

Future in the **MAKING**

Great ideas can emerge over a few cups of inexpensive tea. As in the case of NIIT when founders Vijay Thadani and Rajendra S. Pawar spoke of little else on a rainy June afternoon in 1981. NIIT brought an inadequate education system and a nascent industry together, so that today, one of every three Indian-born software engineers is an NIITian. Similar to their vision was that of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's Gandhi Institute of Computer Education and Technology, with just one difference. Their aim was to make the weaker sections of society computer-literate, free of cost. This endeavour began with over 3,100 applications in its first year. The three month course is currently running in 32

centres with 7,500 students. The power of an idea and the creativity of its drivers marks the soul of a great institution. Like the Kalikayatna educational programme initiated by the NGO Prajayatna under the aegis of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in six districts of Karnataka. Unlike the archetypal schoolteacher solving mathematical puzzles on a blackboard, this revolutionary system of learning eliminates hierarchy, making the teacher and student equal participants in a classroom discussion. Sometimes, it takes just one dynamic vice-chancellor (v-c) such as at the University of Pune to bring about this change. Narendra Jadhav, the last v-c to hold office, was responsible for conceptualising and implementing the Samarth Bharat Abhiyan that encouraged the university's 536 col-

leges to adopt and develop a village. Large or small scale, any mission to bring the marginal to the mainstream is significant. Like the mission initiated by Suvra Mukherjee with mentor Maya Ghosh in 1977 in Jamshedpur. They set up the Prem Jyoti Prangan school for children of domestic help, rickshaw-pullers and labourers, helping them study at Rs 25 a month. Or take the work of former investment banker, Ramji Raghavan, who started the process of sending mobile science vans to transform schools in the rural districts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. An institution is made great by the people who inhabit it. It is made great by the research that emanates from it, the ideas that are generated and the difference it can make to society and eventually the nation. ■



NIIT Across the Country

TECH REPUBLIC

It was the first to help the nascent IT industry to overcome its human resource shortage in 1982. Today, it's a global talent development corporation, offering solutions across 40 countries, churning out five million learners annually. With a turnover of Rs 1,148 crore for 2008-09, NIIT has become a one-stop hub for the back office of the world. "By 2020, India alone will provide 47 million skilled workers to the world, with a global shortfall standing at 56 million," says Vijay Thadani, co-founder of NIIT. With the arrival of personal computers in 1982, the need for Electronic Data Processing professionals shot up to two lakh, even as six lakh graduates were queuing up for employment. Thadani and co-founder Rajendra Pawar approached the IT in-