Alumni Tourism: Its Implications and Contribution

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has diverse facets like adventure tourism, Nature Tourism, Wildlife Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Medical Tourism and the like. One such facet in the modern age of 21st century is Alumni Tourism. Not only in private educational institutions but in government educational institutions too it has nearly become mandatory to have an Alumni Association and an annual reunion. These reunions have become regular feature of an educational institution. As it is a means of publicity too for the educational institutions- particularly private educational institutions so they have started paying more attention to Alumni activities like annual reunions as it provides an opportunity to showcase their progress over the years. They have identified several landmarks to mark the celebrations like Silver Jubilee of the existence of an institution. This paper will try to find out the significance of Alumni Institutions and their impact by comparing the Alumni Association of a residential institution with the Alumni Association of Management school– both government as well as privately owned institutions. Alumni tourism has a special significance in a residential school as the students spend a fairly long and formative period of their lives with their class fellow and teachers.

KEYWORDS : *Alumni Tourism; Sainik School Chittorgarh*

In this paper we will specifically talk about the Alumni Association of Sainik School Chittorgarh that was set up in 1961 with a view to provide quality public school education to the middle and lower sections of the society so as to grow and develop military leadership that was confined till then to the elite sections of society only. So, in order to provide the benefits of public school education based on the system of Harrow and Eton to the middle and lower sections of society; seven such residential educational institutions were set up in different states of India. Rajasthan was the fortunate state to be among them when one such school was set up in Chittorgarh. However, the Alumni Institution of Sainik School came into existence only after 15 years of its existence when its students started carving place for themselves in the society.

The attachment of a boy or a girl towards an educational institution in a residential school is much stronger than in a day school due to special bonding of emotional relationship that is developed over the period of seven years that they spend in the school. In this school a student is admitted in Class VI and he passes out in Class XII which implies that he spends nearly seven years of his life which is

roughly 10% of his life, if the average human life is taken to be 60 years. But these seven years produce such an intense urge to serve their institution that many batches have donated school bus, communication system, Dishwasher for the mess and the like. In fact one Ex-student named Ganpat Singh donated an Omni Van single handedly as School Ambulance that the school had, bore the same registration number as his scholar number in the school.

Alumni Tourism or reunions can take several shapes like celebrating silver jubilee of their passing out from the school, first decade of passing out from the school, golden jubilee of their school or passing out from the school or just a reunion. To put forth the contribution this tourism can provide to the hospitality sector like hotel industry, transportation, local conveyance, general market and the like, we would like to give two examples of Reunion functions of two batches of Sainik School Chittorgarh under the auspices of the school and SSCAS (Sainik School Chittorgarh Alumni Society)[1] in 2015 & 2017. In 2015, the batch celebrating silver jubilee of their passing out from the school, decided to contribute an amount of Rs. 30000/- each and there were about 35 members in this group.[2] With the total generated fund they not only organized their staying arrangements in the town and a dinner for the staff members and retired staff members living in the town but they also brought mementos for the retired staff members and installed a communication system in the school premises that ensured the students to have easy connectivity with their parents and near and dear ones. Perhaps that was the problem that they encountered while saying at the school when they were students. Another example is about the batch which joined the school in 1968 and passed out in 1975 who decided to hold their reunion in 2017. They contributed a fund of Rs. 15000/- each and there were 18 members in the batch, some well to do members even contributed more or sponsored some things altogether. With this amount they succeeded in organizing the reunion successfully and holding a dinner party at a reasonable good hotel of the town. This expenditure is apart from the expenditure the members incur on transportation, fuel, local conveyance and the like. Many members preferred to use public transport system while most of them came by their own hired cabs.

These reunions can be organized successfully only due to active cooperation from educational institutions and alumni association of these institutions. The ideal reunion can be of three days that can serve as template that can be followed by any educational institution for the organization of the reunions. This schedule is normally followed in the reunion functions organized by Sainik School Chittorgarh and SSCAS. Day 1 of the reunion can begin with the registration of members who have come to participate in it. In the evening there can be get-together of the members of the batch who have come to celebrate their special occasion at some convenient place. The second day of the reunion can begin with the Special Assembly in the morning where successful alumni of the institution can give

1 Sainik School Chittorgarh Alumni Society is a registered body with Govt. of Rajasthan in 2009.
2 Report on the Minutes of Meeting from the record of the Association.

motivational address in which they can share their memories and experiences during their stay in the institution. After the assembly there can be photo session with their teachers and the senior most class of the institution. It can be followed by the formal meeting of the Alumni Association in which the administration of school can give their priorities of needs and members of the association can deliberate, discuss on the methods to sort the problems of the institution by strengthening the infrastructure of the school. This can be seen not only as their contribution but even as a tribute to their alma mater. After the meeting there can be a lunch with the present boys that will give them opportunity to relive their past by taking lunch in the same manner as they used to do when they studied in the school. In the evening there can be some sports activity in the form of a basketball or volley ball match between the Alumni Team and the school team. After it there can be cultural variety show by the boys of the school in which some items can be presented even by alumni members. The cultural show can be followed by dinner normally organized by the members celebrating their special occasion. On the third day there can be some outing at some nearby place that can be organized by the local members of the association. After the picnic they can disperse to their respective towns. Although reunions are held in private and public day school too but most of the activities in it are organized by the school authorities only and at the most the ex- students give some gift to the school. Mostly it is one day affair while in the residential schools it is at a much higher level and on more intense level than in a day school .

The second case under study is of the management institution- Birla Institute of Management Technology which is a fully residential campus located in National Capital Region of India. BIMTECH offers admissions to its two year full time PGDM program and other sector-specific programs namely PGDM (International Business), PGDM (Retail Management) & PGDM (Insurance Business Management).

BIMTECH has a dedicated Alumni Cell and Association which strives to create a strong bond with its valuable Alumni with the vision to integrate and engage BIMTECH alumnus with the institute in future and conduct alumni engagement activities. To cater to these objectives a registered association called Global Alumni Association of BIMTCH (GAAB) was incorporated in the month of Sep 2016. Prior to this, the alumni-related activities were taken care by the Alumni Cell. The current association came into existence with the help of crowd-funding by the alumnus who willingly donated for its cause. Though every GAAB member has the flexibility in terms of donation amount, however the President GAAB, Mr. Alok Gupta of the batch 1993, was kind enough to donate Rs. 50, 000.

GAAB has a total of 9000 alumni registered with it which includes more than 6500 alumni working globally at senior/strategic positions leading Indian and Multinational countries both in India and abroad. GAAB has a hub and spoke kind of a structure which works in 9 chapters in India and 3 chapters abroad. The Indian chapters include Bangalore, Ahemadabad, Chennai, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Pune, Mumbai, Delhi/NCR, and Kolkata as its chapter hub while the abroad chapters belong to Dubai, Singapore and the London. Keeping in view the increased cost of conducting various activities across Nine National Alumni Chapters in India & Three Alumni Chapters outside India, it is proposed to increase the Lifetime alumni membership fees. This will help in enhancing the Alumni fund which in turn will lead to more financial support to the Alumni Centre.

One of the major activities undertaken by GAAB is conducting the Alumni Meets for the Alumni and their families. In the same spirit, the following meets were organized.

Ahemadabad	5th Aug 2016
Dubai Chapter Meet	11th Nov 2016
Hyderabad	18th Feb 2017
Kolkata	18th Feb 2017
Bangalore	18th Feb 2017
Mumbai	18th Feb 2017
Pune	18th Feb 2017
Chennai	21st Oct 2016 and 18th Feb 2017

- **Singapore Alumni Chapter Meet (06/03/2016)**
  Singapore Chapter includes Alumni from Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. It has identified around 13 alumni from the South Asian countries. The alumni meet was held on March 06, 2016 which was attended by senior alumni along with a few eminent faculty members of BIMTECH.
- **Ahemedabad Alumni Chapter Meet (05/08/2016)**
  Ahemadabad Chapter organized the chapter meet on 5th August 2016 at Hotel Novatel, Ahemadabad which was followed by networking dinner. The meet was attended by more than 20 alumni along with their family members.
- **Chennai Chapter Meet (21/10/2016)**
  Alumni conduit members connected with the BIMTECH alumni staying in Chennai and arranged the alumni meet.
- **Middle East Chapter Meet (11/11/2016)**
  The Third Middle East Chapter meet of BIMTECH was organized on Nov 11, 2016. More than 18 alumni attended the meet which was organized in the evening at Hotel Four Points by Sheraton located at Bur Dubai.
- **Kolkata Chapter Alumni Meet (18/2/2017)**
  An alumni meet of the Kolkata chapter was held in the evening of 18th February at the Calcutta Punjab Club. There was enthusiastic participation of over 20 alumni, some of whom had also come with their families. Amidst the bonhomie and nostalgia, the exchange of status and whereabouts, senior alumni from 2000 batch at very senior positions, as well as pass outs from the 2009-11 batch interacted with enthusiasm and shared love for their Alma Mater. There was a consensus decision of having more regular meetings and of the need of keeping in touch. The meeting was attended by faculty members form BIMTECH Greater Noida Campus who went specially to attend this meet at Kolkata.
- **Bangalore Chapter Meet (18/2/2017)**
  The Bangalore chapter meet was held at IRIS Hotel, Brigade Road on 18 Feb, 2017. About 30 Alumni attended the meeting. Few had come with family members. The meeting was attended by faculty members form BIMTECH Greater Noida Campus who went specially to attend this meet at Kolkata.
- **Mumbai Alumni Chapter Meet (18/2/2017)**
  Mumbai chapter alumni reunion was organized on February 18, 2017 at Yellow Chillies restaurant, Powai, Mumbai. Mumbai chapter alumni reunion was

organized on February 18, 2017 at Yellow Chillies restaurant, Powai, Mumbai. The objective of the meet was to conduct a regular chapter reunion at Mumbai where BIMTECH has more than 125 alumni working across different industries and represent all the four programs of BIMTECH. The major objective of this year's meet was to invite more alumni as compared to last year. Powai being the most central place of Mumbai, the meet witnessed a large gathering of more than 75 invitees with spouse & children. Some of the alumni had their first participation in the chapter meet at Mumbai. The best part of the meet was the presence of very senior alumni from across the programs. The approved budget for the meet was close to Rs. 2,00,000/- and the alumni with their families were invited over networking dinner. The meet was followed by Gala Dinner and gifts were also distributed to all children accompanying the alumni. The meet saw a great participation from both spouse and children. One of the Corporate Guest Mr. Vivek Mendonsa, Executive Director of Lawrence & Mayo also distributed free vouchers to BIMTECH alumni on behalf of his company.

- **Chennai Chapter Alumni Meet(18/2/2017)**
  The Chennai chapter meet was held at Hotel Barbeque Roof Top, PeriyarSalai, T-Nagar, on 18 Feb, 2017 wherein 14 Alumni attended the meeting. They also had alumni from the Bhubaneswar campus join the alumni dinner meet. Dr. Abha Rishi attended the meeting on behalf of BIMTECH, Greater Noida Campus. Dr Abha Rishi encouraged the Chennai chapter alumni to take on the onus of making the Association an Alumni initiative instead of an institute initiative as then there would be ownership. BIMTECH would back the alumni in their efforts.

- **Chandigarh Alumni Chapter Meet (25/3/2017)**
  Chandigarh chapter alumni reunion was organized on March 25, 2017 at Hotel Park Inn, Sector 35-C, Chandigarh. The objective of the meet was to conduct a chapter reunion which is normally done once a year. The objective was also to ensure larger participation of alumni from the region of Punjab, Haryana & Himachal Pradesh. Since this chapter lacked participation in the past, it was ensured that Chandigarh chapter should also be equally vocal as compared to other chapters in India & abroad. With this perspective, a dedicated communication to all concerned was made by the alumni cell. With continuous communication over social media, WhatsApp group and personal calls, a total of 28 alumni confirmed their participation despite the fact that most of them were very busy because of annual closing of the financial year. The alums were also requested to participate with their spouse & children so that they can interact with their families informally too. The approved budget for the meet was close to Rs. 80,000/- and the alumni with their families were invited over networking dinner. A lot of alumni were added to the WhatsApp group during the course of interaction. This group has more than 50 alumni connected after the meet. Though, this was the first time that this chapter meet was attended by more than 42 alumni, spouse & children.

Annual Meet- 2015

Annual Alumni meet conduction in the month of December 2015 at Greater Noida Campus, more than 300 Alumni with spouse and children participated in the event. The meet was followed by networking dinner.

- **Reflections 2K16**

  The Annual Alumni meet of BIMTECH was held on 3 rd December 2016. The event marked the presence of alumni from various batches. Felicitation for the Senior Alumni of 1994-1996 Batch, who have completed two decades of their graduation, was also done. The event also marked the launch of the Alumni Trust Logo (GAAB) thus, creating a historical event.

- **Reflections 2K17**

  The Annual Alumni meet of BIMTECH- Reflections 2017 was held on 23rd December 2017. The event marked the presence of alumni from various batches. The total budget of this event was Rs. 12,50,000 out of which Rs. 1,500,00 was contributed by the alumni. A total of Rs. 2,50,000 was collected in the form of sponsorships. This event was attended by more than 450 alumni along with their families who were provided with boarding and lodging facilities in the nearby hotels.

  BIMTECH as an institution puts in great efforts to engage its alumni not only with its Alma Mater but also with the current batches that they run. Senior alumni are invited as panelists for conducting Group discussions and Interviews for the process of admission at outside BIMTECH interview locations as well as at Greater Noida campus. A unique scheme called the admission referral scheme is also promoted to Alumni to refer meritorious students for admission to BIMTECH programs. In fact there were 113 referrals made for the batch 2016-18. Senior alumni are invited to address the fresher students during the orientation program organized at BIMTECH campus wherein they interact with students. Alumni referrals have resulted in placement assistance to BIMTECH students in a big way. More than 44 students were placed in India & abroad at various companies in different functional areas. Admission referral scheme was promoted to Alumni to refer meritorious students for admission to BIMTECH programs. There were 113 referrals made for the batch 2016-18.

Analysis

The first point of difference which is evident between the above mentioned institutions is the total time spent by a student in these institutions which vary from 6-8 years in a day-boarding school to just 2 years in a B-school. However, when we dug deep in the context, there is a clear understanding of the existence of a very strong bond between the student and the Alma Mater which is non-dependent of the time spent in the respective institutions. It may seem on the periphery that there is no direct relationship or comparison between a day-boarding school like Sainik School and a fully residential B-school like Birla Institute of Management Technology as far as the concept of engaging alumni is concerned and the concept of alumni-tourism may seem far-fetched. Whatever be the case, the alumni of either of the institutions have shown keen eagerness to return to their Alma Mater to rekindle their memories of their stay in their institutions, and in doing so they have become the active participants in the tourism industry. Whenever these get-togethers or meetings are arranged for the alumni in any city, lodging and boarding as well as the transportation facilities are required and catering to these requirements acts as the fuel to the tourism industry as a whole. The sheer amount of money spent to organize these get-togethers is mind-boggling and can be the new

market which is still untapped by the tourism industry. This paper discusses the contribution of alumni towards tourism with respect to just two institutions. Imagine the information regarding the amount spent on these events is collected from other institutions as well. Arranging alumni-meets has become a fad nowadays by not just the big and established institutions but the mall players of the industry are catching up as well. Now is the time to tap into this emerging market opportunity and provide tailor-made deals to the institutions which can be a win-win situation for every stakeholder in this process.

Conclusion

Nobody thought of providing insurance on mobiles before the service provider like Airtel came up with this innovative idea. In the same manner, alumni tourism is a nascent concept but it is supposed to grow manifolds. This is a phenomenon which is evolving due to the changing equations of the society. Therefore, the tourism industry should be proactive to tap into this new opportunity with the intention to not only increasing the bottom line but also touching the hearts of every stakeholder as well.

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