

BY PUSHKALA VENKATRAMAN

HOUSTON CALLING: A CONVERSATION WITH KRISHNA VAVILALA ('56)



Name: Krishna Vavilala ('56)

Education: EEE (BITS)

Resident: Houston, Texas

Associations: Director, India Cultural Center; Founder, Third Eye think tank, Active Member, Democratic Party; Federation of Indian Associations; American Society of Indian Engineers; Telugu Cultural Association

Award: Mayor of Houston Award, 2002 for exemplary community service

Mr. Krishna Vavilala ('56), has worked tirelessly towards spreading Indian culture in the United States since he first came here. He has also been active on the political front. In 1996, he introduced a motion in the Texas State Democratic Party Convention urging for US support to India over China. Mr. Vavilala has also published numerous letters in the national mainstream press such as the Houston Chronicle on a wide variety of subjects ranging from Indo-American relations to Taliban's tagging of Hindus in Afghanistan.

When he undertook the 1,400-kilometre train journey from his home town Rajahmundry to Rajasthan, he had no idea that those four years at Pilani would transform him completely from

a meek and shy 18 year old into a self-confident young man ready to take upon the real world. BITS being strictly a resident college, the close interaction with students from other Indian states broadened his outlook immensely.

Mr. Vavilala remembered the woman warden of the Arts College who would never allow her students to go out without prior permission and without a responsible person escorting them out and bring them back to the hostel before night fall. On occasions like the BITS College Anniversary Day the girls from the Arts College would be shepherded in a procession into the auditorium to their reserved front row seats led by their principal amidst cat calls, claps and whistles from the engineering students.

His innocent question about "segregation" of guys and girls in the present day BITS brought a smile to my face and he was visibly shocked when I told him about the Music Nites, late night department work, Oasis, gate calls and the 11.00 PM curfew.

There were no movie halls in Pilani at his time. The students craved to clandestinely go and see movies shown at CEERI.

Dr. V. Lakshminarayanan was the Principal of BITS during Mr. Vavilala's time. Mr. Vavilala recalls the time when students squat in front of his house to bitterly complain how tough that morning's test paper had been. Dr. Lakshminarayanan said "Don't worry. I will look into the matter."

He asked the very Professor that set the examination paper to sit down and answer all questions within 3 hours.

Mr. Vavilala fondly remembers the time when Dr V S Lakshminarayanan punished him for failing to wear the proper uniform. Mr. Vavilala was made to run three times around the BITS building on a cold wintry morning – all for wearing a gray instead of the official blue sweater. South Indian students were not accustomed to the severe desert cold of Pilani and since there were no hot water geysers in the hostels for bathing, students had to walk all the way to the mess kitchen and beg the Maharaj for a bucket full of hot water. Nevertheless, Mr. Vavilala feels those tough times prepared him well for the life ahead.

At 65, Mr. Vavilala an Electrical Engineer is happily settled in Houston with his wife and two daughters. He keeps extremely busy by working for Indian organizations that work towards spreading the Indian culture. He is often a part of committees that welcomes Indian dignitaries into the country and thus he had the opportunity of meeting with several dignitaries including Morarjee Desai, Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi and Atal Behari Vajpayee. He is also an active member of the Democratic party.

Mr. Vavilala, is spearheading a Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Statue Project in Houston on behalf of the India Cultural Center. The statue will become not only a landmark tourist attraction in the City of Houston and make future generations of all Indian-Americans proud of their Indian heritage. Perhaps he is motivated by our very own beloved Gandhi statue on campus. |