

# Brilliant Tutorials Turns a New Page with Career Launcher

Alumnus-turned-rival to run Brilliant's brick-and-mortar biz in north & east

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NEW DELHI

Brilliant Tutorials, the Chennai-based IIT-JEE coaching giant that was facing closure in north India a few weeks ago, has found a saviour in alumnus and new-age rival Satya Narayanan R, the founder of Career Launcher.

Career Launcher, or CL Educate, will run the brick-and-mortar business of Brilliant Tutorials in north and east India, which account for 20% of the institute's 40,000-odd students, from January.

"Brilliant is too important a brand to die," says Satya, who was a Brilliant student in 1990 while he was training for MBA entrance exams. He made it to IIM-Bangalore.

The ₹170-crore CL Educate, which offers vocational training and test preparation through some 225 centres in the country, will control Brilliant Tutorials' brand in north and east India, and will have access to its teaching material.

## The Business Spread

### Brilliant Tutorials

- Mainstays: IIT-JEE, Medical entrance, Civil services, GATE, Banking
- Small presence in law and MBA test preparation



### CL Educate

- Mainstays: MBA, Law, Undergrad exams such as BBA, SAT, hotel management
- Small presence in IIT-JEE, engineering test preparation; Started GATE and civil services prep last year



Size of test preparation market in India

Current \$4 billion

Estimated in 2015 \$7.5 billion

In return, it will pay a royalty to the ₹40-crore Chennai institute. "There is no stake, no equity involved. You can look at it as a licensee arrangement," says Satya.

Brilliant Tutorials will continue to control its mainstay postal business across the country.

The coaching institute founded in 1970 by N Thanu is one of the best in the business, having helped more

than 30,000 students join IIT.

Ravi Venkatesan, independent director on the board of IT bellwether Infosys and former Microsoft India chairman, was a Brilliant Tutorials student before joining IIT-Bombay in 1980. "I found it quite valuable. More than anything else, it gives a lot of confidence," he says.

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# Brilliant Hit Rough Patch Last Year

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Brilliant Tutorials slumped into a crisis last year when its chairman T Neelakantan, son of its founder, passed away. His wife and company MD Vasanti Neelakantan, who has been running the business, says managing diverse locations was proving a challenge.

A few weeks ago, Brilliant Tutorials centres in Delhi were on the verge of closure and classes were disrupted because of non-payment of rent and salaries. Some of its faculty members then approached CL Educate, seeking space to hold classes for students because their own centres were locked. CL Educate gave its centres, including Pitampura, Punjabi Bagh and Noida, to Brilliant in the afternoon slot.

"This was a philanthropic exercise and a goodwill gesture to students," says Satya. But this prompted him to reach out to the Brilliant management to see if there could be more to this partnership.

"Satya had respect for the brand, passion for education and the commercial perspective to nurture the brand," says Neelakantan, who has turned down similar offers earlier.

For Satya, this was "more than a logical decision". All his senior executives as students took the Brilliant Tutorials postal course on their way to IIT.

"It's a huge connect with many generations," he says. He says the move makes big business sense.

The overall test prep market in India is estimated to be \$4 billion and is likely to grow to \$7.5 billion by 2015, according to industry estimates.

Half-a-million students sit for IIT-JEE every year. "The number of students that Brilliant has for engineering is four times the numbers we have. By merging, it becomes one of the largest players in engineering test prep," says Satya. CL Educate's engineering test prep programme ARC will merge with Brilliant's programme in January 2012. In the summer of 2001, Satya sat in the Dadar office of GD Agrawal, founder of the Agrawal Classes, another iconic brand connected with IIT-JEE, to strike a partnership. He was denied. Early this year, Agrawal Classes shut down. The Brilliant story has ended on a different note.