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Dev Dutta , Assistant Professor of Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship, travels to India

Dev Dutta

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus, dev.dutta@unh.edu

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Recommended Citation

Dutta, Dev, "Dev Dutta , Assistant Professor of Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship, travels to India" (2008). *Faculty Travel Reports*. 29.

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International Perspectives

Center for International Education

DEV DUTTA , ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Professor Dev Dutta traveled to Hyderabad, India, at the end of December 2007 to present a conference paper. Following the conference, he visited companies in Chennai and Mumbai.

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WSBE's Dev Dutta, right, with Mathan Varkey, head of marketing for GiveIndia.

This winter, I traveled with a very specific research and teaching agenda to three vibrant and dynamic cities in India. I had two papers to present at the Fifth AIMS International Conference in Hyderabad. AIMS is the Association of Indian Management Scholars – a worldwide association of management academics with an Indian heritage. As part of its activities, AIMS organizes an annual research conference in India, which allows its members to network with each other on research topics of common interest. It also allows Indian academics to connect with faculty from around the world.

AIMS 2007 was held in Hyderabad, the southern Indian metropolis from December 27-29. The theme of this year's conference was

“Technology and Management: Two Pillars of Success.” I presented two papers at the conference -- a solo paper titled: “Inter-organizational relationships and firm performance: Impact of complementary knowledge and relative absorptive capacity,” and another paper co-authored with Professor Kam Jugdev of Athabasca University, Canada, titled: “Project management, resource development typology, and the quest for sustainable competitive advantage.”

The conference turned out to be an excellent venue for sharing research and teaching insights with a wide group of scholars. It had plenary sessions as well as concurrent sessions organized over three days, with common dinners and banquets that allowed for socializing and informal interaction. The conference was hosted by the ICFAI Business School in Hyderabad and this allowed the visitors to interact with a wide group of MBA students as well, especially since most of the administrative and logistics activities for visitors were handled by students themselves. At a personal level, the conference was very beneficial for me. Not only did it allow me to present to and learn from scholars, but it also helped me to share best practices in teaching. Finally, I was able to interact with some very bright Indian students on the topic of strategic management and entrepreneurship, the case method of teaching and its usefulness, and so on.

After Hyderabad, I traveled to the southern city of Chennai (December 30) and later the Indian financial center, Mumbai (January 7-9). This part of my India visit was with a different research agenda – to meet the CEOs of two very interesting companies engaged in the domain of social entrepreneurship (use of a business approach towards social uplift) and write management cases on them for a future course at UNH on social entrepreneurship.

The first company, Chennai based Desicrew Solutions, is engaged in a rural Business Process Outsourcing initiative. I had an interesting discussion with its young, twenty-five-year-old CEO, Saloni Malhotra. Saloni's work in helping to bridge the rural-urban digital divide in India has earned kudos from around the world and for her pioneering initiative she has been named the runner-up in Business Week's 2007 list of best young entrepreneurs in the Asia-Pacific region.

My final travel destination was Mumbai, to visit another incredible company called GiveIndia, the vision of entrepreneur N. Venkat Krishnan. Venkat – a graduate of the prestigious Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad – created GiveIndia, a fully internet-based intermediary that connects potential donors who want to improve the socio-economic conditions of India's poorest citizens with a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the field. What is interesting about GiveIndia is that it has adopted a very different business model: (1) it classifies potential donors as individuals looking for a "social return" for the investments they make in socio-economic uplift, (2) it has a robust due-diligence process in selection of NGOs that can receive these resources, and (3) it carries out its own operations with an entrepreneurial mind set, relying not on any grants or support for gratis but by operating on a revenue stream of fee-based services. While at GiveIndia I had an incredible opportunity to discuss the spirit of volunteerism and giving in India, not only with Venkat, but also members of his dynamic team – Pushpa (Chief Operating Officer), Mathan (Head of Marketing) and Tejas (Head of Finance and Accounts).

These two company visits helped me to appreciate how an entrepreneurial venture can be created to specifically focus on the "business context" of socio-economic uplift in a developing country. Even as I will be developing the two case studies and teaching notes over this summer, I have been able to share many of these insights with my students, to demonstrate to them that business success and social uplift need not be mutually exclusive, but can be combined for betterment of people's lives across the globe.

My most sincere thanks go to the Center for International Education UNH, Professor Kam Jugdev of Athabasca University and her SSHRC funded research grant, and Management Department at WSBE for financially supporting my trip to India, which made it possible for me to take up this research and outreach opportunity.

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223 Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824
tel: 603-862-2398 • fax: 603-862-0169
study.abroad@unh.edu • international.affairs@unh.edu