on just 3 hours of sleep every day, but she wanted to give the role her best. Inspired by her mentor, she decided looked at the opportunity as a run-through for a future CEO role. It’s the same spirit and flair for leadership that won her the Citi Women Leadership Award in 2012.

Spontaneity must be Reema’s second name and her infectious energy levels can be injurious to those who are living their lives inside their comfort zones.

THE SECOND WOMAN STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT OF IIMB
CITI WOMEN LEADERSHIP Awardee  |  CORPORATE ALLIANCES MANAGER @ VELVETE LIFESTYLE  |  INHERENT ADVENTURER - BUNGEE JUMPING TO BOAT RACING TO MARATHON RUNNING
She steers her life through the thin line that differentiates ‘why’ and ‘why not’. When someone proposed her the idea of participating in the MTV national challenge to take up a road trip on a Tata Nano, Reema just went ahead and enrolled herself. She cleared the auditions and hit the road with two strangers. 4300 kilometres from Nagpur to Kanyakumari in 21 days – every day in a new place, not knowing where to stay or eat – adventures galore!

From bungee jumping at the world’s highest jumping platform in Macau, to scuba diving in Philippines and Andamans to racing at Dragon Boating Festival in Hong Kong, to road trips in Europe driving at a blazing 190 kmph, to running three half marathons, Reema has totally let herself explore the other side of limits. She swears by the liberating feeling of having done things that she thought she could never do. Reema thinks not too much, does what she wants to and feels great about having done it. She believes if she had put herself through over thinking and analysis, she wouldn’t have done half the things that she has, forget the vast spectrum of experience that she has painted for herself by the age of 29. “I have messed up things, but I made sure I learned from them and that gives me the inner strength to face the tough times in life.”

Placements from IIMB got her a job at Barclays but her craving to work with a start-up venture, drew her towards a fully loaded entrepreneurial experience with Smergers, where she partnered with her batch mate. Smergers was based out of Bangalore but her personal commitments needed that she moved to Mumbai. Though she had to leave Smergers, Reema didn’t want to let go of the thrill and fulfilment that an unstructured start-up environment gave her. She decided to join Vellvette Lifestyle, another start up, as its Corporate Alliances Manager. As maverick as she is in her personal life, Reema brings in utmost discipline to her professional commitments. She is a self-confessed workaholic. She says, “My typical days at work are demanding and hectic, but I’d not have it any other way. I’d rather have a happening day at work the end of which I just crash knowing that I’ve given my best, than one that is laid back and relaxed.”

Reema is a true young generation rebel blood. She takes great pride in her work and delivers her best with utmost honesty. While you find her vigorously working through her corporate role, you never know, she’d already be making plans for a sky diving adventure or for a trip to see the northern lights.
The moment you decide to be content, you extinguish the competitive spirit. And that’s the beginning of the end. You don’t have to be ruthless with yourself, but you have to keep raising the bar.” And that’s what Vishnuprasad BG EPGP 11 did to himself every time, at every stage in life. A national rank at the coveted Chartered Accountancy examinations at the age of just 20 – life just spreads a red carpet, not having to prove oneself again after that. A top banking job and great comforts – but that wouldn’t suit the mettle that Vishnu is made of. He wanted to fly high. He took the risk of taking a career break to take up education. IIMB’s EPGP was his choice and he excelled here as well with a second rank. He could have taken a job at any leading corporate. But he chose the Manipal’s family business and took charge as the EA to Managing Director and Chief Strategy Officer, the first external hire in the top rung of The Manipal Group.
It must be someone else but Vishnu to get contended at this. Vishnu has now taken up additional charge as the CFO of the US subsidiary of the group, which runs 6 manufacturing plants globally and is a world leader in Private Label Home Fragrance products. With a dual role on his plate, Vishnu works fervently like an entrepreneur in the company, thinking and working like how its founders would.

If you want to delve deep into the question of what sets apart high achievers, Vishnu is your case study. He’s been a consistent achiever and a competent leader. He hails from a middle class migrant family of Sourashtra origin that settled in the temple town of Madurai. It could be the inherent spirit of the migrant DNA to excel or the natural talent to perform. But as the bottom line has it, Vishnu is a clear high achiever, our promise to the corporate world.

How does Vishnu continue to perform and stay at the top? Apart from being goal-focused and self-disciplined, Vishnu always had a vision for himself and he worked hard towards it. Delve even deeper, and you will find that the mountains reveal more reasons for the success of this young man. Every year, away from the packed calendars, meetings and strategy making, Vishnu packs his trekking gear. For the past ten years, Vishnu has made it unfailingly to the Himalayas. Fifteen days of high altitude adventure, alienated from ordinary life, soul searching and self-discovery – that is the secret potion that this young man administers. “Whether you are at peaks as high as 17,500 ft, or at the source of River Ganga, or simply making your way up the picturesque hills, you cannot but feel awed, overwhelmed and humbled. There were times I had tears in my eyes”, says Vishnu, revealing one of his dearest connections in life.

After his spiritual getaway each year, Vishnu comes back wiser and reinvigorated. He believes in the power of the journey than summiting the peaks themselves, and that outlook helps him enjoy every single day at his work. He attributes great value to his team and takes them along in his journey. By far, Vishnu says, his best strategy has been his team. He set up an entire team in India and now works with another in the US, where he will be anchored for the next few years. The spirit that he infuses into the team is that of inspired collective growth. Like how it is important that your fellow trekkers make it through the journey, Vishnu believes it is important that your team travels with you, passionately towards a collective goal.

In the future, you will find Vishnu punching above his weight like always. He carries an aspiration to become an entrepreneur and knowing Vishnu’s palate for adventure, he wouldn’t mind risking the comforts of his corporate life, to plunge into entrepreneurship.
My aim in writing this article is to reflect on the question: Why should more MBAs consider academia for a career? To address this question, I draw from my own decision to choose academia and from my observations about academia, first as a doctoral student and now as a faculty member at IIMB.

After the PGP, I worked with Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) for three years based on the good advice that industry experience will help if I eventually choose to pursue a career in business academia. I learnt a lot about organisational practices and managerial behaviours during my stint at HUL. More importantly, my priorities became clear to me during this period. It became obvious to me that I will find a career in business academia more fulfilling than in the practice of business. While at HUL, I applied to doctoral programmes in strategy at several US and European business schools. All of them rejected my application. Disappointed but not disheartened by the outcome, I decided to apply one more time - I didn't want to harbour the regret years later that I did not try hard enough to pursue my goal. To signal my commitment to a career in academia, I made a clean break by quitting my job at HUL and worked with Professor Ramachandran as a research assistant. During this period, I applied again and got offers from various schools (some of which I had applied to previously). I obtained...
my doctoral degree from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. Since July 2013, I have been an Assistant Professor in the Corporate Strategy and Policy Area at IIMB.

Borrowing from the views of the American educator Ernest Boyer, I view a career in academia as a journey of scholarship. This perspective enlarges the scope of a career in academia beyond the dominant belief that it’s mostly about teaching. As I discuss next, there are different roles you can carve for yourself within academia and a myriad ways in which you can engage with society as a scholar.

There are two primary roles that scholars perform - research and teaching. With respect to teaching, there are two routes to becoming a teacher. The first route does not require you to obtain a doctoral degree. Industry experts can work as part-time faculty members and disseminate their knowledge to students. One popular model involves a senior industry executive co-teaching a course with a full-time faculty member, thereby combining complementary knowledge of practice and theory. For instance, at the Stanford GSB, Steve Ballmer, the former CEO of Microsoft, currently co-teaches a course called “Leading Organisations” with Susan Athey, a renowned economist.

The second route to becoming a teacher is to dedicate yourself to teaching as a full-time faculty member after obtaining a doctoral degree. Such a scholar disseminates knowledge that is not specific to one industry. Business schools, at least in the US, have a separate career track for scholars who focus solely on teaching.

Beyond teaching, an important role that can deliver enduring impact is when a scholar does academic research i.e., creates new knowledge through rigorous research. Doing academic research necessitates that you obtain the requisite theoretical knowledge and training in research skills through a doctoral programme. Of course, focusing on research does not preclude you from teaching - it is a matter of emphasis in allocating time and effort. My estimate is that in a given year, scholars who choose the research track spend about two-thirds of their time on research and one-third on teaching. My ensuing views focus on being scholar on the research track that combines research and teaching. It is also the choice I have made for myself.

If you do contemplate making a career switch from practice to scholarship, you are justified in asking: Am I fit for a career in scholarship? If you are naturally inclined to think in an abstract manner about reasons that drive actions and outcomes or like exploring connections among different fields of knowledge, then academia pays you to do so! Scholarship is a good choice if the prospect of creating knowledge and communicating it to a broad audience excites you. Of course, each of these activities is apt at different stages in a scholar’s journey. The careers of senior scholars in business suggest that after obtaining a doctoral degree (which currently takes five or six years, at least in US and Indian business schools), you will be spending the bulk of your time on research and the remaining on teaching in your first decade as a faculty member. On a side note, one way you can judge your interest in and aptitude for scholarship is to work with a faculty member as a research assistant before deciding to apply for doctoral programmes.

A relevant follow-up question is: What are the benefits and challenges of a career in scholarship? With regard to the benefits, first and foremost, scholarship is an entrepreneurial journey wherein you have the rare freedom to define your own research agenda in the pursuit of lifelong and in-depth learning. You have the freedom to study any problem or phenomenon that interests you. Seldom have I heard scholars complain that they are pursuing ideas they are not excited about or do not believe in. Of course, your specialisation will direct your search in certain directions and away from others. Second, you get the creative thrill of generating new knowledge. It’s not to say that practitioners don’t conceptualise. But often, the conceptualisation is specific to a firm or an industry. Scholarship offers you the opportunity to explore generalisations that span multiple contexts and make a broader impact. Third, you can blend your scholarly pursuits with personal interests - I have worked on a research paper using basketball as the empirical context! Fourth, you have tremendous flexibility to determine how to spend your time - you are your own boss! But the freedom comes the responsibility of taking ownership of your research projects and seeing...
them to completion. Sometimes, you may need to raise money from external institutions to execute a big research project. You may also need to reach out to executives if you want to write case studies on companies or use proprietary data from those companies for your research. All this calls for a fair amount of entrepreneurialism.

The benefits of a career in scholarship notwithstanding, I don’t intend to paint the canvas with one colour. Like any other profession, academia has its share of challenges and peculiarities. First, a research paper’s life cycle is long. A paper may take three-four years (and sometimes longer) from conceptualisation to publication. Second, the acceptance rates of papers submitted to top academic journals are in single digits. And your promotion at a research-focused university is determined in large part by your success in publishing papers in top journals. Third, one unintended consequence of the flexibility to work from anywhere and anytime is that the work hours are often relentless. But like any other profession, one learns to deal with these challenges. Despite these challenges, scholarship is a career worth considering for the opportunity of intellectual excitement it affords you to create for yourself.

Having addressed the issues of fit, benefits, and challenges, one important question remains. If the net benefits of academia are positive, and assuming you have a fleeting intention to join academia, then what are some of the issues you should consider before taking the plunge?

First, you need to be mindful of the uncertain prospects of succeeding in a new profession. Embracing this uncertainty requires an attitudinal shift, which makes the comparison of a journey of scholarship with that of entrepreneurship relevant again. If one is doing well in a corporate job, then it may be difficult to switch to academia due to risk aversion. On the flipside, academia is not a definite solution if the current job is not fun.

Second, you need to consider the short-term and long-term financial implications of a career in academia. With regard to the short-term implications, you will live within limited means when you are investing in building research and teaching skills in a doctoral programme. That said, the stipend in a doctoral programme allows you to lead a comfortable life. I highlight this issue since a corporate career creates a comfort zone that makes it difficult to sacrifice earnings in the short term and join a full-time doctoral programme. Pursuing a part-time doctoral programme while working is not ideal because you need to immerse yourself completely to acquire deep theoretical knowledge and robust training in research skills.

With regard to the long-term implications, one common concern is that being in academia and being financially well off are contradictory states of the world. This concern is especially relevant in India since basic compensation at most top Indian business schools does not compare to that at their US counterparts. Based on observation, I can say that many faculty members, both in India and abroad, have dispelled this notion. In India, there are ample opportunities to engage with Corporate India through training workshops, consulting, and speaker engagements, provided your ideas are relevant for managers and you are entrepreneurial. These opportunities will only increase in future as reforms are enacted and companies look to improve their competitiveness, both within India and globally. Over the long term, if a corporate career is a rocket to the moon (the moon being financial rewards), then the journey of scholarship is a hot air balloon ride to the moon (Disclosure: I am still inflating the balloon). The pace of achievement may be relatively slower in the latter but I sincerely believe that you can be financially well off while enjoying the enormous intellectual rewards afforded by the journey itself.

Third, if an MBA programme is a sprint, then a doctoral programme is a marathon. The implication is that the two programmes require a different mindset. Further, if you have started your own family, then your family members are also part of the marathon. They will be making sacrifices in terms of living relatively modestly when you are a doctoral student. Thus, your partner should agree with your decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Your partner’s support will be invaluable in several ways when you are engrossed in your coursework or writing your dissertation.

There exists a view that academics can often go on speaking or writing unless compelled to stop by an external force. I am no exception. In my case, the external force is a pressing need to do some econometric analysis for a call with a co-author later tonight to discuss an ongoing research project. I hope that even if momentarily, I have made you consider pursuing a journey of scholarship. I’ll crunch some numbers now!

Pranav Garg PGP 02 is an Assistant Professor and Class of ’86 Faculty Fellow in the Corporate Strategy and Policy Area at IIMB. He is grateful to the PGP Batch of 1986 for their generosity to partly fund his research activities. He thanks Somak Dhar, Ritesh Hemrajani, Arvind Nair, Shubha Patwardhan, Kunal Rakshit, J. Ramachandran, and Ranjini Sivaswamy for their helpful comments in writing this article.
Rajeev Bakshi PGP 79 and Das Narayandas PGP 84 are Distinguished Alumni of 2014

In recognition of their professional excellence, contribution to the industry, academia and the society, IIMB awarded Rajeev Bakshi PGP 79 and Prof. Das Narayandas PGP 84 with the coveted Distinguished Alumni Awards. Rajeev Bakshi is the CEO of Metro Cash & Carry and Das Narayandas is Senior Associate Dean and James J. Hill Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School.

Rajeev Bakshi

“It is indeed a pleasure and a great honor for having been recognized for my contributions in the fields of Business & Economy and I wish to thank the Alumni of IIM Bangalore for conferring upon me the “Distinguished Alumni Award. My batch mates, co-workers and my great family who have been my constant support, I would like to say that you all have given me the chance to live my passion, I thank you sincerely from the bottom of my heart.”

Das Narayandas

“It is an honor to be conferred the Distinguished Alumni Award by this esteemed institution. The time I spent learning from my classmates and the faculty during my two years at IIMB has been invaluable in shaping my career. I am grateful to the PGP Batch of 82-84 for considering me worthy of this recognition. My deepest thanks go to my foundation – my family.”

Eduniversal Award- IIMB has yet again bagged the top place among business schools in the Central Asia Region in the Eduniversal Awards given away on October 22, in Istanbul, Turkey. Based on a Deans’ Vote Survey, IIMB was awarded ‘5 Palmes of Excellence - Universal Business School with strong global influence’ for the seventh consecutive time at the 7th Eduniversal World Convention.
New classroom complex inauguration

The Institute’s new classroom complex was declared open on December 11, 2014 and dedicated to the IIMB community. We take this opportunity to thank our alumni for their kind and generous donation towards the construction of the complex. This new complex will support the much needed classroom capacity and fuel the growth of our programs.

‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’ at IIMB

IIMB joined the national cleanliness campaign, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, by pledging to make IIMB a zero waste campus in the next 5 years.

Prof. Venkatesh Panchapagesan has been appointed as World Economic Forum Advisory member.

Prof. R Vaidyanthan has been appointed to Ministry of Finance Committee, Government of India.
WINTER 2014

WHAT'S UP @ IIMB

Prof. U Dinesh Kumar has been recognized among the top 10 Prominent Analytic academicians

IIMB’s PGP summer placements 2015 done in 2.5 days

400 students of IIMB's flagship PGP program bagged their summer internships within 2.5 days of the placement activity. 130 companies came down to campus. The uptrend in hiring was in banking, financial services and consulting. Notably leading ecommerce giants of India made their headway as well.

Shashi Tharoor was in campus to speak at Eximius, IIMB's annual Entrepreneurship Summit

Twaran 2014 - On October 2, 2014, the day dawned bright and early at IIMB as close to a hundred runners braced for ‘Twaran 2014’. The run supported the Indian blind cricket team.

Culture Connect @ IIMB

A monthly talk series titled ‘IIMB Culture Connect’ was launched on campus to expose students and the IIMB community to liberal arts and culture. Distinguished writers, artists, playwrights, film makers and musicians, will speak and share their creative journey. The inaugural talk of Culture Connect was delivered by renowned Kannada film maker Girish Kasaravalli.

Vista 2014, IIMB’s annual business summit, had Subramanian Swamy as its keynote speaker
Coke Studio was held @ IIMB by Unmaad, the students’ cultural fest, featuring singer Sona Mahapatra and team Alumni CXOs mentor EPGP students

The EPGP students spent a day at the offices of our alumni in CEO positions as a part of the Shikshu Mentorship Programme. The alumni offered a day in their offices to help them know how a CEO’s office works. We express our immense gratitude to the alumni who made this possible - Haragopal M PGSEM 04 (Then at Infosys), Amit Sharma (IBM), Atul Shinghal (Probe Equity Research), Bhargav Dasgupta (ICICI Lombard), G Shankaran Nair (Servion), Malavika Harita (Saatchi Focus) and Sridhar Ramanujam (Brand Comm).

Prof. Trilochan Sastry has been conferred with Bharat Asmita Award. The award is given away in recognition of contributions by prominent figures from the field of teaching, people’s representation, public awareness and science and technology.

EPGP students win Global Marketing Contest in Spain - Kaustubh Sathe, Praveen Mokkapati & Ravi Kiran Cheni trumped 4600 competitors from 800 universities across 80 countries to bag 6000 Euros & honors from ESIC, Madrid.

EPGP students of IIMB conducted Prayaas - a social responsibility initiative that provides free eye check-up and free distribution of Jaipur Foot.

41st Foundation Day - IIMB celebrated its 41st Foundation Day with a special lecture on ‘Living & Acting Creatively’ by Mr. Ramji Raghavan, Founder and Chairman, Agastya International Foundation
**NSRCEL launches unique start-up mentoring programme**

The N S Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (NSRCEL) at IIMB will be partnering with TiE for AnthahPrerana - a unique mentoring program for early stage startups. This drive propels and strengthens the vision of an early stage start-up to gain quick visibility and support from the start-up ecosystem to grow faster and stronger.

**Three PGP students** started a campaign to reduce power wastage @ IIMB. Tirthesh Prajapati, Rajendra Talele, and Mahavir Kumawat are using video, stickers and posters to spread the message of energy conservation.

**Prof. Pulak Ghosh** has been appointed as member of Data Privacy Advisory Group of Global Pulse - the UN Secretary General’s Big Data innovation initiative.

**IIMB celebrated Joy of Giving Week** with a series of social impact programs.

**One day @ IIMB**

As a part of the Joy of Giving celebrations at IIMB, the Institute gates were thrown open for the public to spend a day in campus. The initiative had a bidding process for participation which raised Rs. 1.67 lakhs. The proceeds will be contributed to social causes.

**Tanmatra**

IIMB, IBM and Catalyst have come together to launch Tanmatra, a cross industry women leadership development program.

**What's up @ IIMB**

As a part of the Joy of Giving celebrations at IIMB, the Institute gates were thrown open for the public to spend a day in campus. The initiative had a bidding process for participation which raised Rs. 1.67 lakhs. The proceeds will be contributed to social causes.
My journey into theatre began with a production in school where I had a walk-in part as Dev Anand. When the moment arrived, the classmate gave me the cue turning his neck to look at me, I stumbled forward and remained nodding like a flapping lid for a lifetime before the other actors moved on.

Many actors in their memoirs have spoken about this moment when they stepped in front of the stage-lights for the first time – isolated in blinding glare and looking out towards a sea of shadows waiting for their lines. They have described how after the inevitable childhood of truancy and neglect, where they had started...
believing the adults that nothing good would ever come out of them, this was the moment where they realised that they were, or could be, someone.

Since that first encounter, I now know that theatre can truly happen to anyone. Many people believe that theatre resides in the world of make-believe – yes – but that is really looking at it very superficially. Its essence is truth, where the fiction serves as but a scaffold to mould the journey towards that truth.

Our ideas of theatre are usually restricted to the proscenium-form, ranging from farcical skits and pretty musicals to “realistic” dramas. I work in those forms too, but my definition of theatre is many times vaster than this now. I believe that theatre is really the stuffing of our everyday life. The work of someone like F.M. Alexander who taught people how to stand, sit and walk correctly falls as much into our everyday living as the realm of theatre. Voice and movement training is more about freeing our body from its bad habits than flinging oneself about screaming and dancing in throes of ecstasy or pain. Augusto Boale’s theatre works entirely with ordinary citizens who have been taught to obey rather than express. Some of the greatest modern philosophers have used theatre as a vehicle for their ideas. Sartre was the most formidable critic of French policies in Algeria at the same time he was writing his existentialist plays. Closer home, Safdar Hashmi was murdered because his theatre was perceived as a threat to the status-quo that made the establishment. Closer to our own time, the controversy surrounding the establishment’s persecution of the theatre artists of Kabir Kala Manch is proof that theatre is more than a star-performer on a ten-foot high proscenium chewing the scene like a birth-right as he declaims to the gods in heaven.

The theatre that fascinates me most, the theatre for which I left my very cushy job after ten years of career, is the theatre that is closer to life than reality. It is variously called improvisatory, devised, clowning, physical – it is a bit of all these and more. This is the theatre that essentially teaches you to be yourself, the life force untrammelled by the deceptions and bad habits of everyday reality.

I have taken this idea of theatre to rehearsals to make actors connect with their characters at a deeper personal level; to the corporate, training a sales team to be more assertive and creative – and especially to children. I have worked with underprivileged and specially-abled children, besides teaching theatre at a private school. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this form of theatre I believe in is entirely about reconnecting with the lost child in us. Not surprisingly, I have seen many first-time performers shed all their inhibitions while performing, go into trances, dissolve into tears after their performance, and inevitably claiming it to be the most transformative experience of their life, ever.
When I decided to suddenly shift careers three years ago, it was a hard decision not just financially but also because I liked my work. My career was poised: I had seen – and survived – the early years of two sunrise industries, big data and mass retail; all the chances I had taken would come to nought...

And that is why I left. I was treating my work as only a career, where investments were made and steady accreditations consolidated, with no thought as to why I was doing what I was doing. I had reached a stage where you never really left work at your cubicle, you lived it 24 hours even if you were at a Sunday buffet with your friends, and the question about your choices at workspace become essentially a question about the life you’re choosing to live. It took me a terrible year to make that decision: I enjoyed my work immensely, but it was not my calling. Not something I could imagine doing for its own sake for the next thirty-fifty years or whatever time was left to me; I could do that with writing and theatre. Once I realised that, it was easy.

Like any work, theatre is a lot and lot of hardwork – if you want to do it truthfully. (I have more or less entirely discarded now my received idea of talent. There is no talent, only hardwork.) Many people walk into (and out of) theatre for its perceived glamour, but I never felt more glamorous as when stepping out and presenting a business plan to an audience of battle-hardened veterans – and knowing I had them interested. I have nothing but respect for any work if it’s performed truthfully and with the right intent. It is, of course, our lifetime’s journey to discover where that truth lies for us. For each of us is truly unique, its truth shaped in our own biological mould and the inimitable set of experiences that slowly knead that mould.

And in case you have trouble now burrowing through that accumulated clutter and noise trying to shape our desires and fears all the time, burrowing and grasping again that vital link to your inner being which flashed so easily once its simple truths – may be a bit of theatre might help.

I am not an actor or script writer or director. Yet theatre plays a big part in my work. My work is that of a learning facilitator. My organisation creates learning experiences where leaders think about themselves and their challenges, draw insights and come up with action plans. I use theatre to enhance the learning experience – make it refreshingly fun, and increase the richness of the thinking and dialogue. Theatre has the magical ability to make it lighter, and at the same time - deeper.

The word theatre can bring to our minds plays, scripts, stage shows,
costumes, sets and audiences. That is theatre that culminates in a performance. However, there is a whole new world of theatre called Applied Theatre. Applied Theatre is about using theatre-based methods to help people think better. It is used for participatory dialogue and change. The distinction between the audience and the performer blurs. Scripts are created spontaneously. People play themselves. They seek not to be entertained, but to understand themselves and issues deeper.

My first experience of the potency of theatre as a developmental medium was through a program I participated in called Playback Theatre. In this form of theatre, the audience narrates stories and the actors instantly act out the story, often dramatising the internal struggle of the person. The experience of watching one’s own story being played back can be profound – the narrator has a sense of being heard and understood. There is healing.

The story can often take on a new meaning and significance for the person. I found this form of drama poignant and powerful. And in the process of learning to be able to do that I had learnt a lot – to listen, to empathise with the unsaid, to resonate emotionally with another, to use my body and voice powerfully to communicate, to be creative... the list was endless.

My colleagues and I started a series of experiments to find ways to use theatre for learning. We learnt two other extremely potent forms of applied theatre – theatre of the oppressed and psychodrama – which allow for dramatic exploration of an individual’s problems or challenges.

Here are some examples of how we integrate theatre into our work. Act Won is our presentation skills program that uses such theatre games - games that actors use to use their bodies naturally and project their voices. Tales of Confidence is another program where participants learn dramatic storytelling – a program that develops stage presence, confidence and voice modulation. In Leadership Lessons from Improvisation program, participants create performances without preparation – the present what they create in the moment – trusting their intuition, accepting challenges and taking risks with themselves. When they improvise in teams, building up a scene, they have to listen carefully to what others are bringing into the scene and build on it. It takes great effort to rise above being a hero and make the scene successful. And then we have my favourite program, Acting as Me - a program where participants personify the limiting beliefs in the head and actually dialogue with these voices. The list goes on...

Here is why theatre works so powerfully in a learning context. It makes people childlike, less guarded and more authentic. Most importantly, it makes them shed their cynical selves and listen to themselves more. Many times the body takes over and people are able to express the essence of an idea through an image, without the tyranny of language. It cuts down needless intellectualisation, allows catharsis, quietens the mind and helps people access their own wisdom. The bit of distance from real life that drama provides, allows us to see ourselves from the outside, gain perspective and experiment with alternatives. In the guise of play and pretend, we can rehearse for life and act in new ways. Imagine watching a play of your own life and experimenting with how you could be different in that scene. If that thought appeals to you, you will love applied theatre.
Three Alumni Take Up Top Administrative Roles At IIMB

For the first time ever we have three of our alumni taking charge of top administrative roles at the Institute - Prof. Shainesh G FPM 96 becomes the Dean of IIMB, the first alumnus to achieve this feat, Prof. Vasanthi Srinivasan FPM 96 becomes the Chairperson of IIMB Alumni Affairs and Prof. Sourav Mukherjee FPM 03 becomes the Chairperson of PGP (Post Graduate Programme). We wish the trio all the very best!

Director's Act

Ajay Bhuyan PGP 03 released his first Bollywood movie - Amit Sahni Ki List. The lead cast also has an alumna, Vega Tamotia, an exchange student in the year 2007.

Mayank Pareek PGP 91 takes charge as head of Tata Motors’ car business

Hasmukh Adhia PGPPM 04 has been appointed as Secretary, Financial Services, Government of India

Anup Uppadhyay PGSEM 04 becomes CEO & MD of Infosys BPO

Vijay Chauthaiwale FTGMP 04 has been appointed as the new head of Foreign and Overseas Friends of BJP cell
START-UP ARENA

Hargopal Mangipudi PGSEM 01, an Infosys veteran, launches a financial services company FinUno based in the US.

Janaki Latha EGMP 29 launched Akshharam, an initiative to teach the Malayalam language, her mother tongue. Her mission is to help kids appreciate the beauty of Malayalam through books, games and stories.


Shailosh Kumar EPGP 13 co-founded a specialty eye hospital, Akshara Eye Hospitals.

Varun Yagain PGSEM 11 launched an e-commerce www.DogMyCats.com, a pet food and accessories store.

Congratulations PC Musthafa PGSEM 07 on raising a funding of 35 crores towards his ready-to-cook packaged food company, iD Fresh Foods.

Congratulations Rajiv Srivatsa PGP 04 and Ashish Goel PGP 04 on raising a massive Rs 120 crores in funding for their online furniture store Urban Ladder.

Krishna Raju EPGP 13 launched Chefit, a specialty gourmet food service and distribution company. Chefit delivers all that it takes to cook a gourmet recipe at home.
Congratulations Mainak Chakraborty PGP 10 - Mainak’s company, Green Power Systems has made it to the Global Top 5 in the Environment Category at this year’s Tech Awards. The Tech Awards are arguably the biggest international platform for recognizing institutions that are making the world a better place. Green Power is the only Asian firm in their category and 1 of the 3 Indian firms in the Global Top 25. Past Laureates from India includes the likes of Akshaya Patra and SELCO.

ACCOLADES

Salutations to the captain of India’s Mars Mission - Dr. K Radhakrishnan

As the nation celebrated Mangalyaan’s successful entry into the Mars Orbiter, IIMB’s celebration was made extra sweet by the fact that we had our alumnus leading this mission. Padmashri Dr. K Radhakrishnan PGP 76, Chairman of ISRO, has been the captain of India’s Mars Mission. We, the entire IIMB community, congratulate him on this larger-than-life achievement.

Congratulations Saumil Majmudar PGP 95 on being featured in Satyameva Jayate. Saumil is the founder of EduSports, a company that works towards inclusiveness of sports in education. Satyameva Jayate’s episode was focused on the need to give encouragement to sports in India.

Gaurav Vohra PGP 01 has been listed among the top 10 analytics academicians in India. Gaurav is the founder and CEO of Jigsaw Academy, an online analytics education company.

Girija Togarati EGMP 27 has been awarded with Nav Kiran Award in National Women Excellence Awards for her services in the social sector.

Congratulations Ankita Agarwal PGP 12 on being featured in the Economic Times Young Leaders List 2014.
**BOOK RELEASES**

**R V Raman PGP 88**
released his new book ‘Fraudster – The story of corporate India’s black sheep’. The book tells about the dark and shady aspects behind the glamorous and shining corporate world.

**Vikrant Pande PGP 92**
released his new novel, ‘Shala’. Shala is a Marathi classic which Vikrant has translated into English.

**Hemant Soreng PGP 97**
released his first book ‘Start me up’, a humorous, fast-paced and inspiring account of the journey taken by three young impulsive entrepreneurs.

**Rakesh Godhwani PGSEM 04**
released his third book ‘What to Say and when to Shut Up’, an interactive book on persuasive communication for corporates, students, entrepreneurs, and anybody who is looking to make a lasting impression on their audience.

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**Wedding bells**

**Supreetha Mave PGSEM 2012** tied the knot with Avinash Singh Gautam on June 9, 2014

**Vhishnu Vardhan PGP 13** tied the knot with Priya Selvaraj on November 27, 2014
BLESSED

Avra Raj PGP 12 and his wife Sanjukta are blessed with a baby girl, Archisaa

Karan Bajaj PGP 02 and his wife Kerry Bajaj are blessed with a baby girl, Leela

Bharath Ravichandran PGP 13 and his wife Sriniveditha are blessed with a baby boy, Surya

Vishnu D PGP 12 and his wife Shweta are blessed with a baby girl, Vida

Sridhar Pabbisetty PGSEM 08 and his wife Veena Setty are blessed with a baby girl

CONTRIBUTION

Big thanks to Mohan Gundu PGP 93 for his donation towards IIMB Library resources. Mohan has offered his donation for a one-year access to ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Times of India (1838-2005) for the benefit of the IIMB community.

OBITUARY

Jitendra Kumar Singh, a PGPPM alumnus, passed away after a bout of Hepatitis B. May his soul rest in peace.
In an interesting experiment, Amit Bansal PGSEM 07 set up a mini portrait studio in one of the subways in Bangalore during the Bangalore Underground Festival. "Complete strangers came in and had a ball posing for the camera", says Amit. And here's a peek into the results that he got:

Dr. Rajalaxmi, an MPWE alumna, along with her friend Nisha Byju launched a simple way of spreading awareness about child sex abuse - www.srishtiLife.com

Sujata Mane EPGP 08 started a campaign against spitting in public places

The Mumbai Chapter organized a cruise party for alumni and family

PGSEM 02 got together for a reunion

PGPPM alumni got together for its first ever reunion
supermarketwala, Damodar Mall’s intriguing and revelatory debut book, provides the very basics for the growth of modern retail and consumerism in India, through interesting and carefully studied consumer behaviour, an art that few in his domain possess. Supermarketwala, is intended to be the go-to book for all consumer business enthusiasts and readers alike, who wish to understand how and why we as consumers behave in a certain manner at different places. These insights, which are the analyses of the sector so far, could become the pillars for shaping successful consumer products and retail businesses in the huge consumer economy that India will soon be. Read excerpts from the Chapter titled ‘Thank You McDonald’s, Welcome Idly Factory’.

Sir, would you like your idlis plain, Kanchipuram, or Guntur? a smartly dressed woman at the counter asks me. I’m in the departure lounge of Hyderabad airport, and ready for a quick bite, while I wait for my flight. Usually, I’m confronted with the ubiquitous fast food restaurants, McDonald’s, KFC, Pizza Hut and so on. I indulge in a burger occasionally, though it doesn’t really appeal to my palate. This time, I make a tentative move towards the smartly named Idly Factory. It is a new concept — this offering of traditional food in a modern location like an airport — and I’m not too sure about it. But I’m in a mood for adventure, and so I rush in where others before me have feared to tread. Glancing through the witty one-line descriptions of each type of idli, I choose the Kanchipuram idlis with a distinct cumin, ginger and pepper flavour.

‘One Kanchipuram…..,’ whispers the server, wearing a smart cap and apron, into a small microphone next to the counter. Turning to me, she asks, ‘Today, we have sambar in vengaya Tamil style as well as tomato Kanara style. What would you prefer? And shall I make a combo with filter coffee, buttermilk, or Coke?’ … Next to the delivery counter is a ‘chutney bar’ with six types of ethnic dry and wet chutneys. My sense of choice and empowerment, already at a pleasant high, increases dramatically as I help myself to a few of these offerings…

As I enjoy a very fresh, aromatic and tasty idli meal, I notice almost similar size stalls for a pizza brand, a burger restaurant, and of course, the place I described above — the ‘Idly Factory’. In their construction and layout, all the
three stalls are nearly identical... Global brands like McDonald's and Pizza Hut have taken the casual, functional eating occasions to an excellence level. At a global, cross-cultural level, they bring in standardisation of products and service, hygiene, transparency of process, branding, and a very modern young ambience. They also establish in our minds a new price point for casual dining — Rs 50 for a simple burger and Rs 100 for a snack meal. We get used to the new price points and with all the excitement, modernity and compelling offers from time to time, we are satisfied with the value we get. Seen in isolation, paying a hundred rupees for a quick snack might not suit every pocket, but customers have learnt to accept that standardisation and professionalism comes with their own costs. A burger and Coke combo in a wayside shack might cost less than McDonald’s, but that’s not where the hungry Indian middle-class is headed. We are growing to expect quality and learning to pay for it.

At the same time, it is important to realise that no vada-pav or idli eatery, starting from today’s Udipi prices, can on its own hope to scale the Rs 40 price point. Those higher price points and customers like me who are happy to pay that price are the contribution of global players in this space.

Until just a few years ago, we were happy with the concept of casual dining equal to street stalls, and paid accordingly. Multinational food chains showed us a different world altogether, one of comfortable ambience, low prices, and high hygiene...

With these new price points as the norm for casual dining, any Udipi diner worth her salt knows that it can create a completely exciting world of taste, ambience, choice, and service. Thanks to McDonald’s and its global peers, the customers are now more than willing to pay Rs 100 for an idli and coffee, too. Equally important, casual dining will no longer imply rock bottom prices and squalor. Customers will expect something better and be willing to pay for it.

That’s when our Udipis and Darshanis can morph into ‘Idli Factorys’ or ‘Banana Leaf Cafes’. They know their splendid recipes and fresh food formulae, for generations. They also have a loyal following, developed over decades. Indian food is what Indians want to eat. If they can get it in an international ambience, they will throng these eateries. All that the local restaurants need to do is change their backroom methods a little bit, modernise their serving styles and lo and behold! we have idli-dosa joints, chat, and bhel counters and ice-gola stalls in malls and elsewhere that can pass the global standards with ease...

At a highway halt in Muzaffarnagar near Delhi, McDonald’s and Haldiram’s restaurants are located in a common facility... Their menus are completely different, though. Haldiram’s even has a special ‘Vrat (fasting) menu’ during the fasting week of Navratra in North India. This is a popular highway stop for people driving out of Delhi, or into Delhi. The parking lot is full... this place is busy! The point to be noted is that at any hour of the day, the number of people eating at the Haldiram’s side of the facility is double the number of people at McDonald’s. This is not just true for adults. Children, too, prefer Haldiram’s. Clearly, when the ambience and facilities are the same, customers prefer local flavours.

The shape of the Indian casual dining opportunity is now crystal clear. International standards and methods are here to stay. Thank you, McDonald’s! And, of course, welcome Idly Factory!

**Damodar Mall PGP 86, CEO of Grocery Retail, Reliance Retail Limited:** Starting career with consumer goods leader Unilever Damodar went on to being an early stage professional involved in steering modernising retail in India. He has been in leadership roles with retail concepts like Big Bazaar, D Mart and now Reliance Fresh. Damodar believes that in Asia families and communities influence behavior of both, the consumer and the entrepreneur much more. Therefore, brands and even businesses will shape differently in markets like India, even as buying capacity increases rapidly. He has shaped unique Indian models in his entrepreneurial stint that led to creation of DMart stores and then with many brands at Future Group and Reliance Retail. A keen observer of consumer and shopper behavior, Damodar is often found in stores and markets. His usual allies are sociologists, ethnographers and design professionals. Modernizing entrepreneur run small retail is his current field of study and work.
Sridhar Parthasarathy PGSEM 06 is a co-promoter at Last Mile Consultants - a company focused on test consulting and transformation training. He is an alumnus of BITS, Pilani and has over 25 years in the IT services sector.

A confirmed generalist in this age of specialists, Sridhar loves photography and riding bikes. His art is a constant search for the unexpected in the mundane. Be it street photography, wildlife, landscape or still-life shot in studios he tries to get an image that causes the viewer to knit their brows in confusion over what it is. He is hopeful there is a subsequent ‘Aha’ moment when they figure out what it is that they are seeing. In that sense, these images are a visual puzzles.
What makes art? I cannot answer that question. Cannot even attempt to. Being fairly artless, and somewhat down to earth, this is one of those questions I am happy to let go.

But why did this question crop up?

In the recent past, I and a friend of mine decided to participate in Chitra Santhe – a once a year, full day street art market in Bangalore. We were happy to get our photographs to the event and show them to people. And hopefully, would also be able to sell them. We had taken a lot of help – from people who were serious artists and knew a lot about photography. All said and done, we were there for a lark.

Participation itself went through a bit of twists and turns. Initially powers that be (who decides who are artists and who are not) were divided over whether to treat photography as art or not. After a lot of deliberation, we came to a conclusion that photography is also art. We tied up with an artist friend to get a stall. And we had quite a bit of fun in choosing the photographs that we thought was good enough for public display and sale. This took time, patience, imagination and expertise – virtues that were evidently short in supply. Most often, the expertise of...
editing the photos needed a friend who is a professional photographer and another artist friend readily became our official critique.

Each photo went through many steps – selection, a sense of what the photo should be saying, transformation of the photo to say that. If nothing else, I learnt two phrases – ‘it is not talking to me’, ‘there is no drama’. Eventually, each photo that was selected came with the artistic approval of four people – two photographers, one artist/photographer, and one photographer/artist.

This is when the question came up – what makes an art? Was it the photograph? Was it the thinking as to what the photo should be saying? Was it the expertise that transformed the photo? I don’t really know. All I can say is that, many people who saw the photos in Chitra Santhe had a smile on their faces. May be that is what art is all about. To bring out the emotions in people.
here's a saying that goes... “Set your goals high and don’t stop till you get there”. Sometimes your goal can be as high as 18,380 feet above sea level. Not always do you get to plan a solo bike ride to the World's Highest Motorable road.

After flying down to Leh and a day’s rest to get acclimatized to the climate its high altitude of 11,500 feet, I set out on a bike ride to ‘Lamayuru Monastery’. Riding alone on my ‘Royal Enfield Bullet 500cc’ on National Highway 1, was a surreal experience. The vast landscapes of the Indus River valley will simply blow your mind. Soaking in every bit of what I saw, I did an extensive 250 kilometres of bike riding in one day. Having been able to traverse this distance in my very first visit to this place
kept my confidence high. It also made me well prepared for the next day's challenge.

Khardung is a remote village on the road towards Nubra valley, north of Leh. And to reach this village, you need to cross the majestic “Khardung La Top”. Scaling from 11,500 feet to 18,380 feet in a span of 40 kilometers is a daunting task in itself. To do this while negotiating landslides, isolated two-lane road, and rough terrains made it a target worth achieving. As you ascend to the top, you start feeling difficulty in breathing. Reaching ‘Khardung La Top’ in two hours from Leh was a surprise in itself. But a bigger surprise was the bike ride post crossing the ‘Top’. The descent from ‘Khardung La Top’ to ‘Khardung village’ was the most challenging part of the entire stretch. From 18,380 feet you drop to 14,700 feet in just 30 kilometers and for a major part of this leg, there is hardly any road to drive on. This probably makes the road towards Nubra one of the most difficult rides. It took me around seven hours of balancing and maneuvering to complete this stretch of 130 kilometers from Leh to Hunder in Nubra Valley.

These mountain roads are not places where you can cruise at high speeds. Thousands of blind curves, hairpin turns, the high winds, chilling weather; all these factors knock you out of your comfort zone.

This ride was physically and mentally one of the most challenging experiences ever. It was a test of perseverance, focus and resolve. Riding alone on my Royal Enfield 500cc bike meant that I had to keep my focus on the road, quite literally, for the entire stretch of 480 kilometers (Two routes spread across three days). You cannot afford to make a mistake while driving on these roads. With the depths of the valley staring at you all along these high passes, the probability of getting seriously injured is very, very high.

I believe that travelling to such places, helps you understand who you are as a person, and it helps you raise your limits. Among my other trips to Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, Agumbe King Cobra International Research station, Periyaar Tiger reserve - I rate this the most challenging ever.

In my view, September to mid-October is the best time to visit Ladakh. The weather starts getting pleasantly cold (0 to 10 degrees Celsius) throughout the Ladakh region and you can enjoy the ride to Nubra valley and the famous 120 kilometers long Pangong lake via Chang La pass.
STAY CONNECTED!

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