

BY SANJAY KHENDRY ('82 PHY EEE)

RAMBLINGS FROM A NOSTALGIC TRIP TO PILANI

Mooras, neurons and old fashioned BITSian hospitality.

Gurgaon - Rewadi - Narnol - Singhana - Chirawa - Pilani ... It's no longer just Rohtak - Bhiwani - Loharu - Pilani or via Dadri ... we crawl past Gurgaon, zip onto the Delhi Jaipur highway, on to the state highway in Haryana from Rewadi and then bump and grind over the most of the 25 km or so in Rajasthan (camel carts and all) and then we hit Pilani ... the goose bumps start building up... its been 17 long years for me and 23 longer years for my colleague Raju.

The start of an overwhelming visit... short – just 1 and a half days – but filled with unbelievable warmth, emotion and of course nostalgia... how does one capture a homecoming? Where the complete BITSian family – all those who touched us – faculty, students, your old mess or favorite *redi* to just about every one else on campus – welcomes returning alumni with open arms. So please be patient if some of my narrative seems to run speedily in one direction and suddenly veers in another... and then yet another. We go past Birla Sarvajanik (I spent an 'interesting' couple of days there back in 1985 (due to Jaundice... my most distinct memory... they would wake me up just when I had gone to sleep, with some difficulty, to take my temperature... but I digress) the bus stand, Nuthan (for those who remember, Soniji and his spirited store are no

longer there) and a closed BITS gate with a sentry at his post!

The Circuit House has blossomed into VFAST (Visiting Faculty and Student Transit) Hostel... with WI-FI connections, air-conditioning, good food and even better hospitality. We quickly check in and step out.

APOGEE (A Professions Oriented Gathering Over Educational Experience or Academic Week from our days) is on. The reception hut is 'as always' at the corner of the first circle (next to the NCC office)... with some action at all times of the day (and night)... with active midnight, actually really early morning, cricket on the side.

The campus is pretty spruced up, tree-lined roads, freshly painted buildings, with the Iron Man and his omnipresent bird at the Gandhi-Shankar circle. Incidentally roads now have names and one-way traffic has

been enforced for motor vehicles.

The Clock Tower continues to anchor BITSian life. It's a delightful and very nostalgic sight and brings back a plethora of memories of all kinds including those of classes, tests, movies, comprees and mess grub! It retains its captivating charm and character even after so many years in the 'real' world. The D-Lawns along with the others are well maintained and bounded by color that I recollect used to amaze first time visitors – greenery and flowers in the desert? Many miss the fruit that ripens in this Oasis – BITSians past and present – adding value wherever they pass, forever bonded together by their years spend around this Clock Tower.

With the recent Go-Live of BITSCONnect (renamed NEURON - NExt-gen University-wide Redundant Optical Network) and the inauguration of the new imposing library building (the original library and ref lib are closed at the moment) – both events on Mar 20 - some fundamental changes have come into being. BITSCONnect (an effective collaboration between the institute and alumni) brings a 1.5 GB optic fiber backbone to every room in the insti & bhawans and to the staff quarters, with Wi-Fi access at Skylab and VFAST. With increase in external bandwidth this will also work well on distance learning programs, industry-institute programs



Baad mein?

and much more.

All staff has a PC (over 1000!! PC's with staff and labs) connected on the network and hostel wings average 2-3 systems -- See this make a major difference over the next few years, adding phenomenal value.

All those who have participated in this initiative have reason to feel proud; this could be an inflection point as Neuron becomes the backbone for many future initiatives. OLAB (Oyster Lab for VLSI design with \$50M (mostly in software and systems) is a start.

"Sarey Gyarah" or the IBM 1130 is no more. Nor are the card punching machines that were required to feed it.

Student profile now includes lots of gulfs (from AP) especially in the first three years (possibly 50% on campus). BITS will now consider only Inter II year marks for students from AP ignoring 1st year make up's (improvement exam marks) which may see this balancing out somewhat. Also, AIEEE had listed BITS (unilaterally) as a participating institute (admissions through AIEEE process). This has now (Apr 2004) been completely overruled by the High Court of Rajasthan and BITS is free to continue with its admission process. Distance learning Programs (DLP) are doing very well. [NOTE: Now of course we have the BITSAT]

Girls have gone up from the 3-5% in the 80s to about 35% now. Incidentally, old timers, Mal is now MB!!! With walls and all ... That was one of my old hostel rooms that I did not get to visit. The *sams* at Nagar's

redi (near the workshop) are just as I remembered them from so many years back. Naagar was our mainstay for so many years of campus life. I can still sort of taste them as I write this. He simply would not take any money and neither did Pappu on my visit to Skylab (where we spent many many hours). Their warmth was simply overwhelming.

I got to our BT (Birla Temple), the Sarasvathi temple, at about 6:30 AM one morning. A place visited by many daily, for many others during 'testing' periods. It retains a peaceful and soothing atmosphere. I never ever got to the BT that early. This morning I participated in the morning *aarathi* with the punditji and discovered that the place retains its simplicity.

“Junta, get involved with BITS if you can – PS2, recruitment, CEL or in any other way. If you cannot, make a visit, a vacation if you will. Take your spouse/kids and enjoy good old fashioned BITSian hospitality”

Rooms with 'character' like S-70 no longer exist - the first sem Modern Physics classes with Prof VK Tiwari, the packed room (was it High/Low Cal or something else?) with Prof Ravishankar - S70 is now 3215 (15th room on the second floor of Faculty Division 3). All room numbers have been rationalized and C-Block is FD1, M-Block FD2, Workshop FD4 and the

new LecDem Theatre (with PCs and projection systems) seating building FD5. FD5 has come up next to the new library (on the road to CEERI) tucked behind / next to the C-Block/FD1. The bogs there are great too.

C'not is as busy as usual. Cold coffee at Blue Moon now costs Rs.13 and a mango shake Rs.15 (Rs.1.50 & Rs.1.75 or Rs.2.00 in the early /mid eighties) - they still taste very good. BUT and this is a BIG BUT, there are NO MOORAS, yes absolutely NO MOORAS to rest your backside in/on and adjust them to just the right angle in the sand and enjoy your milk shake. Changing times (and possibly a ban by the Rajasthan Govt. - seems to be the 'ecological' issue) and plastic, not of the magnetic strip but of the chair variety, now rules the roost. A quizzical "*Mooras?*" with an incomprehensible look is what you get from current BITSians, obviously plastic has been in place for many years now. The missing *mooras* were the only disappointment on this short but hectic trip. A new super market called Akshay has come up behind the medical center and runs with student participation.

All bhawans have grills all around for safety (no more open arches). New H-wings have been built to enclose the rear perimeter. The 1st floor common room (I checked out Gandhi and Ram) had a TV on one side and a network rack (part of the BITSCoConnect Initiative) on the other - looking somewhat incongruous in the environment but the harbinger of great positive change. These have slightly larger twin-seater rooms for first yearites. The H-wing has another smaller

common room with a TV on the 1st floor.

All hostel bogs have an associated solar heating panel on the roof and they have been renovated with bright ceramic tiles. In winter, first one hunted for a bucket, then an immersion road and then you had to ensure that no one else in the wing had a bucket of water getting heated (else the fuse would blow). This now comes from a tap - but only by afternoon in winter. The other alternatives were to have a cold-water bath (rare for most but enjoyed daily by yours truly) or wait till you got home in first sem or for summer in the 2nd sem. The number of cycles has gone up significantly. The Audi is now very effectively air-cooled. More importantly the blue metal chairs have completely disappeared and in its place is theatre seating. Even after so many years, I still think that no atmosphere has ever

matched that of watching a movie in a packed Audi. Did not get a chance to relive this experience, maybe another day... The ET also has changed (after the fire sometime back) and now has seating just like the Audi.

So what are BITSians like these days ... different but the same ... the energy levels are phenomenal especially very visible during APOGEE. I am sure the velas, the ghotus, and the rest are very much around but so is this indefinable energy ... I interacted with many BITSians from 1st yearites to psentii semites... from guys playing early AM cricket to those browsing for US univs or doing mail in the middle of the night, to the psenti semite from Mal who called 'Pappuuu' at Skylab for a missing shikangi in a tone that only one who has done so for many years can do.

Fests are still run by the students, while being facilitated by the faculty - with great organizational ability as usual – creating leaders at every stage ... While I did not get to any of the paper presentations I did see some of the exhibitions ... work of stellar quality. Magazine ratings notwithstanding, BITS is ready to break out into even greater things. One thing is clear that the energy of students, the outward looking faculty and the alumni, working together will take BITS to great new heights.

Junta, get involved with BITS if you can – PS2, recruitment, Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership or in any other way. If you cannot, make a visit, a vacation if you will. Take your spouse / kids and enjoy good old fashioned BITSian hospitality for a couple of days. Either way you will be reenergized. Highly recommended.



‘94 Batch Second semites’ 10TH Anniversary Praveen Rachakulla (’94 Engg Tech)

10 years ago, on this day I stepped into Pilani town, with lots of baggage and a heart filled with great joy, new aspirations, a new place, a great place. BITS, Pilani. It was a joyous moment after an arduous journey in a train with the occasional ragging by seniors. It was all fun.

New friends. New people from different states, a very different atmosphere where peacocks fly over you, camels pass by and students race on bicycles.

It was the start of a new beginning for me - far away from home but it felt like home; with great friends, instructors, professors, mess waale (devendra), raidi waale (nagarji) and of course the beautiful sky lawns, pappu bhai and great landscapes. What with wonderful people hanging around on the lawns engrossed either in studies or in dreams or just mutual admiration, crazy couples.. and the list is endless.

We were 21, a small group, a close group of second semites, as we are called. We stepped in this small town to make it our new home for the next 4 years. This was the beginning. This was the beginning 10 years ago. As we stepped into a small town called Pilani. My wishes to all my friends, second semites, 1994 batch. Happy 10th year anniversary. To those I remember but whose names I have forgotten, to those whose names I remember... Kumar Govindan, Vishal, Neeraj, Bharani, Subhashini, Rukmini, Renuka, et al.