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MY LIFE AFTER 'MMS'

Without a doubt, MMS was the hardest degree to explain, the people who most struggled with job interviews, and who were known for the most progressive thoughts, the hazaar cat shats on campus. It is interesting that so many MMS students now teach at US business schools. One student talks about her journey to create a life after MMS that did not include Java, Cobol and C plus plus.

WHO said people are known by their actions. In India, as in many other places, they are defined by their degrees and careers. Stripped of that, how do you introduce yourself?

I tried that when I took a 'sabbatical' (sounds respectable). Tried to define myself by my name and interests and not bask in past glories or future aspirations. Quickly shifted my stance. Tried to say I tried to say I was a writer (but more often than not, I have writer's block – who cares). So a simple definition was not to be...

I remember tentatively stepping into the BITS Audi with my feelings all muddled up. Well, I was 86A6PS--- and happy to be there. I was ambitious but hadn't been able to put my finger on what I really wanted to do. I knew I wanted to teach sometime but that's about it. What, when, how, was all a puzzle that would unfold. My father had traveled to Pilani to get the BITS form and I had filled it up without knowing much. I didn't even know that a dual degree would afford me an opportunity to get a 'real' engineering degree, but that didn't matter then because I wasn't awfully keen on engineering. (Now it does sound dreadful, doesn't it)? People were so shocked when I nonchalantly mentioned all this (probably thinking that I would turn out to be a 4 pointer or

some kind of nincomp oop) so I stopped doing it and pretended I was headed somewhere. It's just that we were all expected to do pedigree things from pedigree places. And get churned out of an assembly line as India's crème-de-la-crème.

One of India's crème-de-la-crème was busy daydreaming in the Audi when they talked about MMS. That MMS was like an engineering and management degree combined in a neat, 4-year package. Sounded very, very impressive. Very inspiring. That one no longer needed to do a 4-year engineering course and then slog at a good management institute. One could get by with MMS from BITS, Pilani. Ah, if wishes were horses...

Pilani was great fun, acads were wonderful, (extra-curricular were close competitors) and I think more than what the acads taught me, it was learning how to handle one's acads or one's life or one's career that I learnt - in subtle ways. It restructured my brain. It added to my status (that I was a Pilani breed ka pilla). I also discovered the joys of marketing, advertising and psychology. I spent time mulling over the social cost benefit analysis of projects that were being appraised and the delights of Maggie at Blue Moon.

Some sort of discrimination is part of every social structure. Against a race, or a stream or a caste or a state or a...degree...well, MMS junta were considered by some, to put



it mildly, - as vela. There were those of us who took pride in that and those of us who disputed it. I was too obtuse to care. There were other class wars (in Marxist fashion) amongst other streams so it wasn't as if MMS was singled out. I will never forget the scene in the Audi when we all were watching Ankush and a group of actors on screen talked about being out of jobs despite being civil engineers. There was pandemonium...junta wrecked chairs, booed, yelled the Audi down and the movie had to be stopped for a while...so every

stream had a history to contend with.

Well, it was 4 years later that I went on to try and corroborate the Orientation theory of MMS (Engineering+MBA) at the TCS campus interview. And before they could ask me about getting into the regular software development stream, I asked them whether they take MMS people for their management consulting division. There was a bit of a smirk on one recruiter's face, and a hint of an apology on another's. A diplomatic, HR type reply, "Because we really think that you can get into management consulting but after

People celebrated other people's jobs but I did not have any ace up my sleeve. Not yet.

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W And after that PS at



a few years spent in software development." "Well then, I am not interested." I said and walked out. I went for the HCL PPT but decided against selling computers. I wanted an ad agency, or even set my sights on Hindustan Lever but discovered that HLL does not come to the BITS campus. So I dropped out of campus placements and my hitherto carefully nurtured academic and go-getter reputation fell slightly. I don't think I was any longer 'in'.

American Express taught me another big lesson – that they do not recruit BITS MMS junta. Also, that they did think that I would do some data-entry kind of stuff for them, amongst other things. Well, they had bitten off more than they could chew. I harassed my guide and made him hire somebody for data-entry (I shook them to the core of their beings I think, ha) while I did some of the more exotic projects that the IIM guys were doing – on Competitive Strategy

and development of a software for Incentive Planning.

I had heard that off campus one really had to hard sell oneself to the industry – starting with what MMS is all about. But I got into Trikaya Grey. Thankfully, at that interview I did not have much explaining to do. I talked my way through the interview (the way only a BITSian can, the way I had been convinced in the Audi, Day 2 at Pilani), demolished people at the GD and stayed all night working on my first day as an Account Executive. Not my cup of tea, no, I wanted my Mother to know the name of the company I worked with (or vice versa – she had already had a hard enough time explaining MMS to her friends – now Trikaya Grey? I had to bring credibility and respectability back to my life). Panda, one of my closest pals who also did MMS joined Trikaya with me and had a meteoric rise – last heard he was heading the Mumbai Branch of Trikaya Grey.

Other MMS batch-mates of mine (some without additional degrees and some with) seemed to have done well – currently, one is in Pepsi, one in GE, one in an Ad Agency, one a partner at one of the big 4 consulting firms, one in UPS (one of the brands with the highest equity in US), some in software (again, either in Marketing or Business Development), one embarking upon a career to teach autistic children and so on. Quite a motley brew, quite impressive. Lends a lot of hope. Wonder what the path was like.

Well, I had decided that after MMS I couldn't have a repetitive life (like I scream for Ice-cream and any time I scream

that's what it means – a silly metaphor inspired by my child) and end up doing another MBA. A specialization was called for and I zeroed in on MBE (Masters in Business Economics) or MBA (International Business) at IIFT. Got into both and decided on IIFT since it had a good placement record (HLL included) and I had other BITSians for company. The class profile was impressive. And we were taught the boring bureaucratic regulations that the Indian Government had created as a part of their earlier vision to be a socialist and self-sufficient, closed economy (amongst other things).

Here I was, neither was my engineering perfectly respectable, nor my management degree absolutely the best. Heard of the Avis Ad – 'We're number 2 so we try harder.' That's how they got ahead of Hertz car rentals, it was a landmark ad. Very inspiring strategy.

Except that in 91 (my MBA – (IB) was from 90-92) Mr. Chidambaram decided that he had to give my career a different direction. Well, that was not his primary motive I am sure, but he dismantled controls and liberalized India. In my little

life, that meant that IIFT had to redefine its role in the new context and reposition itself as an Institute that taught International Business in the real sense of the word and so on. It didn't really matter to me, I had decided to get into HLL and worked towards that so IIFT really was like a stepping-stone. It helped again when I taught briefly at SP Jain.

But again in organizations, there is so much mentoring and the IIM's, XL and Mumbai Institutes etc. are so powerful. Here I was, neither was my engineering perfectly respectable, nor my management degree absolutely the best. Heard of the Avis Ad – 'We're number 2 so we try harder.' That's how they got ahead of Hertz car rentals, it was a landmark ad. Very inspiring strategy.

When I heard of MMS people taking CAT I could have kicked myself. Considering that I was A Big Fat Rat in the Rat Race, I wanted to eat every fat cat and climb up the corporate ladder. I wanted to live down my stupidity at not taking CAT. I was able to. (Esp. when I realized – on a very philosophical note – that at the end of the day we are all selling soap!).

And then of course, everywhere, in corporate life and with friends, there were the inevitable questions about what my undergraduate degree was. MMS met with puzzled looks. I had to define it as a course in Pilani (based on the MIT system of education – ah, what we do to lend a halo around our heads) where we take all the engineering courses in the first two years and then study our

disciplinary courses, which are all related to Management. Of course, we do a lot of interesting electives like Project Appraisal (I would leave out Philosophy which I actually enjoyed more) and work off campus for six months. I would name drop. Talk about American Express. Not talk about the struggle it involved. To lend a bit more of respectability I would talk of my PS-I at CSIR. That was my claim to fame, to being scientific in a country obsessed with science.

And at some stage when I dropped out of the rate race, I thought I would temporarily teach at school (before getting back to the grueling Post-grad Institute teaching routine). That's when I realized that I can teach only something that is related to my Undergraduate degree. What that is and how that is defined is anybody's guess.

Considering that in Management one is taught to 'present one's views' and I had always wanted to pen down my thoughts, my hobby – writing – became my part time career.

I am sure a lot of you have had better experiences (and some worse). Also, a lot of water has flown under the bridge. In Darwinian fashion, mutations might have occurred in the evolution of MMS. Watch this space, we may discuss this further. If I am not skinned alive by then of course.

Disclaimer: This article is not meant to offend anybody including myself. It is a true, honest admission of what I went through...!