

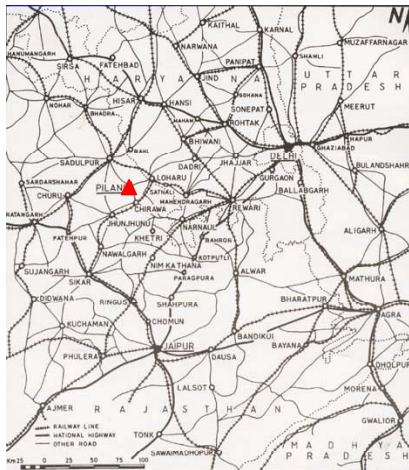
BY DILEEPAN NARAYANAN ('00 MECH)

## BEYOND MY FOUR BEST YEARS – BITS, PILANI REVISITED

*I returned earlier than I had envisaged - but did everything appear just a little different this time around?*



**P**etrichor. The first droplets of evening rain fell into the summer, mitigating the Pilani heat, settling the dust and griming it into the narrow jagged roads. Women pulled up the *pallus* of their saris to wear hoods and ran for shelter, their jolly shouts of feigned helplessness punctuated with silent murmurs of prayer to the Rain God for their children. And larger droplets of August rain fell in the new semester providing respite from the scourge of the Pilani heat. Washing away the present into the past. Cleansing away some memories, leaving behind some. Ushering the newer lot in a cordial yet cooling welcome. Heralding a new season.



The rains fell.

The smell of the earth that saddled the infant droplets of rain suffused in me pangs of nostalgia, transporting me to the same place four years ago, when I'd arrived in BITS as a

freshman escorted by my parents. Does life really come a full circle or does one simply draw non-existent parallels to satiate oneself with pleasant auguries (the sedative tinge of pleasantness infused by retrospective thought), I wondered. It had rained on the same date four years back. Yes. I was pretty sure of it. My parents had left for Chennai the next day, leaving me to embark on my BITSian life. And now, four years later, it was raining. Was this some kind of consummation of my tryst with BITS? Or, was it a mere coincidence? I did not know.

2004C6PS272.

The latest addition to my mailing list. The reason I was braving the heat and rains of Pilani, though I had graduated a year ago. The reason I withstood the four-day siege of my benumbed limbs in trains that smelt like Auschwitz. My first school-ju, who I never got to see during my BITSian life. My brother. He was starting a new life, apparently, away from the comforts of home. My mother told me peremptorily and my father seconded, that it was my responsibility too to help him get settled without hitches. And hence I set my eyes on BITS, Pilani once more. And my heart.

Changes. I expectantly looked for changes.

The dilapidated looking Bhawans; the dusty C-Lawns

where junta played cricket and more cricket; the Gym-G where weeding is always long overdue when it is not BOSM; the Audi where everything happened – from lectures to EDC plays to Music nights (in short—where BITS happened!); the clock tower standing like Atlas, fighting off his breasts, rolling rain-clouds that often tried to cloak his towering self; the *chowki* outside the Audi who, apart from posing riddles to people sitting outside the Audi, was a bit of a conundrum himself; the *redwallahs* and their *redis* which offered *sam-chaat*, *shikanji* and more *sam-chaat* (to say nothing of the yarns about BITS that they spun); the Goddess Saraswati who played for years in a row, the same note on her veena; ANC; C'not; insti; I surveyed all of them through lenses tinted with nostalgia, evaluating a mental contrast with the grey scaled images of the flashback. These still remain the way I had left them. Unaffected by change.

The new library is an imposing magnificent edifice. The walls are tastefully decorated with panels of oil-paintings, some of them depicting mythological scenes. Potted plants and some topiary work garnish the centre of the huge building. The books are also cataloged better, with halls dedicated for every section. Aesthetically wondrous. It gives me the excuse to remark self-righteously: had this Library been during my time, I would have virtually moved into it; and

my CG would have never plummeted the way it did!

BITS has been attacked by the major players in cellular service providing. OASIS has been bought by Airtel. And predictably, Hutch has also ventured into the desert. Every freshman has a mobile phone on him. SMSes fly every five minutes from parent to ward and from fresher to fresher. The wing is alerted if a senior is on the prowl. The seniors, being the experienced campaigners that they are, have learnt to use the mobile to their advantage too. When a senior meets a fresher, he asks only for his mobile number, and not his intro in the public. The mobile is then effectively used to summon the juniors when the coast is clear of wardens and authorities! Lifestyles have digressed from the time when we juniors trudged to C’not to make phone calls to home – the Bhawan phones were perpetually out of

order – and were promptly ambushed by seniors.

Some things have changed.

**“When your kid brother stands towering half a foot over you at six foot two, it’s sometimes prudent for both of you to remain seated. I regretted not having taken one of those detestable ill-fitting ‘BITS, Pilani’ T-shirts of mine”**

I tagged along with my brother for a jaunt on the familiar roads that cut each other at right angles, much like those of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, and other early civilizations whose

salient features the third standard History book scrupulously detailed.

Naagarji waved at me and told me that I had put on a little weight; I told him I missed his *sam-chaats* for the past six months.

Munnaji said in his unique reticently solicitous manner, “*Jaate waqt milke jaana.*” I nodded, resolving to myself for those three

seconds that, unlike the last time, I would see him before I left. The inimitable dosa-maker in ANC (who, I must say, dealt out truly inimitable elliptical dosas!) indulged in some rather expressive bonhomie after which he complained that he had not received last year’s BOSM t-shirt yet. I told him I will see to it that he gets it this time! After which I proceeded to tell him I graduated this June. He bit his tongue and instantly assured me that he knew it all the while and was merely engaging himself in friendly banter. The *rickshawallahs* enquired concernedly whether I will be playing this BOSM as well; I told them I had passed out. They then exhorted me to come to BITS representing some Outsti team and participate in this year’s BOSM. I assured them I would try my best. They all – each one of them – avowed, like they do to every parent year after year, that they would take good care of my brother. “*Aap fikr mat kijiye; hum iska achcha khayal rakhenge.*” The glib words of customary assurance were heartening relief at the moment.

The first-yearites slunk away after stealing a surreptitious glance at my brother; they later came back to me and asked me to which discipline I had been admitted. I told them that I had been admitted to Infosys! Upon which they proceeded to ask me if he was my own brother. I clarified that, in India, it is not yet custom to lease out brothers; it will take some more time for us Indians to embrace the custom. When your kid brother stands towering half a foot over you at six foot two, it’s sometimes prudent for both of you to remain seated. I regretted not having taken one of those



detestable ill-fitting 'BITS, Pilani' T-shirts of mine.

One last time, I gamboled along the road to Gym-G on which I paraded during BOSM; I saw sportsmen—arrayed in their college colors—who were all-importantly striding to the grounds, feeling summoned by the spirit of their respective institutions. And I plodded on the road from the insti to Budh where I trudged back, despondent, after screwing up my CDC tests; people were walking to the mess, animatedly discussing solutions and engrossed in the calculation of their marks and prospective grades. And I strolled on the road to C'not at night; girls were cycling in groups ringing their bells wildly and yelling at boys who had ganged up blocking the road, and were boisterously parading along. Saraswati still smiled at me the same smile she had four years back when I sat in the steps of the temple, staring into the gloaming. And I saw, once again, the hallowed Gandhi Bhawan, which stood

witness to its grandest Bhawan's night, Nihil Ultra 2k++, which, I had thought then, was the grandest celebration of human camaraderie – an overflowing goblet of adrenaline and human spirit; there they were dancing away to night fame and the lilting music was reverberating in every Gandhiite's ear long after.

I wanted to leave.

The place had been etched to remain a part of me. I sojourned in my brother's room the H-wing for one night; my brother's roomie hadn't arrived.

The night seemed to be echoing Thoppul's baritone bellows of four years ago, from room number 316 – he was the ten-pointer, the stud of the wing. In 318, Bul and Chaps – new roomies – were breaking ice, parleying in English like a caring boy and bashful dame trying to court each other and trying, at the same time, not to drop the slightest hint of their

intentions. Gomes was raucously signing his class notes, before a test, to the tune of the latest Bollywood hit song. His roomie, Sucha, was fuming under his breath. We were the Godfathers of the H-wing. I had felt glad to be in the wing that I was as a first-yearite; my wing.

But, why did I want to leave?

Suddenly there was none to share my memories with. I walked in reality, alone. And memories remained, well, memories. I felt speared with the ignominy of having to play witness to the memories of a fraternity. Alone...

"Guys, when is the registration?" the new first-yearites quavered in excitement.

I woke up, in my brother's room.

"Tomorrow!"

A new morrow was ushering itself in. ♦



## *Chitthi aye hai*

### From BITS Pilani, Dubai

Dear Karthik,

... lotsa "firsts" last sem on campus. The start of a campus placement programme like the one in Pilani, mock interviews were conducted by the Campus Placement Cell and 21 companies came and recruited most of the final year students. Also had Techfest 2004 akin to APOGEE. Some cool gizmos like a "Smart Home" (automation of a home using the internet!) and a lie detector were on display.

54 students graduated and we had an elaborate ceremony for them – you guys really should consider starting these.

The institute has also started a Practice School Programme with the first batch of students doing quite well with many receiving offers from their companies. Let's hope the scenario remains equally promising when I do my PS. That's it for now! Take care,

M. (BITS, Dubai)