



SILVER JUBILEE REUNION OF THE 1974 BATCH

BY K JOSEPH ANTONY ('74) IN CHENNAI AND MANY
MORE

*O Batchwalon
Three Days from now
You will be more disappointed
By the things that you did not do
Than by the ones you did do
So throw off the bow lines
Sail away from your safe harbour
Catch the desert winds in your sails
Explore, Dream, Discover, Get Together
Meet for the Silver Jubilee Celebs
During Oct 1 to 3, 2004 at Pilani*

Thus spake Nattu, now Dean Sir, B.R. Natarajan, as he gave a last and final call. It began almost three years ago, with a Yahoo groups called BITS7475, which drew our batchmates now dispersed all over the world, together, over the Internet. Its objective - the Silver Jubilee Get-Together in 2004!! That set the stage and over these three years, it built up our appetite for a long-awaited reunion.

CSG (Chandrashekhar Goel) for whom 'organizing' breeds



Our batch mate Dean Dr B Natarajan

genetically moved a motley Delhi crowd into the challenging task of mobilizing. It was easy. Along came Chaw (Chawla), Mukesh Asija, Ujjesh Sinha, Atul Jain,

Satish Bansal, Ramkaran Goel, CK Agarwal – could anything go wrong? Even Murphy decided, it was vacation-time.

For weeks, we searched each other out, on email, on telephones. Spouses watched helplessly as we hurled expletives across the planet, re-connecting. "Batchwalon" (fashioned from the sholayesque "gaonwalon") we called each other. Roop (E. Roop Bhaskar Raj), Rajiva Agarwal, Deepak Marwah, Sudipto Dasgupta, R.K. Vaish, Nagendra Venkaswami and so many, many others, alternately cajoled and threatened, till a hundred of us agreed, and willingly



Delhi Junta - The Organisers

submitted to Chawla's extortionist methods, and paid up for the trip. (It is believed that he charged extra to some, promising an item number on the bus.

Even the aftermath has been delightful. We have a humungous collection of quality photographs, and some wonderful writing. Winston Churchill might have said – Never before has so much been said by so many ... about so little!

So the compilation has been agonizing - what to include, what to leave out – varying styles, diverse views, the Bresson's, Kafka's and the Ghalib's of our batch - and in the end (back to GB Thomas!) have a "piece-wise continuous polynomial". Read on...

kuch beete hue lamho se mulakat hogi
kuch adhoori rah gayi baton ki shuruat hogi
yaad aeinege ve kisse ve fasane phir sab
jab pacchis saal bad hamari aur tumhari mulakat hogi

kuch to badal gaye hain hum bhi tum bhi
rago main vo furti khoon main vo ubal to na hoga
lekin is baat ka yakin hai ai dost
ki hamari dosti main itne saalo ke baad
purani sharab ka khumar to hoga

Poet - Aniruddh Srivastava

Article I. A log of the Silver Jubilee Reunion of the 1974-79 batch

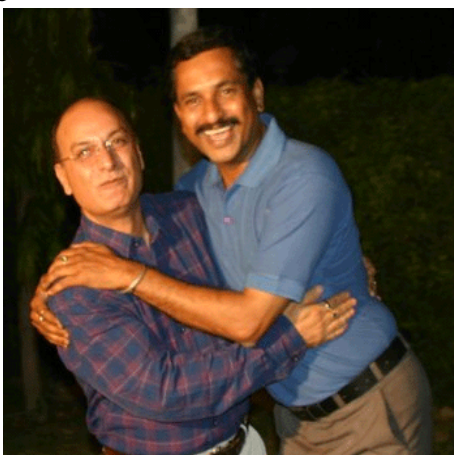
BY SOUMITRA CHAKRAVORTY ('74) IN NEW ZEALAND

30th September – The Beginning

The reunion began in New Delhi with a fabulous dinner, hosted by our Delhi batch-mates, on the eve of our Pilani departure.

We were welcomed at the venue on Janpath by our dear friend, Chander Shekhar Goel, one of the main organisers. It was rather useful net practice for him. He has a son-in-law and a baraat to welcome, for his daughter's forthcoming marriage in December 2004!

Seeing so many mates after 25-26 years, handshakes, hugs and backslaps, was the most contenting hors-d'oeuvre anyone could have desired and this was followed by a decent supply of drinks and a mouth-watering, sumptuous meal.



Razdan and Mishra

The absentees would be



30th Dinner hosted by Delhi junta

envious of the convivial company, the refreshing and encouraging liquids, the delicious food, a few PJs and the lachchhas we have had on that delightful evening. Everything flowed like a finely matured wine until the last group among us left the venue at 1 am.

1st October - A Nostalgic Journey Begins

We began to assemble at Sri Aurobindo Place from 9.30am onward. Many batch-mates, who could not come on the previous day, arrived in New Delhi by planes and trains that morning. More handshakes, hugs and backslapping followed.

Each of us wore a collarless T-shirt designed by our illustrious Tapan Desai (Tubby) and it was a sight to behold. Almost all of us have grown physically over the last quarter of a century and in some cases the growth has been quite substantial. We now have the bodies that can indeed bring out the full potential of a well-designed T-shirt!



Getting ready to go

Our caravan finally left Sri Aurobindo Place at around 11.30am resembling a north Indian baraat minus the bridegroom, comprising two air-conditioned buses and several cars. Bus no.1 had a few die-hard bridge players (Sudipto Dasgupta, K Joseph (Jose) Antony, E Roop Bhaskar Raj and a few others) who promptly occupied the rear seats and started to play without delay.

We had with us, a cassette of old gems sung by Dinesh Sharma, Azhar Kazmi, Shanti Vaidyanathan, Soumitro Ghosh and a few others at Saigal Nite 1977 during which the singers were most ably accompanied on accordion by our very own Moif (SN Mahapatra). We enjoyed listening



The gabbing in the bus never stopped

to this tape on our nostalgic journey.

We picked up a few more mates in Gurgaon and continued on to Rewari where we stopped for lunch. Lunch was no mean feast at all.



Lunch Break at Mahendragarh

Compared to the bus no.1, the entertainment in bus no.2 was a lot more boisterous. Everyone (including the spouses and children) was enthusiastically participating first in the Dumb Charades and later in Antakshari. Among the chief entertainers were Anirudh Shrivastava and Sunil Marda who really stole the show although the rest were not too far behind.

There was a short stop between Mahendragarh and Satnali to enable emptying of the gradually weakening bladders and to fill in some empty lungs with carcinogen. There was another long wait at the Haryana - Rajasthan border to pay taxes but we soon reached Loharu, and were on to the home stretch - the last 25 km nostalgic Loharu-Pilani road.



A break for air and carcinogens

arrived in Pilani in no time and were treated to a running commentary on the bus' PA system by Sunil Marda who had studied in Birla Public School prior to entering BITS. Nutan market has changed with modas replaced by moulded plastic chairs, a greater number of shops with

shutters, a lot more vehicles around and a much bigger bus stand.

It felt great as we entered the campus main gate beneath the welcoming banner and our onward journey came to an end at VFAST hostel some 100-150 m to the left from the main gate.

As we alighted from the bus, we were greeted first by our very own good mate Dean Nattu or Professor BR Natarajan (who was perhaps awaiting our arrival as eagerly as we waited to see him), Prof. RK Mittal and Dr KC Chandoke (the then Gandhi Bhawan warden). More handshakes, hugs and backslaps followed as we met our other mates who had arrived earlier from Jaipur and other places.



The Padia School Band welcoming us

Then it was time for welcome by a girls' band of the nearby Padia School. The girls were at their best and we were indeed privileged to be welcomed like this. Dean Nattu thanked them on our behalf and then it was the time for a 2-minute silence to remember our mates who had moved on before

this reunion.

As the girls played the first two notes of the Beating Retreat, we fell silent. This was a poignant moment for us and a few tears were shed as we remembered our good mates who moved on before the reunion. The silence ended with the girls playing the last two notes and then we made our way to enter VFAST Hostel and register.



Welcoming us with a tilak

Next, came the welcoming tilak on forehead by the volunteer students of present generation, registration, filling of a few forms, receiving our welcome packs and room keys. A quick trip to the room to offload the bags and we

We

were in the VFAST quadrangle for refreshments of Pilani delicacies and entertainment by local artists.

Playing of the ektara and other instruments, folk dancing and singing of the old Rajasthani folk songs such as, 'Gori ko pallo latke...' reminded us of the good old times we had 25-30 years ago. Hemant Daga had carted loads of raj-bhog all the way from Bikaner for the occasion.



It was then time to

The local balladeers at High Tea

clean up and make our way to Shiv Ganga for rest of the evening. Needless to say, the evening was rather agreeable and upon completion of the proceedings, we staggered back to VFAST via Connaught at around 11-11.30 pm.

During this time, a few absentees were contacted on mobile phones and subjected to collective earful at various times as the evening wore on. The sensible ones relented and promised to show up the following day whilst others who still could not make it were missed.

2nd October - A Magic Day

Many of us got up early and went for a walk around the campus – generally visiting the places we wished to, particularly Saraswati Temple and our old hostels.

We also watched school children celebrating Gandhi Jayanti at the Gandhi Statue.



The hostel rooms and furnishings do not seem to have changed much except for the addition of a high speed communication link, a personal computer and steel doors for the wardrobe. The bogs have tiled walls and hot water supply from a solar heater mounted on the roof.

Early morning at Saraswati Temple



The same old rooms !

The breakfast was at RPA mess. From there, the BITSAA Secretary Shivali and her team of volunteers led us for an Institute visit. Some of us borrowed bicycles from the inmates of Ashok Bhawan and made good use of them on campus roads.

We went from RPA mess to the UCO Bank, PO and stopped at the Workshop. It appears that not much has changed from the days of Prof Raghunath, the Workshop Superintendent of our times. Then on to the Faculty Division No. 1 which used (and even now continues) to accommodate the Arts, Computer Science (Information Processing Centre), Civil and Chemical Engineering departments of our times.



Prof Raghunath's domain - unchanged

The most noticeable change was the absence of those monstrous card punching machines, the gross IBM 1130 processor, IBM 2501 reader, the IBM 1403 printer and the associated paraphernalia that used to occupy so much space. Whilst the glass windows appeared to be the same from our times, the Centre has been remodelled to accommodate a large number of computer terminals.

Next, was a visit to the spanking new library whose architecture seems to have resulted in many accolades for BITS. From there, it was to the new lecture complex where everyone piled in to a lecture hall and listened to Dean Nattu delivering an impromptu lecture to the lot of Munnabhai MBBS (Mian, Bibi aur Bacche Samet) who had descended to Pilani that weekend!

We then made our way to the steps of the Audi where a few



The central foyer in the library

informal photos were shot before proceeding to the Central Lawn to plant saplings in memory of our mates who moved on before this reunion.

Whilst the holes were being dug for the saplings, few of our batchmates joined in a BITS style cricket game with the present generation of students and showed to the youngsters that '*samay ka deemak hamare hatho ko major nahin kar paya*'!

Nevertheless, it is a pity that the present lot, use proper stumps instead of the room chairs we used as wickets. Some might see this as a sign of progress!



Planting saplings in memory of those who have passed on.

tall with the passage of time.

It was then to the Museum steps for the formal photo sessions. Around this time, Nitin Pandit (Pondy) and Vinay

Gupta arrived. More handshakes, hugs and dhaps on the back, and we finally got on with the photos.

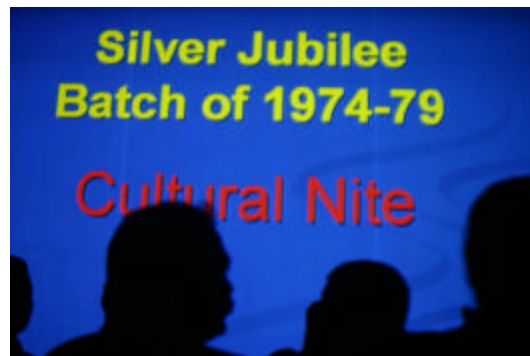
It was now time for the legendary Saturday lunch at RPA mess and then a few hours' quiet time for some whilst gyan-daan (career counselling) sessions for others such as,



Dining at RP Mess

SP Kothari, Raja, Debashish Ghosh, Deepak Marwah, Sanjay Dharwadker (Dharu) and a few other learned batchmates.

It rained a little that afternoon bringing in a cooling respite from the heat. The day marched on and soon it was time to



go to the Audi for an evening we ought to remember for the rest of our lives.

Shivali, the BITSAA Secretary, welcomed us and then handed over the proceedings to our own Dharu who took over as the Master of Ceremony for rest of the evening.

Needless to say, good humour, wit and albeit a few PJs, flowed from thereon. Dean Nattu projected and read out messages received from some of our illustrious batchmates who could not make it to the reunion. The director Dr L K Maheshwari addressed us. The General Secretary of the Student Union and Raja (representing us) proposed a vote of thanks.



The very talented youngsters

A highlight of the evening was the honouring of 26 teachers of our times by various batch-mates, which was the least we could do for those who had taught us then.

The cultural part of the evening was a smashing hit. The present BITS Music Club has a depth and width of talent, which was certainly lacking in our times. They put up a very entertaining evening,

which was a hard act to follow. Nevertheless, Moif, Mrs Surabhi Mishra, Miss Milind, Hemant Daga, Miss Pooja Natarajan (8 years old and the star of the evening), plus Mr and Mrs Sunil Marda made us look good.

When the cultural programme ended, it was time to go to the cafeteria for dinner with the faculty. We returned to VFAST at around 11.30 pm, carried on with lachchhas among various groups of mates and at various locations.

Some of us returned to VFAST around 1.30-2.00 am but were re-directed to the All Night Canteen (ANC) for more chais where Dean Nattu was presiding over the proceedings. At that time of the night, the NC had some 30-40 batch-mates and spouses. When it finally closed around 2.30 am, we returned to VFAST carried on with lachchhas until 3 am when most of us called it a day!

3rd October - All Good Things Come to an End

Once again many batch-mates got up early and went for a walk around the campus to enjoy the beautiful morning one last time. After having the last breakfast at RPA mess, we



The grilled hostels !

farewelled some of our mates in the first bus who needed to return to Delhi early to catch their flights and trains.

A few of us who remained went to the Museum and established that it had not changed significantly since our times. The lunch was a Sunday Special at the RPA mess.

We then bought a few souvenirs from BITSAA, ordered few photos of the reunion, bade our farewells to the hardworking and wonderful team of volunteers of the present generation students, Dr Chandoke and Dean Nattu before boarding our bus. We were farewelled with a BITSAA souvenir and a boxful of delicious Pilani pedas.

We left BITS Pilani at around 2 pm. A truly remarkable event had come to an end!

Article II. Some of the things I observed that are symbolic

BY C.M. RAMESH ('74) (UNCLE TOM) IN GOA

The junior Bhawans (Vyas, Shankar, Krishna, Gandhi, Budh, Ram) are now all grilled, and the E-shape is now closed up to form internal quads. (The Bhawans now have a squarish 8 shape). The entrance and exit from these Bhawans are through central doors that are also grilled and the gates shut at some time during the nights. No exit/entrance from any part of the Bhawan's downstairs wings, as used to be the case during our sojourn there!. Thankfully this is still to apply to the "senior" bhawans (RP, Ashok, et al. Malviya of course is now a fortress due to it having become an MB for girls.)



Honouring our teachers

The Sharada idol in the temple used to be visible from the Audi entrance looking out. This is now obscured by the tall statue of GD Birla erected right

in front of the temple, so what one sees from the Audi entrance is the back of GDB's head!

The library building is an 'aalishaan' modern structure (quite incongruent with the architecture of the rest of the campus), but two things struck me as quaint. It is pretty far from the main academic buildings, and the murals on the ceilings at the entrance are all paintings of Krishna freaking out with gopis! Strange I thought for the entrance of a library. But that is what is shown in movies like 'Main hoon na' I suppose.

One sees a lot more sentries around and the main gates to the institute appear guarded and half shut. Since now the Institute has a big supermarket within, the need for students to go elsewhere (esp. Nutan) for anything has reduced and I am given to understand by locals at Nutan (we had jalebis, kachoris, and chai there on the morn of the 2nd), some of whom remember the Sardar Gujral as Student Union Pres days, that it is rare for a student to be seen there now.

As Parakram says, there is the ubiquitous Undy visible in the front of most rooms in most wings of most Bhawans when one winds one's way through the roads beside each Bhawan. (Can't see them at the MB's as the wings are shielded from outsiders, and as a consequence the world outside is shielded from insiders looking out!)

Arz karna chahata hun, lekin alwafz nahi
Teri dosti aur purani yadon mein
kho jane ko jee chahta hai.
Door baithe ho pass fir bhi ho tum kitne
Phir Pilani tere paas aa jane ko jee chahta hai

Poet: Harish Khullar in New York

Article III. Reminiscences deep...

BY SANJAY DHARWADKER ('74) (DHARU) IN NEW DELHI

Thanks, we already have wonderful descriptions of our reunion – the write-ups and the pix. After the return, anticipated total silence for a few days if not weeks, but here we were clamoring for the story to be told, almost immediately. For Nattu and the Organizers – a sigh of relief that it was over? No...a loud lament of emptiness. A Single write-up? Impossible. One hundred souls ...500 man-years of Pilani, 2500 man-years of memories...and 300 man-days of reunion (not counting families). Would have to be James Joyce and Ved Vyas in one...

But I try. Since the event narrations are done and still



The spanking new library



The ever compere-ing author

coming, maybe I omit the details. I try to discover - What is it about Pilani and us?

For months we waited in anticipation for the reunion. We traveled, across the globe, by airplanes, trains, buses and cars and, past Nutan reach the portals of our most cherished memories. As the evening fell, we set out on the streets we knew, looking for the familiar sights – bhawans, bank, PO, workshop, insti...

So much looks the same. But like elsewhere in the world, grills and walls have come up, somehow taking away the openness that was our Pilani. It is now boys 'and' girls all over the streets, together at the rehris, bhawan gates and elsewhere. In the hostel rooms, you are not an existential castaway any more, cut off from the rest of the big world, but are connected now. The Internet feeds you, I am told, your assignments, your knowledge and of course, whatever after-hours stuff that you want. The student is now more business-like – cycling to lectures, cycling to Connaught (for 'pesarattu' not 'samosa'), and the endless lachha session seems to be rare now.

We ate at the messes, and could swear that it was the same where we left it 25 years ago, even the coolers and washbasins outside. Perhaps, what has remained most unchanged of all - the dimly lit corridors and the dimly lit streets. The evening and the night has the same basic feel. Many of you might remember a souvenir that Tubby sketched, Jose pixed and we wrote a few poetic lines, which ended with "...and the pavement stretch dissolves in the dark" – it still does. Only that time, we wandered on foot, in our little groups, like lost souls in our own purgatory. Now the more singular souls flit about on cycles.

One evening, during the reunion, it came back to me. For 5 years, we walked the little grid of our Pilani streets, taking turns that led us to our friendships, knowledge, romance, rejuvenation and retribution. I remembered reading the Marquez' classic 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' and writing a letter to a beautiful Meera Bhawan girl, of how

we live our life in cycles – in one instant, in an evening, in a day. Our 5 years in Pilani were as though we lived our entire life, end-to-end. The letter had two objectives – to impress the girl and perhaps enlighten her a bit. Still don't know, if either happened.

And now 25 years later, it seemed as though we did another full cycle. We took the turns and walked the streets again. Ironically, the 'chaurahas' now have sign-posts, to where the roads would lead – the post-modernists would be delighted that their metaphor is now a physical reality. For a moment it seemed eternal, and I dare to say, we seek and almost find, our little version of immortality.

In the darkness, round the corner, I hear Salve's inimitable laughter, punctuated by his asthma thing. When the e-mails start flowing, I dream there was one from Mundkur, wanting to know about a bridge game in the night...

I stand in the audi and say my pj's one last time. You all laugh, perhaps out of charity, and the young ones, under duress from Nattu's supari (yeh mota kuch bhi bole to hans dalna kya, sochne ka nahi), my happiest moments, then and now, I must admit.

At breakfast and lunch in the mess, we stand in line for our French toast, Dosa and Aloo Parantha. We drink the tea (or



Malviya now a fortress within Meera !!

was it coffee) from the steel tumblers, as though it was theertham and prasadam. As the pix show, we were a solemn lot - pilgrims, (among the sambar chawal – there was even a somber Chawla!), believe me.

We did our Maha Kumbh, took our dips, drink a few drops of the elixir of life, and move on. But the magic is in the telling of the stories, and each of us must tell it our own way, a la salim javed – kabhi comedy, kabhi tragedy, kabhi action, kabhi halka sa romance.

Article IV. The Angst of the Absentees

BY ANUPAM BOSE ('74) (BABUJI)

Received a call from revellers at Reunion a little while ago. Salle log ka vocabulary sudrega nahin ! To try ginger a support group for absentees - sure, we deserve some vigorous investigation - but they are in Pilani, and we are not - rubbing salt and mirchi hamara parampara kabhi raha kya ? Jor se bolo, nahi chalega, nahi chalega.

Dharu, devoted some unnecessary time discussing my sexual proclivities with close relatives ... but what of the others ? Are these our representatives to instruct the brightest and finest of our youth in the desert, on the values which carry you through life? I was expecting Roop to be reeling from seeing his descendant in Budh actually studying Econometrics, instead of composing creative make-ups. And Toy, since Class 3 a voice of conscience turned harami, to check out a room in RP and advise them in masterful fashion how to take a double finesse. Or Sudipto's Rajesh Khanna swagger - can these kids' namby pamby hero Saif Ali Khan even come close. No. NO. Absentees join me in a resounding No.

But ... but ... always thought drinking to avoid sadness was too filmi ... this Friday night its not.

Article V. Wonderful it was... A trip down memory lane.

BY PARAKRAM MISHRA ('74) IN CHANDIGARH

Its going to be a week since we gathered at the Free Mason Lodge and the emotional hangover persists. I had tears in my eyes... The journey back started in silence but Jacob had this great idea of Beer...

The morning walks in Pilani were great. Bazmi, surprisingly was up early with his camera and I found him lurking dangerously near Malviya Bhawan (part of the 4MB cache!). Some of us visited the bhawan rooms we stayed in, and almost ragged the inmates. I woke up the inhabitant of 274 Ram where I landed up as a fresher and was tempted to ask him "what the hell are you doing in my room?" ♦