

BY PRAKASH MANLEY ('98 E&I)

We who are not as others

The average BITSian is mysterious to say the least... squirms out of bed at 11 AM, oozes into the nearest redi for unhealthy munchies, plays cricket, misses CDC classes, strips for public amusement once every year, smokes, gets sloshed, falls in love too quick, falls out of it faster, gets sloshed some more. It has to be more than just the brand name that motivates this creature to dream so big and achieve so much in the real world.

That day in October '98 when we got our fresher's welcome at Gandhi Bhavan, was the happiest in my life. The freshers from all other Bhavans had officially been declared first yearites a fortnight earlier and we'd just about had it with their paedomorphic rodomontade. My four years of dissipation began that night. It began with room ransacking, followed by an intensely competitive water fight. I understand that some BITSian generations remained uninitiated with the ransacking tradition. It's when the seniors' get together to zap all your 'nerdy' clothes and school supplies on the night of your fresher's welcome (and I, along with at least 80% of you reading this article *were* nerds before BITS).

The next stage of our metamorphosis lasted longer. At that point we enrolled in extra-curricular departments or sports teams to ensure food and freebies during Oasis, APOGEE or BOSM, but without even knowing it, we were entering institutions that were to shape our persona and soft skills over the next few years, through hands on lessons in human behaviour, teamwork, time/money management and leadership. In my opinion, this stage of BITSian metamorphosis is one of the reasons our colleagues

from the IITs do better at research... UNDER BITSian leaders (Anyone from the Bits2bschool network will vouch for me on this one). From time to time I thought of allowing my academic alter ego some intellectual stimulation, but he, for the major part, suffered malnutrition. I had entered a vicious cycle of extra-curriculars, entertainment, courtship, victuals, and whisky. And by choosing Art-n-Dee / PAP as my department, I had ensured that I got the biggest possible slice of extra-curriculars. When I occasionally paused for a breather amidst this sick cycle carousel, I always wondered what I would be doing in four years' time. This madness has to stop sometime. What happens then??? I carried this concern with me till that immensely hot day in May '02 however, when I graduated and watched 'em shut the door on me.

That year was arguably the worst ever for campus placement featuring the likes of 'Loharu Precision Screws' and many of us second-sem-on folks found our first jobs attending interviews outside BITS. The BITSian fraternity was an immense source of support and encouragement through these trying times. Following this, at our first jobs and grad schools

the occasional insecure desi colleague tried to sequester BITSians and IITians because of an "attitude problem" he/she had found us to display. I don't know how many of you have been marginalized in this way but I think we might be treated this way because we are naturally more self-assured and confident, and sometimes this tends to get across as arrogance. Personally, my self-assurance comes from knowing that I can survive anything if I've survived a proper fresher's period at Pilani and not squealed. I recently got together with some wingies of mine. I hadn't met some of them since May 2001. Now most of you will agree that in the years since graduating from Pilani, you mellowed out a little... Stopped using the %&#* as frequently, at least. I'm guilty of the same. Yet, when a bunch of bums who together lifted an inter-wing QT cricket tournament under floodlights six years ago get together in a remote old cabin in the Shenandoah Valley, sanity is severely compromised. We sang, we swore, we *laccha*-ed, we barbequed, we played cricket, and we '*combined-crash*'ed. A CC, where I live now, is mistaken for a gay gangbang, but this has to be one of the stronger BITSian traditions, especially practiced

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before tests, or in the Controlz and Rec 'n Acc booths and in Artndee's M17 during Oasis and APOGEE. Some of my more famous D's came about following a night-out session before a winter test-series that first took me to ANC, and then transformed into a CC. But before I digress further, I must mention that a BITSian reunion of this kind (when you're still lucky enough to be bachelors) is really good for the soul and I would highly recommend it.

There are so many great stories you tend to forget if not refreshed periodically, like my CoStAA body meeting with our beloved GSu who blew a fuse when we suggested screening LD movies to raise funds for APOGEE '01. He strongly suggested that we CoStAAns get our behinds on the BITS cable channel and do a cabaret instead. I always admired him for making a single-handed effort at restricting a belligerent bunch of BITSians. Though we

were going with the flow then, and didn't want to break the tradition of screening LD movies at the auditorium, quiet retrospective thought tells me that *'American Pie'* and *'Wild Things'* had no business echoing down those Hallowed Halls during a nationally acclaimed *'Academic'* festival. The other story we refreshed in vivid detail at this particular get-together of ours was one of the worst executed Bhavan's nights any of you have ever seen... Gandhi night '99 (*'Saturnalia... Beauty amidst Chaos'* it pleased us to call it). Now, I'm not being entirely disloyal... We had a smashing stage and backdrop and a terrific common room entrance, but when our first program began, one Bhavan senior stepped up to me and said

(I'll probably remember these words for as long as I live), "Machaan, I don't know how to tell your buddies this, but it's not very cool to rehearse on stage during the actual program".

My befuddled response was "Ooo aah... They aren't rehearsing, umm... 'tis the real thing we're seein". He said "Oh! uhh... wokay" before he skedaddled out of the Bhavan to save his dignity. This goes to all the '98 batch folks who lived in MB, Shankar, Vyas, Krishna, Ram or wherever in the 1998-99 academic year... You will all forever be undecided on which of your Bhavan's nights was the best that year, but we at Gandhi will confidently tell you that ours *was* the worst ever, and we are proud of it. We even have far more memories of it so there.

Each of us has actively participated in organizational activities whether it was Bhavan's night or Music night, Sangamam, BOSM, Interface, Oasis or APOGEE. I have discussed this with several batch-mates and other BITSians who graduated recently (class of 2002 and later), and many think what they have seen of the corporate world is on the same lines as what we experienced at Pilani. I always liked to think of BITS as a cocoon, or a play school, where we were delivered a lot of life lessons in a comfortable, friendly setting.



Prakash Manley & Co. during their *laccha* session

Like we'd been given play money and asked to do small tasks that are represented in real-life at a much larger scale. There were no real dangers if you made a mistake... If you were fired from a post, your life didn't come crashing down; if you were incompetent, the worst that could happen to you was verbal mayhem at GSu's office; apart from it all, you had a lot of fun learning. Please feel free to correct me if I'm wrong, but my opinion is that the soundest principles we maintain in our lives are from lessons we enjoyed learning, or had hands on experience with. This may be why many of us have better human skills than Mech. Sol fundamentals, and it seems logical to me that once a person has developed the core of a good human being, he can add on other functions with relative ease, and is better equipped overall, to handle the hurdles of a world that's predominantly human.

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