

BY LAXMAN MOHANTY ('71)

PLANET PILANI*Published and copyright owned by desijournal.com*

Two days back I was traveling by the morning 5.15 bus from Jaipur. Till Sikar my eyes were closed and I was in a kind of trance. I had to get up very early in order to not miss the Jaipur station; otherwise I would have landed up in Old Delhi station. After Sikar, as the sun light transformed to its glorious form I also came to my own self. Then I sat down looking outside at the babul trees passing by. Babul trees looked superb with new green branches just coming out and appeared like green cotton wrapped at the tip of all branches. The air was cool and this glorious morning set me to think about my association with a place called "Pilani".

Some 25 years back in the month of June I had made my first trip to Pilani to join Birla Public School in class XI. It must be around 5 O' clock in the afternoon when I and a friend of my brother (my escort) landed up in Pilani. On the road, we had come across several people ploughing their fields using camel driven tillers, babul trees standing like ever prompt soldiers on the desert and one or two peacocks loitering in the fields. Pilani was a big surprise with its large bunch of trees. I could not believe it was in the middle of a desert. But what had surprised me most were two things: sun not budging to go out though it was close to 8 o'clock in the

evening and the most "besuri awaz" from a lovely creature called peacock. Even seeing peacocks moving around so close to human beings was a surprise for me. When first time,

dunes to create a new pattern. After 22 years when I had taken my wife to show those sand dunes they had vanished all together. There seemed to be no place which had only sand.



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I ate "rajma" I mistook it as groundnut peas which had somehow no taste. The curry of "tinda" was also a total novelty.

We used to have a lot of sand dunes near the horse riding field of our school. Many times we used to walk on the sand dunes with friends and what used to amaze me was that sand dunes located in a particular place were displaced to another place overnight as if somebody in the night reconfigured all those sand

Everywhere there were small bushes and grass. This seemed to contradict what we have been reading that a large percentage of our land is getting converted to desert.

The death of one of our school students forced us to an adventurous experience. For the first time in my life I had to participate in a strike. We, seniors, defied our Principal, came out of the school campus and went around in the Pilani

village asking other schools to close and also shouted various slogans. What stuck me was that the small Pilani village had so many schools and most of the students were from various parts of the country. We also went to the President of BITS Students' Union, who was like a big brother to us, students of BPS. The President of BITS Student Union addressed us like a professional politician in the front lawn of the BITS campus and assured us to send a student delegation to Sri K K Birla to look after our demand.

The concept of "hiring bicycles" was quite novel to me. In our school, we were allowed half a day of leave on Sundays to go out of the campus and visit BITS, Connaught Place, and other shopping areas. Students used to almost run to reach the cycle stores near the school campus and then after hiring bicycles covered the whole village in those 3 to 4 hours. After so many years of traveling to many other places, I am yet to come across this simple concept of being able to hire cycles and roam around on your own. We had heard a lot about the availability of free cycles in Copenhagen, but when we visited the place we could not find such facility.

For most of the inmates of our school one of the biggest challenges was to jump over the school wall, see any movie running in the local movie hall called "dabba", then again climb over the campus wall and come back to our hostel room without being caught anywhere. Mind it, the school used to show movies every weekend and "dabba" could be hardly called a movie hall with bats roaming around and chairs hardly about to stand

on their own. The ultimate defiance was when the Principal refused to allow a group of my friends to see a movie in the BITS auditorium and as a mark of protest all of us forced our way through the main gate without bothering for a minute whether we would be allowed to continue in the school or not from the next day onwards. Fortunately, we were let off with mild warnings.

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While being in school I had decided to join BITS as it was much easier option to do so. There was no need of going through postal coaching and all the hard work necessary for IIT entrance, one need not to go for another learning curve in adopting to a new place and BITS was an exciting place with its good name and our seniors from BPS.

What I still remember about my days in BITS is the "baad mein" culture. If you had no money, there was no problem. Eat or buy things and simply utter the magic words "bad mein", which

meant I would pay later. Interestingly, the shop keepers, even without knowing you, allowed you to go without paying and they never bothered about recording your name or address. People used to pay back later and I haven't come across any case where somebody vanished without paying back the dues. I often wonder if we can have this kind of faith, the world will really be a nice place to live.

The other thing that had impressed me was the culture of everybody paying for own food. A bunch of friends may come together and sit for hours, but while paying for the food every body paid for his share of food (I have not used "her" as by some celestial rule any "her" was never allowed to pay for her food). If you have no money, you allow your friend to pay on your behalf and as soon as you land up in the hostel, you pay back your friend the fifty paise or whatever he had paid for your tea or food. I felt this system never put any pressure on a person who was low on resources and could not afford too many things.

Pilani undoubtedly is a sandy place, but the sand storm that we experienced once was simply out of the blue. One afternoon, we were standing on the roof of our hostel and then suddenly we saw some black cloud moving towards us. Out of fear we tried to get down to the first floor, but by the time we managed to reach the first floor verandah the whole place had become pitch dark and we had no option but to sit down on the verandah calling each others' names to ensure that all of us were there. We were not even able to see one another from 1 foot distance.

But after a few minutes the whole place was lighted again. After sometime we realized that it was a sand storm and the older people on campus told us that sand storm of such intensity had come after 13 years. An incredible experience really!

During ragging...I threw a karate kid and hit (a senior) in the belly. .

We hear a lot of nasty things about ragging. But what I came across in BITS was really fun. Someday I was asked by a senior to bring water in a jug from the cooler located near the next hostel. Every time I used to bring water some other senior on the way used to drink that water and I had to repeat the process. After 2 to 3 efforts I simply threw away the jug and reported to the senior that the jug was taken away by a senior. Another time a senior urged me to show a karate kick. Though I never knew this martial art, I simply threw a kick and hit him on the belly. He had no clue to do what next. Of course another time I was easily trapped by a senior who posed as a fresher to me and sought my suggestion regarding the strategy to follow as he was asked by a senior to report to his room at a particular time in the night. Without thinking even for a second, I suggested “don’t go and if that senior asked you

later, tell him that you were taken away by another senior”. I was caught red handed of misguiding my peers and invited for a special treatment!

I learnt to survive both the cold winter and the hot summer of Pilani. But the most chilling experience I still remember is one of my journeys from Loharu to Pilani. It was winter at its best and I had landed up in Loharu at about 1 am by the evening train from Delhi. There seemed to be no bus for Pilani and all I could manage was a truck that was going to Pilani. I had to sit in the open carrier and I was not even properly dressed. Every minute that night seemed like an hour and the journey from Loharu to Pilani simply took ages.

What I liked about BITS was the freedom that it provided. Of course, I have seen many of my friends not able to cope up with this freedom, go astray and ruin

their careers. Though I spent almost all of my time doing all kind of art and décor works, I still do not have any regrets. I might not have got 9 CGPA but the experiences that I had gathered in working for Oasis and APOGEE helped me immensely later in my work life.

When I left Pilani after completing my engineering degree I had never thought that one day I would again come back, stay in the hostel and eat the mess food. And all the time now I go back to Pilani for some or other reason I still find the place fascinating and out of the world. Though many things have changed like the ratio of girls and boys and coming of mobile phones, still Pilani has remained unchanged in many ways. It still feels like a place you can’t find anywhere in the world - a planet by itself with its own history, structure and ways of doing things.!



A BITS Style International Cricket Tournament in New Jersey On July 31, 2004

A summer picnic on July 31 (Saturday) featuring the first ever "International" Wing Cricket Tournament exclusively for BITSians on the East Coast! In the morning, we will play some BITS style wing cricket. Six-a-side with tennis ball and armchairs as wickets! Please register your six-member team today. To register your team, just e-mail venu@dreamcricket.com with your team name. If you want to play but don't have a team, email us and we will hook you up.

Then, we will follow it up with some real cricket for the more serious wing-cricketers among us (with real stumps and gear). This will be a 25 over match between pre-1995 batch and post-1995 batch. If you are interested in playing, please e-mail venu@dreamcricket.com with your batch. Please mark your calendar for this outdoor event with food, drinks, and games. There is no fee for participating! It is FREE!

The cricket ground is in Central NJ. Watch this space for more info on the venue and for wing cricket rules.

Time: Morning. More information to follow

Price: Free sponsored event.

Place: Cricket ground in Central Jersey. More information to follow.

Organizer: Venu Palaparthi. Email venu@bitsaa.org

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BITSAA East Coast Event

Books by BITSians: Memoirs of Army Days



Anuradha Gupta studied MMS at BITS Pilani (86-90) followed by an MBA (International Business) at IIFT, Delhi (90-92). She worked for 10 years, the longest stint being 7 years at Hindustan Lever. She taught at SP Jain briefly and plans to get back to teaching eventually. Right now on a sabbatical, bringing up her child she is thoroughly relishing her hobby, writing. Her first book, "Memoirs of Army Days," deals with what being Army brat entailed. The second book, "The Green Dragon" is in the process of being published. The third book deals with getting rid of the stigma of mental illness which is still shrouded in myths and misconceptions. She also writes on issues related to the girl child, poetry and humorous articles etc. for a website, www.viewsunplugged.com.

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