

Featured Article

BY SUHARSH DEV BURMAN

ON THE ROAD TO PILANI

Three batch mates take a delightfully funny journey back to the Vidya Vihar campus after many years...



Burman (left), Mirchi (Center) and Misra on the Horseshoe

“**A** ten point agenda?!?” I nearly fell off my futon (which is hard to slip out of if one has lounged on one). “You have an agenda to cover during this trip! OK, what would be some of those must do items on your list”, I asked. “Parathas at Kapoorji’s (sorry he died – no parathas), drinking in Nutan (not allowed anymore), Fried Maggi & Chickoo shake at C’not (still there – yippee), chai n ciggis at sky, samosas at Naagarji...”

I smiled as I quietly slipped a strip of Pudín Hara and some Alka Seltzers into my tote without them noticing. Yes, this was the one trip we were all looking forward to for some time. Been planning it over a few months, across a few thousand miles with the help of a few hundred emails on varied schedules of 3 men who bonded over a decade ago and were deciding to revisit the starting line, where, as someone aptly said – “the journey begins...”

Misra (LA), Mirch (Mumbai) & I (Delhi) decided to go back to BITS for a day to bask our past. 6:30 a.m. on a cold foggy Delhi morning of January 6, 2003, three of us bundled into my car,

picked up another friend (who had lived a hostel life at BHS, Pilani and generally knew about the BITS life as well during the 80’s), and were off. Freshly brewed coffee (from the thermos packed by my ever understanding wife) made the rounds inside the car, as the CD player exploded into Red Barchetta (Rush), which got Misra into such a tizzy and he screamed out the lyrics and his air guitar impression of Lifeson nearly knocking over the morning cuppa joy all over my almost unused, hence nearly new, backseat.

Old stories, new glories, pals, gals, good times, bad times, you know this, you know that, where this macha is, who is in touch with whom, and the journey weaved its way out of Delhi towards Rohtak. The route taken was, unfortunately, the familiar & the much travelled by: Delhi – Rohtak – Bhiwani – Loharu – Pilani (we promised to seek the road not taken on the way back). We were going back, Jack, doing it again! Wheels turning round and round...brought us closer and closer as the excitement grew. Somehow, by sheer coincidence, we never got around to playing ‘My Old School’ by Dan, even though it was on the CD too – wonder why?

The fog started clearing up after Bhiwani as we decided not to stop

anywhere and have our first break at Pilani itself. Misra was avidly shooting the local scenery from his vidcam and the background score was inter-sprinkled with the likes of good ole tunes from those good ole years, plus some new stuff like Dave Matthews, Morcheeba etc. We reached Loharu and Mirch screamed – Buggas, Jal T! We gotta have another snap of us!!! Well, at least we can have lunch, he protested – but better sense prevailed as the thought of the mouth watering fried paneer maggi started wafting thru the olfactory of our wonder years.

It was nearly 11 am and the gods started smiling as we crossed the railway line at Loharu on the final stretch of our trip. The fog cleared up totally, the sun was out and even the road improved ten-fold. The speedometer suddenly shot to over 80 kmph after struggling to even reach 50 kmph during the first three quarters of the way. We knew we were on a good wicket now and nothing was gonna stop us now...woooeyeah!

Is everybody in? Is everybody in? The town of our re-birth was on the horizon and a sudden silence crept in. Pahari loomed on the right hand side of the highway and the red flag on top of the mandir fluttered in the wind welcoming back the unsung heroes into the cocoon that cradled us into the guys we turned out to be. Suddenly the huge iron campus gates

approached us with a bold BITS emblazoned and the guards almost knowingly opened up automatically - just by seeing the smiles on our faces. Hey, we were not the only ones you have done this you know, and we will not be the only ones doing this in the future too...



Pappu & Girdhari together !

11:30 am and we parked into the guest house we were surprised to see it empty and even more surprised to see renovations. Where were we to stay? Upon asking the chowkidar, we were informed that a new guesthouse had been built next door at the Laxmi Narayan centre and ample acco was available. Phew – as today was registration day and we had tried to book the place by phone but to no avail. Luckily it was 2nd sem and not too many parents were around. Promptly we shot out our ID numbers, just like we were sitting for the comprees, at the registration desk and were told that we could avail an ex-students discount of Rs. 150 on the normal rental of Rs 600 per night for a double room with a/c and heater n attached loo. However, in order to avail that discount, we had to go to the insti, wait outside and seek audience with RK Mittal, get him to sign the form and come back. Hmmn, the more the things change, the more they

stay the same - as Geddy Lee aptly put it.

Forget washing our sandblasted faces, we headed straight to where we spent the maximum amount of daylight hours in BITS – sky lawns. Grins abound as recognition dawned on Pappu's same Alfred E Newman face.

Chais did the round as we sat on the amoeba but no ciggis. Not allowed anymore! The new face of change. However Pappu obliged us with a four square from his personal dibba and refused to take a single paisa for chai etc – still a

sweetheart! Couple of curious students kept gazing at the old fogies as they became more and more vociferous with their antics and stories. One obliged us with the new registration booklet to see which prof was taking what courses. A couple of recognizable names, but mostly new ones and hajjar new courses – Aaah, progress marches slowly on – at least the limbo of the Mitra years was being washed away steadily. Mirch brought up the agenda items as we were sitting on a park bench and eyeing little girls with bad intent... J

What! Mal is a female bhawan!?! What do you mean we can't enter!!! Another shocker –

Malviya, the bastion of the senior most on campus was now donning iron gates and walls and was Meera Bhawan II. The female populace had grown leaps and bounds (quantity yes, but quality still was to be desired for – one student commented. Some things you know, they can just never change – ha ha). There is even a girl student union president here – a first for BITS! Wow man, times they were a changing...

1 pm and hunger pangs started. We decided to check out the RBM, sorry the RB mess now, for some grub. We walked thru Ram Bhawan and discovered that the Bhawans were all now '8' shaped from the familiar 'E' of our times. The ends were blocked – quite good for QT cricket as the tennis ball was now boxed in! The loos – another shocker – tiles man! The loos were tiled. There were mirrors, solar geysers, doors coloured but those huge tiles really took the wind out of our sails. Mirch and Misra promptly went to their old rooms – knocked and woke up some poor buggas to take a snap and vid clips. The amount of PC's with the students came as a pleasant surprise too. Oh yes, we were aptly informed that porn mags were a thing of the past and now students exchanged PC hard drives overnight for 'entertainment', as a LAN was not on the insti agenda as yet. Technology in BITS was finally raising its 'head' – ahem - P2P reigned supreme.

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Cell phones also made a grand entry into the hallowed halls this year. Pilani was on the mobile network of India. Was the cocoon crumbling?

The mess – what a mess! Same dingy atmosphere, same benches and huge tables, same bartans and even the same mess servants, well aged, but still around. We were informed that if mess food was our fondness for the day, then we had to go to Ashok/RP as that was the official mess for

outsiders. The sight of a dirty jhadu and pocha lying on top of the table next to a table being served just killed the scene for us and we decided to skip another of Mirch's agenda items and head to the safety of C'not.

C'not – without Mooras! Mould(y)ed plastic chairs and tables were everywhere. Blue Moon, Golden Dragon, and Kamal etc etc. No mooras man! Kamal (Pappu/Kallu Kapoor clan) had opened up a restaurant at the fag end of C'not and their old place was an techie corner with std/isd, fax, dtp, typesetting, computer education type of thing. Decided to visit his restaurant at night and to check out good ole Blue Moon. Shikanji (Rs. 5, with Bisleri for our US friend's delicate stomach) and Fried Paneer Maggis (Rs 20) made the rounds. BTW, Midnight Beauty comes in 4 flavours now and is Rs 25. Sitting around we noticed an authentic Andhra food joint doing brisk biz – apparently now the gult and the illad (no malice or ill will here, just revisiting ole jargons – wokay machha?) communities constitute over 80% of the populace. Maybe time to relook at the normalization process eh Mr Diro?

Post lunch and no sack! Enthu was brimming in Misra's bones. We walked to Shiv Gangs and remembered all the naughty things that we never did! Hah. The path to the guesthouse was locked but we were informed that never hampered anyone. Drove back to sky – hey we were up against time vs. agenda, and found good ole Giri as a hired hand to Pappu! Smiles and Photo sessions. A psenti walk thru the still damp n dingy hallways of the insti followed suit. We found that the

classrooms were now 4 digit nos. and the classes and the labs, at least from the outside, still looked the same – dilapidated, unpainted, and in various stages of decomposition. Some places we never visited during our times – ref lib and the insti café behind the Audi were rude awakenings. The Audi was shut however we got to know that they have fixed chairs now and smoking, drinking, and other toxins were not permitted. People were frisked before entry!!! Yikes.

Out of the D block, we saw a humdrum of activity on an otherwise sacked out Monday, at C block. Registration was on! IPC was humming and we got a whiff of the T in BITS finally. It was a computerized process. Too much for Misra too handle who had to capture it on video. A new building was also being constructed next to the C block as well. Don't know – Mgmt Centre maybe?

It was 3 pm now and a trip to the temple at Pahari was next on the cards. We drove thru Pilani town and reached the bottom of the hill. Trudged up the 250 steps and reached the top to be greeted by a dog first, then a Pundit. Caught the still fantastic view, offered our prayers, and caught our breath before heading down. Oh yes, Mirch had to stop at least 5 times before he reached the top. And promised to cancel this from his agenda for his future visits... A brief stopover at BHS and its hostel in town, a quick shopping trip for a tie-dye bedcover for home and we were back near the campus gates by 5 pm.

Went to sky and sacked on the lawns till the sun was going down. Went to Krishna bhawan for more photo opportunities for the M & M bros. Also, hostels have iron grills blocking the downstairs wings facing outside now and all

have just one or two points of entry – maybe a GKW menace in the wings? Or the loos?? Stopped at smiling Naagarji for some samosa chat, sprinkled with those fried peanuts and adrak chai. Mirch polished off some Rabri with chopped bananas as well. Aah the good life... Next stop - the

C'not – without Mooras!

Mould(y)ed plastic chairs and tables were everywhere.

Blue Moon, Golden Dragon, and Kamal etc etc. No mooras man!

Mandir.

The temple - still so calm and serene, despite the rising cacophony of birds on the trees lining the roads of the campus. Hey, we never got shat upon despite travelling down these memory lanes. Oh yes, these roads now have names and road signs too! Some roads have no entry signs and there are one-way streets as well. Anyhow, we stuck around for the evening aarti and saw the beginning sem rush to the temple. We fondly remembered the two times there was massive rush at the temple - at the beginning and near the end of sem – both for the same reason – God! Please help me get thru this sem! And thankfully Saraswati obliged us each time... We humbly acknowledged that fact as we lowered our heads and thanked her yet again. Our shoes were still there when we climbed down that made Misra happy - he was seen lurking trying to find his old pair of rubber chappals that were apparently whacked in his 3rd sem out there.

A quick drive thru the campus including agenda item Meera

Bhawan, where Mirch ever so excitedly wanting to see if he were to get lucky this time around. Bugga, maybe I can pull some senior vibes here... It was 7:30 pm by now and darkness was welcomed to provide the cover for our planned activities. C'not time again – but alas, the place was teeming with chitter chatter of movies watched over the hols, new pop bands, general catching up etc; we decided to move to the safety of our room. However, not before a massage by the nai. I started and then Mirch followed too. The general complaint was that maalish was now a forgone art – no one wanted one, as they were too much of delicate darlings. A good tip and more smiles – the mood for the evening was set.

We headed to Kallu's restaurant. Don't know what we ate, but had a nice time as we found some sounds guys sitting next to us. Adding fuel to the fire of our inquisitive minds on how things have turned around in BITS, we sat around and laccha'd.

Changes after changes surprised us – almost no shmokers, no drinking outside, all ghotus, Audi rules, this n that and the evening went on. Mirch found solace in a 5th yearite who was the Oasis English Press co-ord. Sparkle in those eyes shone in the moonlight – BUGGA! Mirch just could not control himself – spiel after spiel on how he started this, n that, and how he needed a copy of the last OEP issue, last Cactus Flower, till Kallu finally signalled that it was already too late for comfort – 11 pm!!! Apparently everything shuts in C'not by 10ish...

A quick paan – that was the only thing open then, to round off the evening and we were ready to hit the guesthouse.

Another laccha session followed in the guesthouse till about 1 am and we decided to call it quits. Guys had to catch a taxi to Agra the next day from Delhi so we had to leave at 6 am again. A sound sleep and awakened by a wake up knock on the door – a few rupees in the right hands can get you anything in Pilani – still!

Chais to break the grogginess and we were off by 6:30 am. Foggy again, but this time we took the road less travelled – Pilani – Loharu – Dadri – Delhi. A new road, nearly two lanes at places, but overall an excellent ride. Despite the fog, we were touching 60 kmph. Reached the outskirts of Delhi by 11 am and packed in some tandoori parathas at a dhaba with Amul butter generously thopoed all over the hot steamy surface. Yummy!

Reached back to the traffic and noise of Delhi by noon and soon everyone was gone. Mirch n Misra almost immediately took the cab to Agra to see the Taj and I started to shave and generally preparing to head to office. Surprisingly, the Pudina hara and Alka Seltzer remained untouched as I unpacked! Took out the Floyd, Dead, Dan, Dylan, Tull, Rush, Zep, Stones etc CD's and put in some new ones for the week ahead. And just as that feeling of weird kind of emptiness started to creep in, a thought raced through my veins - yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away...!

Calling twenty five BITSian entrepreneurs to an exclusive event with Diaz Nesamoney

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Meet Diaz Nesamoney, current CEO and Founder of Viewceler, an enterprise software firm that recently raised \$6.5 million. Diaz is also former COO and co-Founder of Informatica (INFY: NASDAQ), a \$200 MM enterprise software firm. Only 25 invitations. Learn about entrepreneurship, raising financing and the Informatica story.

Time: 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM on May 22, 2003

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