

BY DILEEPAN NARAYANAN ('00 MECH)

A Month of Bhavan's Night

The ruling hands of BITS, Pilani have said a firm 'no' to Bhavans' Nights. But, does the newer bunch know what it feels like to celebrate a Bhavan's night? I recount, without tempering for the sake of political correctness, the naive pride of then: how it felt to celebrate a Bhavan's night -- the contagious Bhavan enthu and the vicious Bhavan spirit -- when the Bhavan was the first yearite's home and there was little beyond.

It was the time when Mal did not like walls. And, people left their slippers outside IPC when they wanted a newer pair. One had to hand over one's ID card outside the *audi*, to watch a RAF movie. Voices were often heard, calling out, "317, phone call! Holding," or "318, gate call," from near the common room -- there were no mobile phones. It was the year when aeroplanes learnt to fly through buildings, but Team India had not learnt to huddle. It was the time when Bhavans celebrated Bhavan's Nights. It was the year of 'Nihil Ultra 2K++'.

"The Bhavan's night," cried our H-rep, spread-eagling to the ground, "will, this year, be a Bhavan's week!" We freshers hailed him, lifted him up, and, in keeping with the jollity of the occasion, gave him another round of bumps. The talent that had been put on display, on that day of Freshers' Welcome, apparently, had prompted him to make such an epoch-making proclamation. Moreover, there, began the talk of Gandhi's Bhavan's Night.

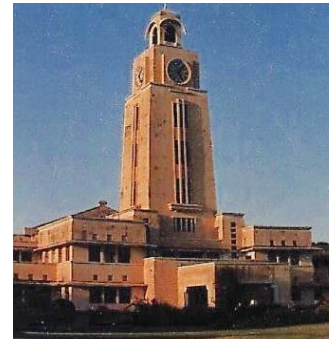
Came the second semester: junta *ghotted* for tests, played QT

cricket, guessed classes, but discussed the Bhavan's Night more than it discussed girls. As the propitious hour neared -- a month before the usual Bhavan's Night week -- the pressures of preparations having to be soon embarked on were mounting. The seniors, in a common room meeting, announced that our proposal for a Bhavan's night had been approved by them (few of us recollected such a proposal having been made, but cheered nevertheless), and decreed us to begin our preparations. "This is your Bhavan's night," they insightfully added, "And there will be no intervention from us seniors in the planning." "But, you have our full support, always," they vouched, reassuringly.

The first step incumbent on us was the task of electing a coordinator -- the coord, so to speak. The common room, where all the first-yearites had assembled for the purpose, remained silent for a minute. A fellow's hand went up. "I want to be the coord." His wingies cheered. "Go *ra*," they shouted; they were *gults*. Then, another hand went up. Both the

candidates came forward, their entourages not far behind, and got into severe deliberations. The cheering slowly gave way to a chaotic babble. "He, for sure, has political ambitions," one fellow hissed from behind, looking askance at the second candidate, "I am sure he is going to nominate himself for H-Rep next year." After hushed parleys, the second candidate came forward and declared himself the coord. The audience let out a confused cheer. "The decision was taken in the best interests of our bhavan," he announced, putting things into perspective. "This will be the best Bhavan's Night, ever!" he proclaimed. And he became our coord.

When we had to decide on a date for the event, the coord put his foot down -- we would perform after all the Bhavans had had their turns. The last would be the grandest, he vowed. This criterion was singularly instrumental in the choice of the auspicious date. "But what shall we call our Bhavan's night?" a studious looking chap asked, overwhelmed by the prospect. In the next meeting, two guys came



CREATIVE & HUMOR

up with names, but junta felt they were too comprehensible to evoke awe. Then someone came up with Nihil Ultra 2001. The Coord rather liked it, probably because it was more Greek than Latin. Moreover, it could then be captioned, much like big-budget Bollywood flicks. Then, a CP-I (Computer Programming I) stud observed that 2k++ would sound more fundoo than 2001! Whatever the name, "Nihil Ultra 2k++, *Nothing Beyond*" soon became the apple of every Gandhiite's eye.

Often, furtive emergency meetings were held in the common rooms, and the heftiest person stood at the doors to guard our secrets against spies from Krishna and Vyas. Raging issues were discussed: some were thwarted by firm opinions; many still raged. Shankar decided, rather prudently, that the best way to bid farewell to their seniors was not a Bhavan's night. And so the people decided not to inconvenience it by dragging it into the discussions.

Soon summer was beginning to blaze his way through the desert. And, with a mere week separating us from the Bhavans' Nights, things got hotter than ever. One night, while leaving the mess after the grub, we chanced to find quite a crowd outside the mess. Three fellows were crying, four were bawling their lungs out, and many others were unmistakably chagrined! "The posters!" the wailers wailed, punctuating their wails with less-than-pleasant details of the miscreants' lineages. Apparently, some malefactors had torn down the posters that the Gandhiites had put up in the messes to advertise the occasion. The posters themselves had not been less talked about. Furious tirades had raged over them.

Some creative souls had wanted to write a 'for' loop of C++ code to allegorize the countdown to the Bhavan's night. Some, who heard the cathartic proposal, did not hesitate to show the world that they were miffed. Nevertheless, clearly, CP-I had played on the minds of more than a few, and to a greater extent than one would imagine. And the posters in the messes flashed exactly that: ten lines of C++ code! Coming back to the spat itself, the arraigned were some inmates of Krishna, Gandhi's neighbor.

Krishna! The very mention of Krishna Bhavan evoked a sense of bonhomie in the Gandhiites. I mean, instantly the Gandhiites all fraternally bonded amongst themselves, and voiced, in no kind terms, that Krishna Bhavan would willingly create all the trouble in the world during the Bhavan's night, if they could help it. The two Bhavans had already squared up against each other in the Basketball courts, although they did not play in the basketball matches. The biggest fingers had been raised accusingly at each other -- often, literally -- and vile unfounded rumors often coursed themselves into the veins of both inmates and, sometimes, boiled some blood.

The Krishnites denied that they had torn away any poster, but the poor fellow who claimed to have seen it pleaded them guilty. They made it clear that they did not think much of any of our posters, anyway. "Surf Ultra: *Something beyond*," they chanted, when they saw a Gandhiite. And the Gandhiite mocked in retort, "Jai Krishna!" And that irked them no end. But, honestly, we never quite knew why they shouted, "Jai Krishna," -- some scoffed that it

made them resemble a certain band which helped build bridges to Lanka with stones, while most others were a little more circumspect in their criticism -- when they could have chosen to shout virtually anything! But the Krishna seniors said it often, and were proud that they said it often enough. And the juniors were proud because the seniors were proud to say it. Anyway, the issues of the poster seemed to only stretch themselves into posterity.

Meanwhile, budget limits imposed by the Wardens had been well exceeded. It was decided that we would build caves leading up to the quadrangle arena. Night-outs followed night-outs, and classes were totally gussed, to say nothing about tests. And so caves were built and makeshift stages appeared out of wing cots. We were to have a number of dances (one among which they called a shadow dance), and a mime whose singular motive, in keeping with the drift of things, was give back all the flak we had got. And, the boys had already invited the girls; there was a lot at stake!

When the gates opened to Nihil Ultra 2K++, the excitement among the fanatical supporters of all Bhavans was palpable. The Krishnites too arrived, rebelliously encoded in black shirts and black *lungis*, ashes and vermilion generously smeared on the foreheads, and flaunting a C++ primer out to the crowds -- an obvious insinuation at the posters. And then they all shouted, "Jai Krishna!" and, a strange peace descending upon their faces, settled down to watch the show.

The happenings off stage were as dramatic as those on stage

CREATIVE & HUMOR

themselves. The electricity played truant -- in a manner that only it is capable of -- and suddenly, in the middle of a dance, there was a power cut; the entire quadrangle was plunged in darkness! A huge roar went up and continued until one of the guys, nicknamed after the electrician Mangi Lal himself, ingeniously pulled out wires from the Bogs which were connected to the insti generator! In a desperate rearguard measure, the think-tank decided to advance the shadow-dance to the semi-darkness, and hope that the power was restored before the dance ended. C-Lawns would have, that day, heard the cheers and sighs of relief when the power did, in fact, get back in time.

One would have expected sanity to be restored to the proceedings. But the Gods had already charted out another course of action. One of the comperes, while introducing the next event -- the mime --, for no pressing reason, accosted the Krishnites with, "I am sure you Men in Black will have something to say about it!" The 'Men in Black', who had remained as well behaved as petted puppies till then, all jumped up at the mention, threw their C++ books into the air and charged forward with their war cry. And, needless to say, the quadrangle was thrown into anarchy. It took a great deal of exaggerated apologising to appease their tickled Krishnite spirit, before normality prevailed. The show, by itself, captured everyone's imagination. Nihil Ultra, despite its acrimonious interludes, was a success.

Tired inmates of Gandhi were woken up early next morning by a certain chap from Krishna.

Apparently, in the mayhem that had occurred the previous night, his C++ book had been lost! He had a CP-I compe soon, he said, and implored us -- rather politely, I thought -- to return it if we found it by chance. People assured him (with a similar politeness) they would, if they chanced upon it. Nihil Ultra was talked about by everyone for the next few days. Gandhiites and Krishnites gradually warmed up to each other. But I find myself unable to rule out hearing about a certain inmate of Krishna who had to write his CP-I open-book compe without a book.



CREATIVE & HUMOR