The BITSAA Edition

Sandpaper [2.0]

Spring 2005

BITS, Pilani, Alumni Magazine

2 BITSians among CNN Time's 25 Global Business Influentials

Dream a little MBA dream with bits2bschool

BITSians in the Media & Bloggermania

From the land of the dragon: The Old House

BITSians win Columbia B-Plan competition

Diaspora's deliberations on life's *Transitions*

The BITSunami Rehabilitation Project

Life saving trees planted by Sudeep Jain ('86), IAS

Sandpaper [2.0]

Spring 2005 Issue

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Of Tsunamis, Transitions and Thankfulness.

Tsunamis. Prior to last December's tragedy I personally would have thought of a Tsunami as something that might have appeared on a Geography test, never quite appreciating what it truly meant. Needless to say, my learning in this regard has been painfully accelerated. World Bank reports indicate that in addition to the several hundred thousand lives that have been claimed, the ability of 645,000 families to make a living has been affected and the impact to local economies is of the order of several billion dollars.

But inasmuch as our proclivity to wage senseless wars often frustrates me, our ability to bond together in the face of shared adversity never ceases to amaze me. The relief efforts have been global, the international community generous and the concern, genuine. On a more personal note, I believe that BITS Pilani did not just teach us to develop algorithms or solve equations but also instilled in us the ethical and moral foundations of outstanding global citizenship. This belief was reaffirmed in the incredible unselfishness and sense of initiative demonstrated by everyone on the BITSunami team and by the members of BITSAA chapters around the world in assisting with rehabilitation efforts.

Gut-wrenching change has been thrust upon those affected by the Tsunami. But for all of us change is the order of the day, the norm. It's hard to turn a corner without butting heads with the many forms of change that induce transitions in our lives – our families, our careers, our industries and all else. Joseph Schumpeter's idea of Creative Destruction and continuous churn within capitalist structures is increasingly relevant given current socio-economic trends in the world.

In this issue we bring you the first in a series – *Transitions*. Each of us, at different stages in our lives, is posed with choices. While we alone can decide what is in our best interest it is often beneficial to gain another's perspective. This issue's *Transitions* focuses on a clichéd, trite yet perpetually debatable issue of immigration and the associated pros and cons. As the Sandpaper team interviewed BITS Pilani alumni and raised the question, the responses evoked a great deal of emotion and debate even within the team. Anytime people express their views emphatically, it's usually a pretty good indicator that they care enough and that caring was motivation enough for us to publish the story.

And finally, let's all learn to be thankful. Thankful for what we have, for the people we know, for the opportunities that we're privileged to be provided with every day. So does thankfulness imply respect for and a willingness to accept status quo? *Sacre bleu*! Not at all! For all progress is predicated on a certain innate sense of dissatisfaction with status quo that is healthy, indeed desirable. The intent is to learn to appreciate and be thankful for all that we have and then set audacious goals and dare mighty things. Acceptance of modest goals and constrained dreams characterize too many lives. In framing the audacity of your goals, use your own benchmarks and definitions of success within businesses, academic institutions, communities or even within your own homes.

Our predecessors within the BITS alumni community are trailblazers and our goal at BITSAA is to tell you their stories, to inspire you and to provide complete and unequivocal support for your goals by facilitating the creation of the world's best knit, most collaborative alumni network.

Sandeep Mukherjee ('95 Phy Mech)
Chief Editor
April 7, 2005

Sandpaper Online

http://www.bitsaa.org/sandpaper/sandpaper.html

BITSAA Newsletter

Every month we bring you a newsletter with stories about BITS and BITSAA through the Yahoo! Groups. In case you miss an edition, you can visit the Newsletter archives online and go through issues and news that you may have missed out on.

Photo Galleries

Click on "Photo Galleries" on www.bitsaa.org and see photos of Pilani, cartoons, artwork and books by BITSians, as well as profiles of BITSians in business, academia and research.

BITSians IN ACADEMICS

At last count, there were **208 BITSian** alums teaching as professors at universities and research institutes around the world. All details including research, emails and phone numbers are to be found on the website. Contact these professors. Start a dialogue!
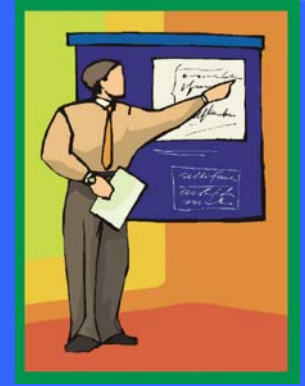
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JOIN THE TEAM

Sandpaper 2.0 is created by a global team with members spanning seven countries in four continents. It's a great place to gain organizational leadership experience, network with the alumni community and enhance your writing skills.

Please send your articles, nominations for Quarterly BITSian, letters to the editor, feedback and requests to join the team to: smukherjee@bitsaa.org

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Special thanks to Anuradha, Chandy & the Pilani team, Sandhya and Dileepan for working especially hard.

BITSAA SANDPAPER VISION

Focus on the BITSian community -
alumni, students and administration.

Build a close knit BITSian **community** by promoting

Increase BITS brand equity

participation, evoking feelings of nostalgia, **pride** and

An emphasis on building
engagement through awareness
and debate

connectedness by keeping everyone in the community **informed**.

Our news, achievements in academics,
business and in the community.
What's happening at BITS and at
BITSAA chapters around the world

To read past issues visit the website:
http://www.bitsaa.org/sandpaper/sandpaper.html

Chitti aye hai

ON THE PURPOSE OF BITSAA

I can see BITSAA taking a shape beyond what we had imagined when we first started out. Along with the Silver Jubilee batch get-together, we should also have an annual alumni meet for those can make it. This can be fixed for a particular week in the year, so that people coming from overseas can plan accordingly. Every year we can have a particular theme attached to it. Ideas will flow with more interaction among alumni from different batches.

Chhatra S Nahata (csnahata@vsnl.net)

Here is my list of what I believe BITSAA's objective should be:

1. To be the network that we can all connect to, when we need help or when we want to help others i.e. collaboration.

2. Finding like-minded folks: Regardless of how surrounded we are with friends and family, friends that remind us of special times of our lives are ALWAYS welcome. Also, one can never have "enough" friends – or fun!

3. Joining hands with people for collectively giving back: To society, to world-at-large, to Pilani etc.

The mentorship initiative is an excellent start for the first objective. We need to get the LinkedIn thing going for doing more of the first part.

Sangeeta Patni (sangeeta_patni@yahoo.com)

VERY IMPRESSIVE

A very impressive magazine indeed. Please feel free to suggest how we could participate, connect, lead efforts locally in the bay area via the now famous BITS connection. Thanks,

Nipun Davar ('84 Pharma)

NO ACTION IN BANGALORE?

I was just going through the co-coordinators database and noticed one very interesting thing, according to me the maximum number of ex-BITSians are in two cities, Hyderabad and Bangalore. In fact, Bangalore might have as many as 6k-10k BITSians. But somehow the Bangalore chapter of BITSAA is most inactive! Why is that?

Even chapters in New Zealand (with less than 6 members) have get-togethers etc while the ONLY event I have seen in Bangalore is the BITSConnect Music Nite which was organized 2 years ago. BTW, that music nite raised Rs 32lakhs ($80k) in one night. This is more than what ALL chapters put together in US raise round the year. This means that the potential in Bangalore is HUGE but according to me what we lack is leadership.

I was in Bangalore in Jan of this year and arranged a Controlz (OASIS, APOGEE dept) reunion for which 17 people turned up. They all loved the reunion and all of them were somehow waiting for someone to come and arrange it for them. In that one night we raised Rs. 30k ($600) for a Controlz website.

Can we co-coordinators do something to make the Bangalore chapter more active? The BITSAA Reunion in Bangalore could potentially be the biggest party Bangalore has ever seen. I would do it if I get a sabbatical to Cypress Bangalore for a semester!

Ashish Garg (gargyboy@yahoo.com)

I feel the size of the chapter is inversely proportional to the number of events conducted. Events targeting a larger population naturally take much longer to organize and many more people need to be involved while those targeting a smaller number of people tend to take less work.

I believe that the best way a larger chapter can meet frequently is by creating smaller clubs centered on special interests like biking, hiking, music, drama, technologies, community work etc. This is very similar to the idea of clubs in BITS. Your controlz reunion is a good example.

Prasad Thammineni (prasad@bitsaa.org)

Great to see such extensive BITSian participation in BITSAA's SiliconValley chapter. Hard to believe it's been so long since we boarded that bus to Pilani along the road to self-discovery.
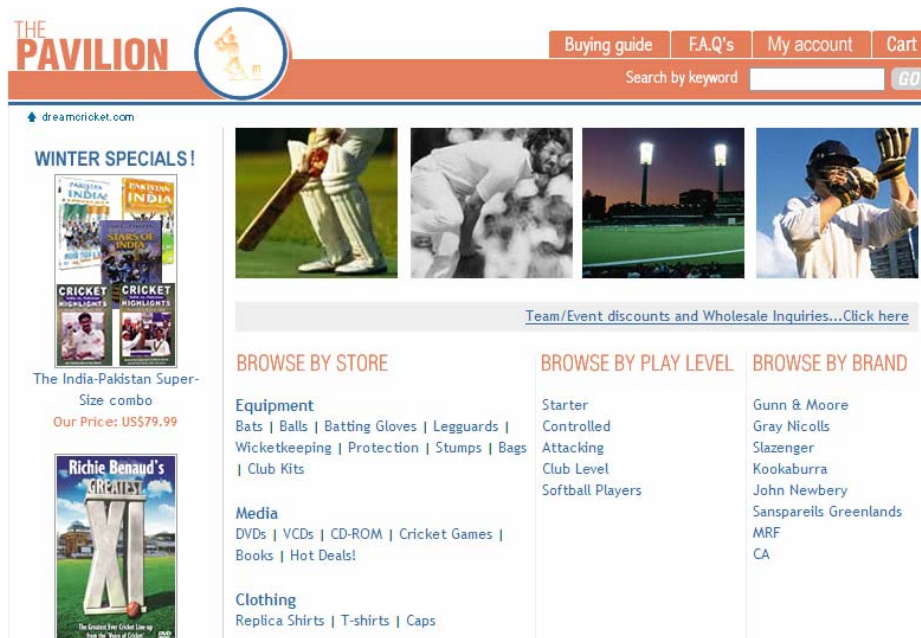
Prasenjit Chaudhuri (prasenjit@bitsaa.org)

♦

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BITS & BITSAA NEWS

Rising above barriers

Archna Bhandari (Chem), presently the Principal Engineer, Mitretek Systems, Inc. is one of the Special Recognition Winners of 2004 National Women of Color Technology Awards. In the words of the awards committee "In many cases, they have broken through barriers of culture, class, and even language. In others, they have surpassed racial and social expectations. But they have risen above these barriers to demonstrate the importance of perseverance and the power of a

Archna Bhandari

dream."

Breaking new ground

Dr H P Vyas ('71 ME), Director, Solid State Physics Laboratory (SSPL), Delhi, has been promoted to the rank of Sci H and Outstanding Scientist w.e.f. 19 August 2004. He obtained his ME from BITS, Pilani in 1971. In recognition of SSPL team's outstanding research contribution under his leadership, he has been honored with prestigious Path-Breaking Research Award for developing and establishing 12 GHz MMIC Technology in DRDO.

Ride across the river

Dilip D'Souza's ('76 EEE) Ride across the River was adjudged the winner of the fourth Outlook/Picador India Non-Fiction Competition on Feb 25, 2005.

Faculty of eminence

Dr. Yogendra Gupta (Phy) has been recently honored with the prestigious Eminent Faculty Award from the Washington State University.

President's Award

Padmanabhan Seshaiyer, Asst. Prof. Texas Tech University has been awarded the prestigious 2005 President's Excellence in Teaching Award, Texas Tech University.

The new biz mantra

Perhaps anyone who has ever worked in an industry has had trouble with the four letter word. Well, we don't know what you thought but we meant the dreaded species called BOSS. **Rashmi Datt ('MMS)** managed to survive for 19 years in an HRD environment with 5 bosses (Gosh!). And now, she has come up with a new book on "Managing Your Boss". This 174 page book has been received well and is a treat to read.

Anuradha's debut novel endorsed by 'The Hindu'
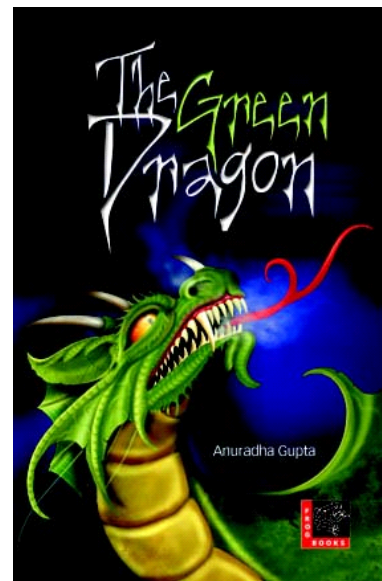
Anuradha Gupta (86A6)'s debut novel, The Green Dragon, dealing with environmental issues is 'a handy tool for projects and debates on the environment, tells you why the earth is in need of help.'

according to a review from Subajayanthi B, **The Hindu**. With other good reviews from the Free Press Journal, the book makes us 'think about issues like war and preserving the environment'.

New kid on the block

Harish Lakshman, a BITSian of the 1989 batch, has been

featured in The Week Cover Story. "By the third generation a family business usually goes kaput. But there are ways and means to buck the trend," says Gita Piramal. "Harish is a hands-on scion" says the writer about the 31 year old Director of Rane TRW Steering Systems of Chennai.

Keeping the lights on in TN

Congratulations to **Hans Raj Verma ('82 MMS)**, IAS, on his appointment to the post of Chairman of Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. This prestigious post carries with it, as you'd expect, a far from light amount of responsibility.

Captured in time

BITS alumnus, **Agendra Kumar**, country manager, Veritas Software, never forgot his two passions---IT and photography. His recent photography exhibition, Symphony of Silence, organized at the India Habitat Centre last year, demonstrated that the BITSian way of life lives on with us even when we are far away from our alma mater.

Rajendra Khare is Chairman of India Semiconductor Association

BangaloreIT.com 2004 conference saw the launch of the India Semiconductor Association - a forum for better interaction between members and the government, academia, VCs and industrial bodies. MD of Broadcom, **Rajendra Khare** is the first Chairman of ISA.

Movie 'Swades' inspired by a story written by Dilip D'Souza – a BITS alumnus

The director of 'Swades,' Ashutosh Gowariker, got the idea for the film from a column **Dilip D'Souza ('76 EEE)** did for rediff.com about the true story of two young engineers from Kerala who built a dam in rural Maharashtra and supplied electricity where there was none. Dilip's contribution was acknowledged in the titles of the film. Dilip adds, "The articles about these two guys were used to nominate them for the MIT Technovators prize last year, which they actually won".

Open-Silicon Announces Hitesh Bhatnagar, as GM

Open-Silicon, Inc., a fabless ASIC company that provides an alternative to traditional chip design and supply chain models, today announced the appointment of **Hitesh Bhatnagar** as general manager of Open-Silicon India.

2 Indians in CNN/Time's 25 Global Business Influentials – Both BITS, Pilani Alumni

Time Magazine and CNN recently released its list of 2004 Global Business Influentials, 25 leaders in a broad range of industries recognized for setting standards in areas like innovation, globalization and effecting change. This year's list includes 2 Indians – **Vivek Paul**, CEO of Wipro

Technologies and **Balaji Krishnamurthy**, CEO of Planar Systems, both alumni of the BITS, Pilani.

BITSian MBA from Harvard Business School?

BITS, Pilani, may soon have its first MBA from Harvard Business School. One of our recent applicants has been admitted and has not yet made the decision. The person in question has the initials N.S! More on this next time.

Autar Kaw selected CASE Florida Professor of the Year

Autar Kaw ('76 Mech), a professor of mechanical engineering in the University of South Florida's College of Engineering has been named the 2004 Florida Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement for Teaching.

BITSians win Columbia B-School competition

Rajashekhar, Sriram, Kavikrut, Srikanth and **Amit** with guidance from alumnus **Anupendra** won the 2005 annual A. Lorne Weil Outrageous Business Plan Competition. The contest is organized by the Eugene M Lang Center for Entrepreneurship.

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MASALA & SPICE

Mani Shankar's (BITS '78) Tango Charlie opens strongly finishing at the top of the box office as of March 31st

TANGO CHARLIE, a movie about the fight between the Border Security Forces and the militants within our country starring Ajay Devgan, Bobby Deol, Sanjay Dutt and Suniel Shetty is receiving good reviews at the box office. True to Mani Shankar's style, he enmeshes heavy gadgetry and stylized action adroitly.

The story has a strong message to offer - that violence doesn't pay and that war is futile, eventually causing human loss. The intentions of the film-maker need to be applauded!

Mumbai with the byline "Where Crime Meets Confusion!"'

Padmini Chettur's (BITS '87) World Premiere of Paper Doll!

After her successful UK premiere of 3 Solos where one writer called the performance a combination of "serene elegance and exquisite detail, morphing fluid and lithe movement with the rich rhythms of the mridangam drum and saxophone," Padmini Chettur heads off to Netherlands for the World Premiere of her latest work, Paper Doll. In Paper Doll, performed by Padmini Chettur's company of five dancers she examines the chain of paper dolls we used to cut out when we were children. They represent perfection, but also two-dimensionality. After the Netherlands premiere, she takes the show to Berlin and Brussels

Anu Hasan (BITS '88) turns producer and takes the Mumbai Express on April 14th

Tamil-Hindi bi-lingual 'Mumbai Express' starring Kamal Hassan, is the first movie that has Anu Hasan sharing production credits.

In Mumbai Express, produced by her family's production house, Rajkamal Studios, Kamal Hassan teams up with Singeetham Srinivas Rao of Pushpak fame. Giving Kamal company is Manisha Korala. Kamal who plays the character of Avinashi alias 'Mumbai Express' is a daredevil deaf motorbike rider who does stunts in deep wells and other difficult spots. It's a full length comedy taken in the backdrop of

◆

BY THE BITSUNAMI TEAM, ANURADHA GUPTA ('86 MMS), SANDEEP MUKHERJEE ('95 PHY MECH), LAXMAN MOHANTY ('81 EEE), SRIDHAR NAGARAJAN (AID)

THE REHABILITATION OF TSUNAMI AFFECTED AREAS – A BITS ALUMNI INITIATIVE

To restore and to sustain: Two tsunami affected villages in Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam district, Naaluvedapathy and Pushpavanam, have been adopted by BITS Pilani alumni for rehabilitation within the next five years.

As you're all probably already aware, in December this past year Tsunamis of biblical proportions struck India and several other countries. Sadly enough, this was merely the latest in a spate of natural disasters – adding to the adversity inflicted by the super cyclone that hit Orissa in 1999 and the earthquakes that rocked Gujarat in 2001. Cities, coastal communities and seaside resorts were devastated. Over 290,000 people lost their lives and thousands others were injured. Several countries including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand were affected as over a million people were rendered homeless. The World Bank reports that the Tsunami will cost India alone an estimated $1.2B in reconstruction. And yet again, as we have seen so often in the past, it is in the face of shared adversity that people cast aside their immediate worries and differences and unite with a common goal of making a difference in the lives of those affected. As Shankar (BITSunami team, Sub-Editor – The Hindu), describes it "such cataclysmic events serve not merely as opportunities for resurrection but also as checkpoints to re-examine our own lives, regain a sense of perspective and give back to our communities."

In a most touching display of humanity, people all over the world, BITSians included, sent in donations to effect immediate relief, volunteered their assistance and did all that was humanly possible to help.

But it isn't mere charity that's the answer in such situations as Laxman, a member of the Sandpaper team discovered when he visited cyclone affected villages in Orissa. The villagers who used to be relatively affluent explained that they found it hard to accept external 'aid' and instead of rice or items of daily need were more interested in ways to rebuild their local economies and regain their financial self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

REHAB OR RELIEF?

While many rushed in with relief by way of money and materials, contributions which were certainly appreciated and commendable no doubt, some within the BITSAA community recognized that in the midst of this disaster, there was the need for, and an
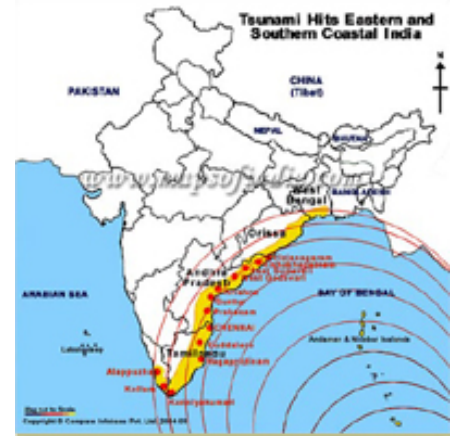
opportunity to launch an initiative dealing in longer-term results and sustainable development. Or as our Vice-Chancellor described it, a 'holistic' effort. This notion led to the formation of the BITSunami team.

Close to Ground Zero, a team from BITSAA's Chennai chapter, with members ranging from 25 to 75 years in age, got (and still are) busy putting together a rehab initiative, valued at over a million dollars, and BITSAA chapters across the globe are embracing the project wholeheartedly and with immense pride.

The distinction and rationale for billing the effort as rehabilitation-focused is because it involves integrated development and is comprehensive in nature, embracing all of the following elements:

- **Infrastructure rebuilding**: Houses, community buildings, roads, over bridges
- **Livelihood growth**: Fishing, boats, nets, new techniques.
- **Agriculture**: Land fertility reclamation, cropping pattern, cattle and poultry
- **Health & Sanitation**: Health center, water purification systems, noon-meal scheme for children, medical camps
- **Education**: School renovation, creating endowments etc
- **Trauma Care**: Psychological counseling and rehab to lead a normal life
- **Ecology rehab**: Coastal defense mechanisms

THE VISION

Rehabilitate two villages in the hardest hit areas. *Nagapattinam*, the Tamil Nadu district in which the two villages, *Naaluvedapathy* and *Pushpavanam* are located, was one of the worst affected areas

VALUE PROPOSITION

The BITSunami effort is distinctive in its approach in the following five ways:
1. The comprehensive nature of the rehabilitation – Integrated Development

2. The incorporation of the knowledge and the involvement of the local populace in executing the project to deliver meaningful results.

3. The formal involvement of BITS Pilani led by the Vice Chancellor himself. The enthusiastic response from BITSians around the world, a host of corporations of international repute such as Wipro, WeP, HP, Polaris, Infineon and the involvement of a number of non-government organizations.

4. A group of highly committed and qualified professionals who can bring in innovative solutions – read BITSians. This is by virtue of having one of the largest, most collaborative alumni professionals.

Want to lose weight? Join BITSunami

Srikanth ('88 Chemical) found an innovative way of raising funds. His father and he entered into a public pact that for every kg he loses starting March 6th 2005, up to the first 10 kgs his father will donate Rs. 1000/- to BITSunami and Rs.5000/- for every kg thereafter.

5. Overheads kept to a bare minimum with everybody chipping in. Want figures? Just Rs.3K a month for a coordinator at the village

level, Rs.10K a month for the overall coordinator based in Chennai. Another coordinator at *Nagappattinam* district in a month or two would cost just Rs.6K per month.

APPEAL TO BITSIANS

The communities need BITS Pilani alumni to prove that we are equal to the task of completely changing the face of two villages impacted by a tragedy *after the NDTV and CNN crews have left*.

Just giving up a minor luxury could mean providing a basic necessity to a villager, as Sudeep Jain, IAS, (BITSunami team member) points out "the equivalent of two cold drinks per day for the duration of the project would be immensely valuable".

Whether you are involved in sending funds, assisting with funding efforts, spreading the word through your network of friends or organizing events, every little bit counts.

PROJECT DETAILS

The *Nagapattinam* district was one of the worst affected districts in mainland India during the Tsunami disaster. Close to 100,000 have been rendered homeless and more than 6,000 lives have been lost. The devastated villages will require extensive involvement by government, philanthropists and people like you and me to restore a semblance of normalcy.

Two years ago, drought-stricken farmers in a village in Tamil Nadu walked into the Guinness Book of World Records by planting the highest number of saplings in a 24-hour period

Stirred by the calamity, like-minded professionals from Pilani expressed a desire to leverage their technical and networking skills to reach out to and develop these villages.
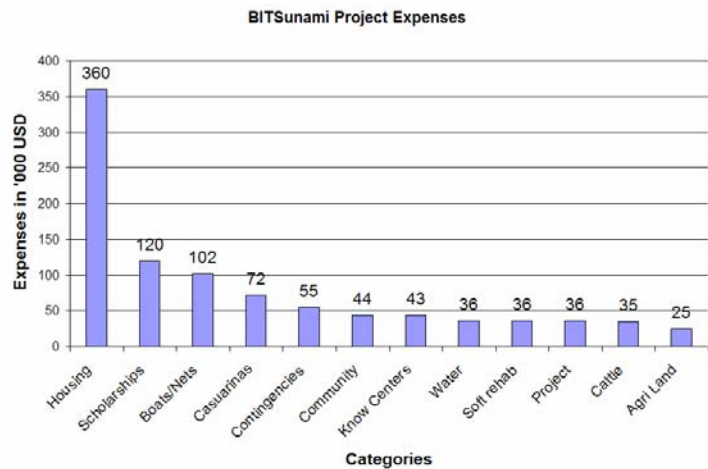
The entire project is being routed through BITS Pilani Alumni Tsunami Rehabilitation Trust (BITSUNAMI in short) – a trust formed by the alumni in the Chennai chapter. The District Collector of *Nagapattinam* and the District Monitoring Commissioner are also assisting with the team's efforts.

Partnerships with focused NGOs such as LAFTI, PREPARE, the Indian Council of Child Welfare (ICCW), LEAD, BOBP (Bay of Bengal Project) and MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) are also being established.

The team project will not just create these two model villages but also inspire people around the globe and most importantly, leave a lasting impression in the lives of the villagers for generations to come. The Project will last for five years with a project office at *Nagapattinam*.

An interesting fact about *Naaluvedapathy* is that

through the efforts of Sudeep Jain, the village is in the Guinness Book of World Records for the achievement of planting 80,244 trees in 24 hours using a 300-strong volunteer team. How the plantation helped during the Tsunami is reported by Reuters in the excerpt below.

TREES TO COMBAT TSUNAMIS

An extract from a Reuters Report, January 30th 2005

Two years ago, drought-stricken farmers in a village in Tamil Nadu walked into the Guinness Book of World Records by planting the highest number of saplings in a 24-hour period. On December 26, as the killer tsunami struck down thousands of people and homes, the casuarinas and eucalyptus trees, which had been planted to appease the weather gods, saved the lush green village of *Naaluvedapathy*. Of the nearly 8,000 people who died in the state, including 6,000

Details of the project elements and preliminary budget can be read, not as simple mathematics, but as an indication of how much has been lost and how much can be retrieved through a small gesture on the part of everyone.

Also, anybody who wishes to contribute to a holistic effort at rehabilitation and integrated development of the Tsunami affected area on a long term basis could do so by committing funds in the immediate term and/or also spread their contribution out over the next five years. The team is also expecting corporate sponsorship of project elements in entirety – these are yet to be formalized and committed. Income Tax exemption under Section 80G for contributions from within India has been applied for.

WORLDWIDE EFFORTS

As news of the Tsunami rolled in, the immediate need was to disseminate information to BITSians worldwide on how they could get involved including comprehensive advice from and specific pointers on relief efforts, agencies, contributions and potential matching donations. Several emails whizzed across multiple BITSAA mailing lists as a consequence of which our alumni community's awareness grew dramatically.

A fundraiser, Nrithyanjali was organized in New Jersey with active support from **Pushkala ('95 MMS)**.

Contributions
http://www.bitsunami.in/

For those outside the US/India
Cheques to be made out to (under email advise to bitsaach@yahoo.com) for other currencies, please email bitsaach@yahoo.com

For those in India
Cheques made out to "BITSUNAMI" to be mailed to:

> c/o K S Venkateswaran
> D-17 Narumukhai Apartments
> Brindavan Nagar Extension
> Velachery (West) Chennai-600088 India
>
> E-Mailbitsaach@yahoo.com

Contacts
> K Srikanth, Tel: +919840155510
> R Kurian, Tel: +919840284250
> K Venkateswaran, Tel: +919444024583

For those in the US
Send a cheque to "OPEN" with "BITSAA Tsunami relief" in the memo line to the following address:

> Kumar Thiagarajan
> 25470 Gimbel Drive
> South Riding, VA 20152

OR

> Rajesh Ramadoss
> 652 Benner Rd Apt 10
> South Riding, VA 20152
> Allentown, PA 18104

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in one fishing village, only seven were from *Naaluvedapathy*. The casuarina trees, which numbered more than 60,000, took the brunt of the tsunami waves as they swept through the area. Sudeep Jain, who led the plantation drive, has started a trust since the tsunami struck to undertake tree plantation along the 1,000-km coast of Tamil Nadu with the help of his engineering school classmates (read BITSians). "We don't need to anymore advertise the benefits of tree plantation... (It) is the cheapest and best way of rehabilitating the tsunami ravaged coastline," he said.

FUNDING

The corpus of funds the project will need is almost a million dollars, half of which we hope to raise from BITSAA members worldwide and the other half from philanthropists and companies through the efforts of the team and BITSians. We appeal to you to contribute generously to this fund.

A number of people volunteered and were involved with various non-profit organizations on the ground. **Srinivasa Rao ('78 MMS)**, a resident of Singapore for close to two decades now, was featured on Singapore's Channel News Asia for his exemplary work in this realm. Other BITSians who were actively involved during the Tsunami relief efforts include **Chandra ('91)** and **Smitha Kalyani ('96 Comp Sc)**, active with the Association for India's Development (AID) in Chennai. **Preetish Nijhawan ('85)** is on the Board of the Non Profit *Pratham* and works in Austin, Texas. He went to India subsequent to the Tsunami to contribute not just monetarily but also to volunteer his services.

Ravi Baid ('86) and his non-profit in Delhi, *Roundtable India (RTI)*, were involved in an extensive effort in Tamil Nadu and a few other southern states. RTI was officially approved as an NGO undertaking rehabilitation work and rebuilding infrastructure.

Sea front view after debris was cleared

Sridhar Nagarajan ('94 Phy Chemical), an AID volunteer in San Jose, worked in Chennai and Koovathur in Kancheepuram district for 2 weeks (Jan 9, 2005 to Jan 23, 2005). At the end of his tireless stint – including logistics, material management and rehabilitation – he authored a first-hand perspective on how humanity has come together to the aid of Tsunami victims.

"In summary, the whole world has really come together in support of this initiative. Life in Tamil Nadu in my view is slowly but surely returning to normalcy. The relief workers and the government are doing a great job. Many friends I know have said 'at the end of all this, most people are going to feel good' about this. Well, if not that, people need to realize that natural disasters such as this cannot be controlled but at least it is heartening to see that the world is unified in dealing with the aftermath."

We also thank and acknowledge all of you who have contributed in so many ways that we perhaps are not aware of and please do stay involved...

CONCLUSION

The BITSAA Chennai chapter has taken on this arduous but truly inspiring task upon itself. This gives BITSians as a community a phenomenal opportunity to help and make a difference. Holistic development on this scale involves a firm commitment and one hopes that BITSians and people the world over will continue to extend their support to this noble venture. The exercise will also create a knowledge base that can be used in other villages or in similar situations, god forbid, if it's needed.

Let's all commit to helping in any way we can.

♦

Getting the local community involved…

…and making a difference

In conversation with Sudeep Jain (BITS '86), former District Collector of Nagapattinam

Who/What inspired the initiation of the project?

Several NGOs and individuals devoted themselves to the immediate relief effort. I even found small associations from Gujarat who, despite their own fiscal situation, had come down to *Nagapattinam* and committed to spending a few months and whatever money they had. BITSians, in sharp contrast, are certainly far more blessed in many ways. While many saw the Tsunami only as a tragedy, we saw not just the unfortunate aspects but also the opportunity to devote ourselves to a massive re-building exercise. While most of us live for ourselves, it is also true that each of us do want to contribute to society at large. This

The First BITSunami Expedition

(L to R): R Nagarajan, Sudeep Jain, A Shankar, Krishna Mudaliar and KS Venkateswaran

is the time to realize our broader goals – by contributing generously, sharing knowledge and ideas and leveraging our networks to devise innovative solutions. The cumulative effect of these ideas is what I'd speak of as our collective inspiration.

How does your involvement, given the fact that you were the former District Collector, enhance the project?

My personal involvement dates back a couple of years during my tenure as District Collector of *Nagapattinam*. I was fortunate to work with the local community on almost all projects because of which I knew a few people personally in most of the villages. Because of my background today I am more effectively able to communicate the value of the BITSunami Project to all the citizens, the local politicians and the officials. By positioning this as my personal project I've ensured that we receive the complete support of all stakeholders. My colleagues and I are also in touch with close to 100 companies and individuals for sponsorship.

Why these two villages?

The Tsunami claimed 6600 citizens from my erstwhile district. As summed up by one of my deputy collectors on 28th Dec from Ground Zero - "Sir all our good work and that of all our predecessors has been washed away in a few minutes". Today my nine-year old daughters are afraid of visiting *Nagapattinam* because the city is not what they had known it to be.

Why is long-term rehabilitation critical to this effort?

Because after the debris is cleared, the bodies removed and the living have been provided food for a month, we still have to ensure that thousands of these psychologically devastated people have shelters as well as a means of livelihood. This is also an opportunity for us to ensure that we build model villages for those who've not been quite as fortunate as we have. ♦

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

Baad mein?

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

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 gults (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 *aarthi* 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 BITSConnect 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 'Papppuuu' 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.

BY CHANDY JOHN BENJAMIN ('01 INSTRU) AND GAURAV VERMA ('02 MATHEMATICS)

CENTER FOR SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

New initiatives and strategic direction of the CSD @ BITS, Pilani.

The Center for Software Development (CSD) CSD was set up by Dr. KRV Subramanian with the vision that it would "provide a forum where the IT development activity at BITS would find a wider utility and the intellectual capital available at BITS would be tapped towards development of quality software". This is the objective that has driven Team CSD. After Dr. KRV Subramanian, CSD has been led by his wife Mrs. Usha Subramanian and is now currently under the stewardship of Dr. Rahul Banerjee, CSD coordinator.

Over the years the CSD has grown into a facility for cutting edge tech research and development in addition to its original objective of software development. Dr Banerjee believes that there is no dearth of talented young minds at BITS who are enthusiastic about software development initiatives and software research. In fact this is how members are inducted into the team. The criterion of your CGPA plays no role in the selection process. What the team demands can be summarized in just two words: sincerity and aptitude. The sincerity to work with dedication on tasks assigned. And the aptitude to learn and grasp facts and methods easily and quickly. CSD today includes 75% first degree students, 10% Masters and the remaining 15% PhD students.

The CSD makes use of hardware platforms already available at the institute and has also added hardware systems like the IBM Netvista™ / Netfinity™ / xSeries 235 / 255 eServer™ servers, IBM Netvista Workstations, HP Scanners, Logitech QuickCam™ Pro Web Cameras, iPen™ Graphics Tablets. In addition to these the CSD also uses developmental software tools such as Visual Studio, Visual Studio .Net, Eclipse and WSAD for Java related development, Macromedia Studio Mx for multimedia related development and the Lotus Domino Server for E-learning related services. The CSD has identified the areas of internetworking, grid computing, wearable computing and technology transfer as its primary areas of emphasis.

> CSD was set up by Dr. KRV Subramanian to "provide a forum where the IT activity at BITS would find a wider utility and the intellectual capital available at BITS would be tapped towards the development of quality software"

CSD's

BLUECHIP INITIATIVES

Project BITS Linux commenced in 2001 and now has a focus on developing and distributing its own version of the Linux Operating System which has several new and innovative features. It will have CMFS Architecture, default support for IPv6 and Bluetooth, a new graphical web browser with IPv6 support, a Video-on-Demand (VoD) base system with native IPv6 capability and related enhancements.

The **BITS Multimedia Operating System (BITS MOS)** project, initiated in 1999 aims to develop an operating system which caters to soft real time restrictions of multimedia applications. With the knowledge acquired since the project's inception, Team CSD now believes that it can after all develop such a system that can provide inherent support for the soft real-time restrictions imposed by multimedia applications.

Another initiative is the **Virtual University** (VU) project. The VU is a supplementary facility for the students pursuing a degree through the Distance Learning Programmes Division of BITS, Pilani. Using this facility, off-campus students can make use of facilities normally only available to someone who is on-campus. Project VU is

Cutting edge **Software** Solutions...

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extremely beneficial as a student can work at his/her own pace without being the limitations of time and space! Efforts are being made to simulate classroom teaching which would make it easier for the student to understand the course. CSD plays a major role in providing technical support to distance learning operators of BITS, wherein it enables professors on campus to deliver live interactive lectures with full video and audio apart from slides and other documents. All that a student (sitting in any part of the world!) needs is a multimedia PC or a laptop with headphones, a microphone and a good internet connection to participate in this virtual classroom. A student can ask questions and also participate in online quizzes.

consists of researchers from various disciplines such as Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry, Instrumentation and Mathematics working quantum algorithms, cryptography and circuits.

CampusBuzz is an initiative managed wholly by students in the CSD team. It was started in 2001 to bridge any gap arising from the absence of any online resource about the campus and its activities. In the near future the CBuzz Team @ CSD hopes that this intranet portal would be capable of managing all the needs of a BITSian.

Perhaps the most important achievement of the CSD has been relating to the Internet Protocol version 6 (Ipv6), **Project – IPv6@BITS**, one of the earliest structured international projects in this field, started in 1998. Dr. Rahul Banerjee believes that Ipv6 will be the cornerstone of Next Generation Networks.

CSD Team @ BITS Pilani

CSD Bluechips
Linux
BITS MOS
Virtual University
Quantum
CampusBuzz
IPv6@BITS
Grid-One Computing

Some of the highlights of the IPv6 specific work at BITS are as follows:

- BITS, Pilani was the first from India to be on the International IPv6 Backbone known as the 6-Bone.

- BITS, is the first university in the world and the only Indian University that holds the status of a pTLA (pseudo top-level aggregator for 6-bone addresses) for IPv6.

- The IPv6@BITS website was the first Indian website to be 100% IPv6 capable – IPv6 or IPv4 enabled.

- BITS led the IPv6-QoS Group at the European Commission's Next Generation Networks Initiative.

- BITS has bought out the world's first three native IPv6 based applications employing Video-over-IPv6 technology and allowing Dual-Stack Compatibility.

- BITS Pilani is the first university outside Europe to be granted the NGN-I (Next Generation Networks Initiative) Membership by the European Union (EU). A variety of projects undertaken by the CSD have also been sponsored by the EU.

- BITS is also helping several Indian companies such as Wipro, Novell, Samsung Research, FutureSoft other universities and engineering colleges to build small experimental IPv6 setups.

Also underway is the **BITS Digital Library Project** to design a digital library system that can inter-operate with other digital library systems. The idea is to provide a smooth user interface with high-quality, efficient search and service engines so that anyone accessing this feature would be comfortable getting the feel of using this as a single knowledge base. CSD also participates in the Oxford based JournalServer Digital Library Project.

The first phase of the **Grid-One Computing** initiative involves building a medium-sized grid spanning the campus and involves many server-class systems, as many as a thousand PCs for the institute laboratories and in faculty chambers, and PCs in hostel rooms and staff quarters. This could use operating systems like Linux, FreeBSD, SCO Unix, HP-UX, Sun Solaris, Windows 2003 Server, Windows 2000/Me/XP, Novell Netware, Win CE, Palm OS, et cetera. In the second phase, the initiative will connect the resultant grid to span the BITS campuses of Goa and Dubai. This would be amazing when one looks at it from the point of campus connectivity. This'll be built as an IPv6 native support based grid.

A research facility of mobile and wearable computer research is also in the pipeline replete with wireless access including IEEE 802.11b, Bluetooth, and IRDA apart from the regular connectivity of the Ethernet genre. The setup involves Pocket PCs, SmartFones, Tablet PCs and a host of software to support R&D. Part of this funding has come from Microsoft Research, Redmond and will be used for providing

Looky here folks!

on-campus students and faculty facilities for performing experiments related to software development and deployment for mobile services.

CSD COURSES

CSD also offers a set of skill-oriented courses each semester which can be undertaken by any student in addition to a regular academic course load. These courses include ASP.NET, Java, Linux Programming, OOP with C++, basic C Programming, Oracle, VB.net, C# & .NET, and XML. Students can register in these courses by paying a prescribed semester fee. The students are also provided certificates on completion of the course. Further, assistance is provided to students appearing in campus interviews on basic programming concepts which are required for job interviews.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Rahul Banerjee believes that the work that CSD has been doing over the years is slowly but surely getting noticed also gaining critical acclaim. The amount of external funding that BITS, Pilani has received for its R & D projects has crossed Rs. 95 lakhs excluding the grant

provided by Cisco for the BITSConnect project. A team of five students won the IBM Great Minds Challenge, an all-India competition in 2003, where they presented a prototype of the Panchayati Raj System – their in-house evolved system of e-Governance. Three students were chosen for Microsoft Research Internship at Redmond, USA. A two member team of BITS students reached the finals of the Intel Student Research Contest.

CONTACT CSD

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Or Visit
http://www.bits-pilani.ac.in/csd/Home/

All these are clear indicators that Team CSD's efforts are coming to fruition and creating reason for some serious BITS, Pilani pride.

♦

BY SUKANYA VIJAYAKUMAR ('02 CIVIL)

CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

Enthusiastic faculty and students and the involvement of alumni help CEL become one the nation's preeminent centers of its kind.

A three-hour meeting with the president of CEL, BITS, Srinivas Jampani, had the effect of a tornado on me. Only, at the end of the experience, I wasn't left amidst debris. I had been initiated to a highly motivated and structured organization that could leave the common man confounded. If I had been even mildly skeptical of him, I would have called Jampani a fanatic. However, infectious enthusiasm and a thirst to achieve left a deep impression on me. Yet, being able to appreciate qualities like enterprise, un-put-downable confidence and amazing drive was not enough – I was gasping at the end of the meeting. Had I met the whole crowd of budding leaders at CEL, I would have been sapped of every last iota of my energy. Jampani's

enthusiasm, unlike that of other people of his age, does not end with talking at length about what he would want to achieve in life-his dreams and ideals take him to a different strata, amongst the likes of Vivek Paul and Nandan Nilekani – that of entrepreneurs.

He is one of several people whose fire and passion run India's finest entrepreneurial organization at college level – the Centre for Entrepreneurial Leadership at BITS.

CEL consists of eight domains – Networks, Rural Entrepreneurship Development, Resources, Sales and Marketing, Technology, Process Audit and HR, Operations and Finance – each headed by a vice-president, a membership of around 70 and is guided by able and supportive

members of the faculty. The primary goals are to increase awareness about entrepreneurship and encourage the students of BITS to hone their latent entrepreneurial skills and to think out of the box. It is actively involved in bridging gaps between the academic curriculum and the industry and facilitating commercialization of R&D and other resource-strapped start-ups by acting as an incubator.

All events held by CEL on campus, are blocks in the process of building an environment conducive to achieving these ends and have turned out to be very professional in conduct and quality. They are brands in the making. The most glamorous of all, could easily be the national

level event Conquest, which claims to be more than a mere business plan contest. It tests not just the capability of a team in making a tangible business plan but also the participants' mettle and guts in executing the plan. Spread over 45 days, it includes modules on creating the plan, preliminary judgment and mentoring of the finalist-teams by a panel of eminent industrialists, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists (which included Ms. Anita Sakuru, CEO, Kenpeople, Mr. Jairaj Gupta, CEO, WorldCast Technologies, Mr. Ravi Kuchimanchi, Aid India (of 'Swades' fame), Mr. Rajiv Singhal, ITC GIAN), a grueling testing system, et cetera. The event, held during APOGEE, was sponsored by Kenpeople, Broadcom, NewBreak and Nuware this time. Ideas for Rural India, or I4RI, is a huge effort to bring together the talent of students, research activity and corporate power on the same platform to integrate them to make tangible and worthy plans/products for execution in rural India. Both these events have just seen their second editions during APOGEE 2005 but have attracted as many as 80 commendable plans/entries from

some of the best colleges in India. Another new event that started off this Oasis, *Prayag* (shown below), turned out to be a huge hit. It had teams executing given businesses within a stipulated period of time and with constraints on resources in simulated situations.

Other regular events held on campus include the BITS Big Bout (a panel discussion that is aimed at bringing students' in-room discussions under the lens to give it a more meaningful dimension), Parampara (a

semesterly exhibition of products made in the villages around Pilani in order to market them, with the help of self-help groups and NGOs), the Entrepreneurship Awareness Program (workshops to spread awareness about entrepreneurship in North India) and the Meet the Entrepreneur lecture series (which has successful entrepreneurs giving lectures on entrepreneurship and narrating their start-up stories). CEL has also successfully spearheaded the incorporation of two courses, "Creating and Leading Entrepreneurial Organization" and "Global

BITSian Awarded 'Tatrarakshak'

The highest rank medal awarded by the Indian Coast Guard

One of our very own, V Natarajan, a System Developer and Database Administrator in the Indian Coast Guard, Ministry of Defence in Mumbai, has been awarded the '*Tatrarakshak',* the highest medal awarded by the Indian Coast Guard. This medal was awarded to him by the President of India, Dr. A P Kalam, on Republic day.

Natarajan is proud to be a member of the BITS community and is glad he was able to keep his promise of "utilizing the knowledge and exposure gained given by the BITS environment to promote the well being of our nation".

He is in his final semester in the ME Software Systems program. He also has a B E in Information Systems.

Congratulations to him on behalf of the entire alumni community!

Business, Technology and Knowledge Sharing", in the list of courses offered as electives.

CEL has big plans in the pipeline. An ambitious project is the "ξ Communities", a consortium of resource persons from the industry who would share information and ideas with students and faculty, through regular video-conferencing. A more exhaustive project is the Venture Partnership Project, a plan that resembles an internship for BITSians, or in simpler words, a plan that involves shadowing CEOs. It would entail being monitored by a faculty member while the student closely follows all the activities of the member in the industry, learning the ways of

the company as well as about the traits of the mentor. It is being envisaged as the right interface between the students and the industry and actually promises to be a rejuvenating experience for the mentor. Plans are already underway to spread the modules of Conquest and I4RI over 10-12 months and make them yearlong events.

CEL has been helped a great deal by entrepreneurs and industrialists like Laura Parkins, Mayank Gaur, Sanjay Kendhri, Punita Pandey, K. R. Venkatasubramaniam, et cetera, in terms of knowledge-sharing and sponsorship. There has also been extensive mentoring by alumni such as Anupendra Sharma, Satish Gupta and Sirish

Kumar. CEL now looks forward to large-scale help from alumni, especially entrepreneurs, to feed its ambitions and hopes to build mutually rewarding relationships with them. The only challenges that lie in its path are that of sustaining the interest and help extended by resource persons especially considering the short span of student life on campus and problems posed by the location of BITS.

For more info, log on to www.celbits.org.

♦

Chitthi aye hai
From BITS Pilani, Goa

Dear Karthik,

Hope you're fine. Are you still freezing in Pilani? Just so you know, the weather in Goa is simply dandy right now. Just a tad cooler than Mumbai, simply Purrfect!

Since you're dying to catch up, lemme fill you in on the exciting new happenings at our end. 21 new second sem-ites have joined and, needless to say, we've extended them as good a welcome as any self-respecting senior group can (sutble, evil, censored laugh). So, we can finally call ourselves seniors, as any high IQ BITSian would admit, the newbies are junior to us by a full semester. Our Audi and the library should be open real soon. The grapevine has it that the audi is going to have a seating capacity of about 2200. The library is going to be similar to the library at Pilani – replete with computer facilities, video viewing capability, good books (or so they say) yada yada yada.

Cultural (hmmph!) activities have just begun and we're finally organizing inter-state cricket matches on the new playground – really as much culture as I can take. A lot of people have computers now, so we're not as bored as we used to be! The professors are good, and since we have mandatory attendance, each professor knows his students well and vice-versa (snigger! snigger!). Elections are just around the corner and we'll soon have a student government in BITS Goa... yippee!

We certainly don't have as much freedom as you do in Pilani… but it's all right. We've got to be back in our hostels by 8.30 p.m (even the boys). Each of the four hostels, two of which are for guys, have a register where we need to sign if we're going to be out late. Of course, the beaches help kill time as we wait for those alleged good books to show up.

Hope all's well with you. Take care & see ya!

A. (BITS Pilani, Goa)

ART BY PRAVEEN RACHAKULLA (ET '94)

Praveen works as a supply chain management and warehousing consultant with Sapphire in Boston, MA. At BITS he was the treasurer for the Engineering Technology Assoc. and was also an active member of Planning and Publicity and the Art and Decoration Departments. Prior to consulting, he worked in an operations management role for a startup firm manufacturing fuel cells and at Polaris Software Lab. He is a practitioner of Reiki and, more recently, yoga. He's involved with non profits in Boston. Praveen enjoys playing racquet ball and martial arts, anything to do with arts, music, photography and experimenting to create new colors. He has an MSc (Tech), Engineering Technology from BITS and an MS in Engineering Management from Syracuse University.

He's starting an MBA this year and lives in Boston with his fiancée, Divya.

To see more of Praveen's artwork, visit http://bitsaa.org/gallery/artwork
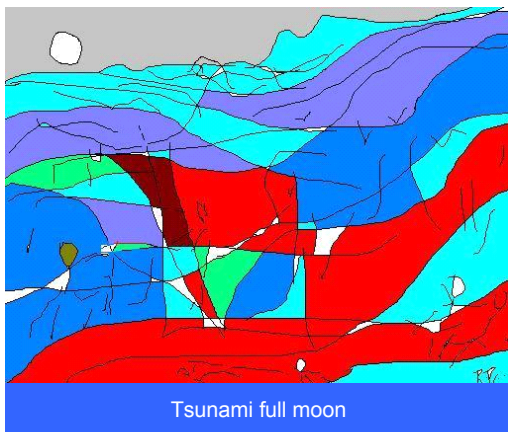
Tsunami full moon
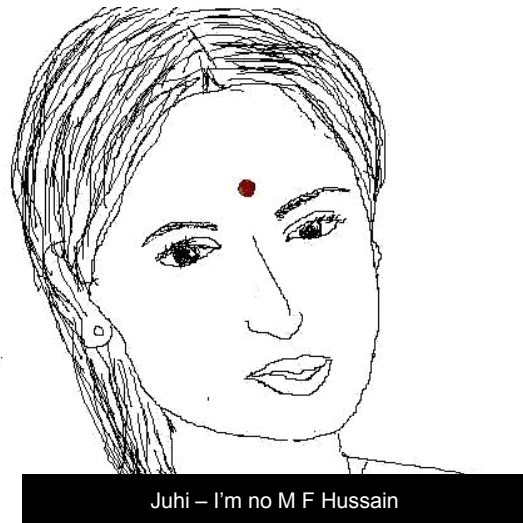
Juhi – I'm no M F Hussain

A K, The President – India's very own Einstein
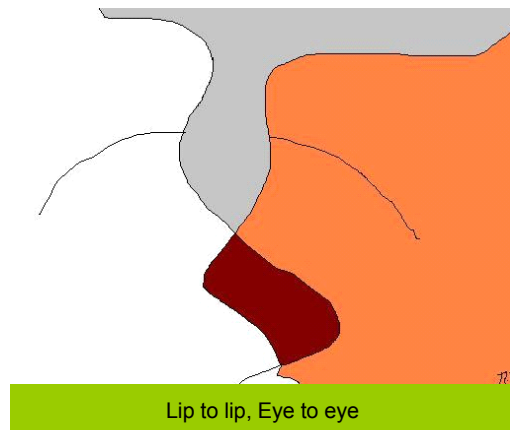
Lip to lip, Eye to eye

My little Sonu
– A Tsunami Victim
Anuradha Gupta ('86 MMS)

Ocean wave, after ocean wave,
And devastation all around…
A little girl, just a few months old-
Didn't even know she had been found.
Must have known she was all alone,
A vacant stare was all that was there-
Didn't know how her life was devastated,
As wave after wave finally abated…
Her parents were dead.
And as I saw her, I wanted to hold her,
To fly across the miles…
To be her mother, to be the one that consoled her-
That took her home, wiped her tears,
That took her home and hushed her fears,
I made all the calls, adoption was banned!
In the midst of the worst tsunami in 40 years,
Flesh trade had begun,
What kind of world do we live in,
How can despair beget this kind of sin?
When permissions were granted,
The picture still haunted me—
The ocean waves, the dead bodies, the child next to them,
Perched up steady against a bedraggled tree…
Matted hair, big eyes, a torn dress beckoned,
I imagined replacing her look with a smile-
I made more calls, adoption had begun…
The laws told me my parameters were wrong,
Visa status and such hogwash…
More orphans than parents—
And a mother had been scorned.
I brooded nights, stifling my pain,
The bureaucracy, the distance, what did the child gain?
Now as I do my bit, in any which way,
Tucked away is a little prayer…
For the girl I named Sonu, I hope she has a home
I dedicate all my efforts to her,
But she may very well be alone…
I'm haunted, but every time I lose hope,

I voice her name silently,
And surrounded as I am,
With everything that fills my life,
Blessings that abound—
Sonu is ever missing when I look around…
I still seem to grope,
For something that would fill this vacuum.
My heart bleeds at photograph after photograph…
Profiling the disaster, filled with despair,

Death and disease; towns and homes wrecked,
Pain that no one can bear…
Thank God for every effort, every bit of aid—
While I move on…
With not even a picture of Sonu to hang on to
But I don't want the memory of her face to fade,
It's something intangible that I now cling to,
It fuels my desire to make a difference,
With so many people devastated,
I must reach out to at least a few…
♦

Desert Rain
Sagarika Jaganathan ('93 Bio)
Like the lone cactus
Self sufficient
Succulent
At once thorny
And tender…
Never once
Looked up
Skyward
For that elusive
Desert rain…

Then it arrived
One day
In torrents
Lone Cactus
Now, a rose in bloom…
Lasted but a day
Lost in the sands of time
Where the lone cactus stands
Now gazing skyward
For that elusive desert rain
♦

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?

Petrichor. 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.
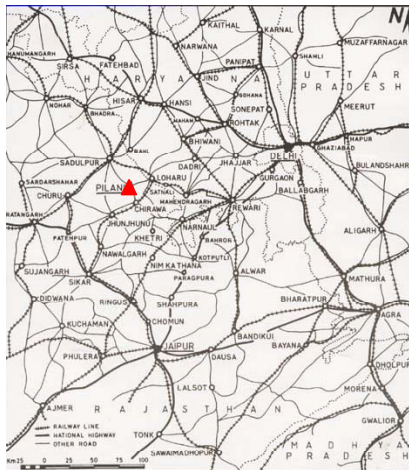
The rains fell.

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 *rediwallahs* 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 Techofest 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)

BY SAGARIKA JAGANATHAN ('93 BIO)

MOMENTS IN TIME…

Memories of what we presumed was the conquest of the Ganges, that turned the tables on us, capturing our hearts instead

I remember being asked to memorize Oliver Goldsmith's poem, "The Village Schoolmaster," while in middle school. Its last verses have haunted me ever since: "And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew, That one small head could carry all he knew."

In a way, these verses seem to characterize every one of us—the innumerable memories we carry with us as we cruise through life. We are like fireflies, flitting through a cornucopia of ephemera, shining, sometimes brilliantly, by virtue of those memory flashes. Not all of them are mindless trivia or knowledge worth its weight in gold. Some of those snapshots bring back days and events, frozen in time, that hold special significance in our lives. Only when we peel back the leaves of memory do we encounter a mulch of almost intact moments of profundity, carefully preserving the essence of certain events, people, and places whose charm and influence may have escaped us over the years. Such 'peeling back' may occur almost inadvertently or spontaneously, sometimes taking us back several years in time, impelling us to pause and appreciate the greatness of those defining moments that had a part to play

in who we are today. As Russian poet Alexander Blok once said: "True greatness can only be seen from far away."

Driving past yellow mustard fields during the perfect Californian summer of '98, I felt a sweeping sense of déjà vu. I was 22, and contemplated life's

big questions, having stepped out, just a year ago, from the comforting haven that was BITS, Pilani, into a whole new world, continents away. The startling riot of yellow hues took me to another drive, in the not so distant past…

The spring of '97. About ten or eleven of us, wide-eyed boys and girls, set out from BITS, traveling in a jeep, train, and bus to reach the rolling hills of Hardwar where the Ganges flows. Spirited, free, and crazy, we wanted to explore; try new things. We were ready to take on challenges the waters would pose…or not quite.

None of us had dreamed that white-water rafting would be part of our repertoire of BITSian experiences, when we nervously set foot on the Vidya Vihar campus, on day one at Pilani. But there we were, between sun swept hillsides, clumsily holding the oars, trying to navigate Mother Nature with help from a human guide—our rafting instructor.

The first hour or so of our adventure was a smooth sail, considering what lay ahead. We began to relax, taking in the beauty of the mountains; the sunlight danced on crystal clear waters broken unsteadily by our rowing. The water looked so inviting. Our guide said we could dive right in, helmet and vest, into the 100 feet deep waters in the stillest part of the stretch. "It's called Body surfing" he said, and promised that it would be like nothing we had ever known before.

I sat on the rim of the raft, clutching the tethering ropes— Afraid. Contemplating.

A piercing scream, two gulps of water, and a temporary sinking feeling—all of which lasted merely five seconds or so, but seemed like a journey to death's door and back—and my head bobbed up above water as I gaped at the two guys, my raft-mates, who had chosen to introduce me to the waters, with a shove. Noxious fear dispelled,

I joined the body-surfing entourage! We let the flow transport us to what seemed like paradise, until our guide beckoned for us to file on board. The last of us was reluctantly dragged aboard, as we paddled the oars again. What was a quiet murmur all along now magically metamorphosed into thunderous roars. The rafts began to go rough-and-bump over rocks propelled by currents that seemingly came from nowhere. We were in the rapids—each holding on to dear life while raging waters tossed our rafts like leaves in a storm.

We screamed when one of our friends, suddenly dislodged from the raft, landed right in the middle of the ruthless currents. We watched in shock as the savage currents—paying no attention to the fact that our friend here was a deft swimmer—tossed him around, threatening to dash him against the looming rocks. Our captain and guide steered adeptly, all the while screaming level-headed instructions, which we tried our best to follow. He gallantly rescued our comrade – all of us could have worshipped him!

Silence again. The rowdy waters had assumed a sudden gentility—a transformation one must witness to comprehend. The Ganges continued to tease and awe us, silent and serene one moment, a raging torrent the next. By the end of the day we were tired and spent, but I couldn't wait to come back for more. That night, the Ganges was in the fabric of our souls. We sat around a bonfire, a new closeness among us, for having fought, survived and eventually conquered the Ganges together. As the flames hungrily licked the embers, I gazed into the fire,

and then at the glowing, happy faces of my friends, laughing and replaying the days events. We were singing, talking, almost as if in a drunken stupor, as each of us wrestled with the unmistakable romance that charged the young night air, quietly perpetuated by the Ganges—her shimmering waters reflecting a full moon…

We woke to the sun streaking the eastern horizon—a ball of orange peering over the hills, ready to watch us launch into day two of our river adventure. As the day drew to a close—bonding to her ethereal beauty—we were unprepared to witness the heart-breaking debacle of soap suds and sewer flows ravaging the virgin waters of the Ganges. We arrived at people-infested Rishikesh, into whose ruinous arms she flowed…

Like all good things in life, our rafting adventure had to come to an end. We hauled the raft ashore; despite being simply pumped with air, its bulk surprisingly weighed down on our shoulders as we waded through shallow, murky waters. But a heavier load was on our hearts, as we grappled with fresh memories tugging at our heartstrings, beckoning us to go back to those ledges on Tiger Paw, where our adventure began.

On the train journey and the jeep ride back, the mood was contemplative. Although it seemed that we had fought bravely and survived the challenges posed by the raging waters, we felt anything but triumphant. It was the Ganges that ultimately conquered us…capturing our hearts: a realization that had only just begun to dawn on us. While we

knew we could not check the ruthless passage of time, we replayed those moments in our minds—moments recorded for posterity.

> **"We screamed when one of our friends, suddenly dislodged from the raft, landed right in the middle of the ruthless currents"**

I've since driven past many yellow mustard fields; done a daring thing or two. But each time, my mind takes me to those fine days and fun-filled evenings on the banks of the Ganges, where we huddled around flickering flames, contemplating new relationships, old friendships, and the paradox of the simple yet complex life that we led behind the gates of Vidya Vihar.

BITS represents a significant milestone in my life—distinct and unique. No matter how many friends I made, which end of the CGPA spectrum they adorned, what events we were part of, I am, like the rest of them, bound to BITS by a common thread of collective nostalgia.

These days, whenever my mind retrieves snapshots during each of its unannounced forays into the past—revealing, time and again, that the essence of my experiences at BITS is etched in its reservoir of memories, constantly coloring those rare moments of epiphany—they never fail to make me smile.

♦

BY ANURADHA SHARMA GUPTA ('86 MMS)

DADDY COMES A VISITING

'The Return of the Father…'

Daddy came to meet me a record 13 times in four years! He would get extremely Anu-sick and Pilani seemed just round the corner from Delhi those days. Now that I have a little one, I can empathize because we are temperamentally very similar. I was Daddy's little girl and he would brood about my health and well being. Any concern would propel him towards the Interstate Bus Terminal (ISBT) and he would embark upon the six-hour journey to Pilani.

Given that he was retired and was handling his own book business, it was easy to manage his schedule for a few days. There was a swanky guesthouse as one entered Pilani, on the left, and another soon thereafter—this one, an apology to guesthouses, down-market and dilapidated. Being the rustic that he is, he thought the latter was functional, the *masala chai* was great, he befriended the housekeeper and felt there was no reason to pay a premium for ambience.

All of us, especially in our youth, experiment with issues. Somehow, the thought of meeting up with my father in the ordinary guesthouse did not gel. Call it a status symbol issue, a youthful folly, call it anything. I'm so much more discerning now— especially after a major in marketing. I can now see through the premiums charged purely on brand name and halo effects. I can see through how the lack of discernment about the difference between needs and wants is exploited. Temperamentally, I'm equally down to earth. But it's the "Circle of Life" syndrome and back in those days, I insisted he stay at the plush guesthouse. He did succumb a couple times but his soul rebelled…And yes, he discovered another alternative…an innovative, original discovery.

He stayed with my pals! In the guys' hostel. He stayed mostly with Dev and Chotu and a couple of times with Bhattu. Their rooms were messy, full of sexy divas (well, posters at least) and stacks and piles of dust-laden books (many of which seemed to bemoan their fate – no one paid attention to them except maybe during an occasional test series). Everything tottering, skeletons falling out of closets. Shocking graffiti—descriptions of enraptured guys wooing indifferent girls. Heavy metal that would jar a lesser mortal. Piles of dirty laundry. Guys moving in and out, general *laccha*, Daddy perched on a bed chatting about everything under the sun. Totally comfy and at ease.

"I can still remember the joy of dragging Daddy into the girls' mess…"

Daddy has this capacity to enjoy every bit of life, to live it to the fullest. I can still remember his rich laugh resonating in my ears as he described— in the presence of my pals— outside their Mess, how delightful the experience was. How young he felt and totally at home, with such sloth, gluttony, and sheer depravity. How good the food that everybody complained about tasted. How nice it was to 'hang out' with the boys. Bless their hearts; my friends welcomed him for we were as close as a family could be.

It was after all Dev who stood outside my hospital room when Tannu was born, grabbed the camera from hubby and clicked a dizzy number of under-exposed photographs, the ones that were visible were with the cradle all covered. In 'The Little Prince' fashion I knew Tannu lay within. It was Chotu who defended me when somebody alleged that I had C.T.'ed (course topped) O.B. because the Prof liked me (his calm demeanor was shaken for once in Pilani as he suddenly threw everything in sight at the unsuspecting guy – from books, to powder tins). True loyalty, true pals. Renchy and Muds hung out with Daddy as if he were their pal – definitely more entertaining than staid old me. Indeed, he enjoyed every minute!

I can still remember the joy of dragging Daddy into the girls' mess and making him sample delicacies that had hitherto been offered only in the guys' messes – ice creams, for instance. It

didn't matter that eventually he paid for it – it was from my scrounging and saving that I could treat him. It was my turn to foist stuff upon him – to spoil him. He sat with my friends and seemed to know everybody's names, histories, heritage, likes, tastes, and tales. Even today he will suddenly spring a surprise and ask about a forgotten batch-mate, a memory that will send me scurrying around, looking for her or him, overcome with sheer nostalgia.

Now some friends had fathers who were, thankfully, a wee bit busier. At the best of times, at the peak of his career, Daddy had always had time for us. He never seemed rushed or busy, never preoccupied. There was always time for bird-watching (genuine birds of course), walks, poring over books, discussions, little secrets, discussions about geography, war, boys, politics, not necessarily in that order. But now, he took the cake, baker and bakery. He seemed vela!

After a while, it irked me when in one semester—since I had acid reflux (thanks to eight cups of tea a day, sleepless nights spent *ghoting*)—Daddy landed up for the third time. I remember standing next to Mr. Postman, hoping I would receive a letter (from somebody other than Daddy who pretty much wrote poetry every day – 'I miss you, the sky is blue, *tum* aae nahi, kyun?'). Well, surprise, surprise, he was, in person grinning from ear to ear. Hadn't informed me, ostensibly to get me to jump out of my skin – with delight?

My disposition as acidic as my stomach, I took him aside and muttered, "You keep landing up - people will think my Daddy is a vela! What will everybody

say…" He is such a sport, he thought I was genuinely upset. And he left telling me he'd be right back. I waited and waited, thinking he would return, but he left a message for me (he managed to go to Dev's hostel, call him out and leave a message with him) that the Vela Daddy has departed – till the next time! He had a hearty laugh as he confided in Dev and would not get dissuaded. Dev even offered that he stay with them and ignore me but Daddy left. Guess who kicked me that evening? None quite as hard as I kicked myself..

Time wounds all heels, time heals all wounds. I don't think I ever apologized enough, but God bless Daddy's good-natured heart because he has converted the incident into one of his favorite stories.

He left with his ego damaged and clambered onto a Delhi-bound bus – scheduled to reach late at night. How he nearly fell out of the bus at Jal T, not deliberately, of course, it was the mammoth crowd, stupid! How he nearly gave into the temptation of heading back, at that point. About how he and one Jat heaved and pushed and elbowed each other to try and

grab limited space on a seat with seat-covers torn and springs broken - so that they could have a comfy slumber – if at all that was possible. About how the Jat was leaner and meaner and it was a losing battle. About how the Jat fell asleep on Daddy's shoulder with half of Daddy hanging out of the seat and the other half pushed off by the burly fellow with his ticklish mustache. And about how he resolved to return soon after the dust would settle…

As soon as he got my teary letter saying that not only was he a vela, he was also dense, and he better return, he headed back. I stood waiting for him this time, since he had forsaken surprising me and had actually revealed an arrival date with trepidation. I waited outside the campus, amid the chatter of people sitting outside sweetshops, the comforting noise of the *rickshawallahs*, and ran to hug his big, burly form. Yes, return he did, lovable, incorrigible Daddy. Along the dust laden road on a bus that journeyed from Delhi, through Haryana, into Rajasthan—Loharu through to Pilani—grinning from ear to ear. Return, he did.

♦

BY SANDHYA KRISHNAN ('99 INFO SYSTEMS)

ENTREPRENEURS – STARTING YOUNG

BITSians, right out of college, start Corpus Labs, a provider of ERP solutions and systems automation solutions.

"The idea of Corpus Labs came out of the blue. The entrepreneurial bug had been there for a while and we always wondered about starting something in the future". This was when 'Anto' ('98 MSc Chemistry, '02 ME Software Systems) was in his last semester of ME and TAship. Faced with the question of the next big step, the desire to go the entrepreneur's way came back with a vengeance. Thus Corpus Labs was started.

Armed with no business model or plan, Anto shared the idea with some of his close friends, like-minded people. Very soon Praveen Kumar Rondla (98' Mech), Ramesh Narayanan ('99 EEE), Bharath Pasupuleti ('99 Biological Sciences) and Vikas Malik ('97 Eco with Chem, '03 M.E Software Systems) agreed to give it a shot. "Corpus Labs was started with the assumption that we could do something positive as long as we stuck together".

The team had worked together at the Centre for Software Development (CSD) before Corpus. Did that matter?

"Working at the CSD makes you feel like you're a part of a software development company with BITS as the client. That creates a tremendous sense of independence. In fact, as of now, CSD has proved to be quite an entrepreneurial hub with 4 startups by its ex-members and even more in the pipeline."

The whole team knew each other well from the various night-outs spent in the cozy ground floor room in FD3 (S block). As a result there were good work dynamics and more importantly everyone knew the talents and weaknesses of everyone else. This has certainly helped approach the task of assigning roles and responsibilities and, of course, as they readily admit "It's always fun when a bunch of BITSians get down to do something together".

The difficulties they faced along the way.

"The first and foremost difficulty we faced was the mindset that 'middle class youngsters can't run a business if their life depended on it". Armed with their degrees from BITS, they had their paths chalked out in the corporate world. They only had to nod and affirm. So in many cases their

parents were disappointed when they chose the path less taken.

"The whole world seemed to be at work to convince us out of this 'madness and rash exuberance' – as they called it. To work with so much discouragement around you, even before you start, was something unsettling."

"Facing both the emotional and professional pressure of being an entrepreneur was something that took a lot of effort to handle. But all this made it a real challenge. The stakes were high and there would be no looking back."

"Thinking of it now, the hurdles turned out to be small, but it was the reaction of the world that wasn't".

I'm sure you guys had some fears too.

Established by a group of BITSians with expertise in various areas, we are a firm committed to bringing the world of technology into your lives through e-solutions, multimedia content development and web scripting and a lot more areas. With our foray into various aspects of the software world, we pride ourselves on our capability to deliver the best within crunching timelines.

Technology is just a buzzword if it is not enriched with innovation, imagination and above all, passion. We, at Corpus Labs, believe that success is just a culmination of these qualities. It has been our unending endeavour to incorporate these facets into all aspects of our operations and thereby achieve results that meet the high standards expected by the industry today.

more...

Product View

Aasha - The Ultimate HMS
- Aasha Professional - for small clinics
- Aasha Server - for medium hospitals
- Aasha Enterprise - for big hospitals

Vasthra - A textile management genius
- Vasthra Professional - for small sized businesses
- Vasthra Server- for medium sized businesses
- Vasthra Enterprise - for large sized businesses

Drishti - specialized for eye doctors

Services

Distributed transaction

Solutions

E R P Solutions & System

"As of fears and apprehensions, the first one was the inevitable question of whether we would click or not. As all founder partners of the firm are from middle class backgrounds, failure meant heavy consequences."

Each rupee of investment mattered and failure was not an option, as the money would have to be repaid. To add to it, the decision to start happened right at the end of college, and they had no back up, financially and otherwise.

"We have to confess that we had no solid, in fact, no business plan at all when we set off. We were branded as BITSians who were wasting the BITSian tag. This was something that we were determined to prove wrong."

So what did your first order feel like?

"The first order that Corpus Labs bagged was for their textile showroom inventory

management software, *Vasthra*. The client was a textile retailer called Kutiappaa Silks."

"The expression on our clients' face when we approached him the first time is still afresh in our memory. To say that we felt like a bunch of novices would be an understatement."

However the hostility soon gave way to acceptance as the prototype was in sync with his requirements and the deal was inked in a week's time. The installation period was two months and the software was completely operational by then.

"As it coincided with the opening of their new showroom, our first installation itself was in the limelight. There was simply no time and space for any slipups. On the other hand, it helped our marketing team as many of the key players of the segment were available at the inauguration."

Corpus has now successfully completed one year of operation with the client and the latter has

signed on for an annual maintenance contract. A just verdict for the quality of their work.

So are things looking up now?

"Things seem nice and bright now. Having spent a good 16 months in conceptualizing, developing and testing the company and of course the products, we are now in the process of branching out into other markets – both national and international. Offices are also being opened at other locations for marketing purposes. As of now we are looking at Singapore, Hyderabad and Cochin out of which the Singapore office became operational in the recent past."

"We have to confess that we had no solid, in fact, no business plan at all when we set off. We were branded as BITSians who were wasting the BITSian tag. This was something that we were determined to prove wrong."

And your future plans?

"We have been concentrating on inventory management solutions and hospital management systems so far. Both have received several plaudits from the local markets. We have also identified niche areas where we have bagged a few clients. That should help us conceptualize products in these segments."

Business & Entrepreneurship

They are now focusing on business intelligence and decision support systems for various verticals. Addition of tax consultants and chartered accountants to their team has made them highly competitive in these domains. So 'divide and conquer' seems to be the rule of the Corpus game.

What do you feel was the effect of BITS on your lives as entrepreneurs?

"BITS has a system that by itself makes it one of the best nurseries for entrepreneurship. The BITSIAN system of 'plan and build your own life' is one of the best sources to nurture and build entrepreneurial thinking."

"The participation of some of the 'Corpuscles' (as we at Corpus Labs are called) in the Central for Entrepreneurial Leadership (CEL) motivated us and enabled us to have discussions with some successful BITSian entrepreneurs. It also helped fortify our entrepreneurial

Their first office

aspirations."

Some of them have worked as TAs and the experience has been invaluable. It meant that they got used to presenting their work to large (usually bored) audiences. This way there was no escaping the quality of the presentations required to keep the audience alive. TAship also taught them to multi-task while forcing one to make the big transition from one side of the writing desk to the other.

Everyone on the Corpus team fondly remembers and thanks Dr. VS Rao for all his help and guidance both within and outside CEL. Thanks are also due to Dr. B R Natarajan, Ashish Bhinde and Anupendra Sharma. Besides that, it comes unsaid that this firm owes a lot to the CSD experience.

To contact them, email Anto at anto@corpuslabs.com or Vikas at vikas@corpuslabs.com. For more information on their services - www.corpuslabs.com

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Business Standard

Baba Kalyani is Business Standard CEO of the year

Bharat Forge Chairman and Managing Director Baba N Kalyani was named Business Standard's CEO of the year in recognition of this his leadership role in the transformation of Bharat Forge to a globally competitive company. The company today manufactures the world's lowest cost forgings company. He studied Mechanical Engineering while at BITS, Pilani. *BITSAA Sandpaper* recently featured him in our article on "Top 20 BITSian CEOs".

Winners of this award in previous years include Tata group chairman Ratan Tata, Reliance group chairman Reliance group chairman and Infosys' NR Narayana Murthy.

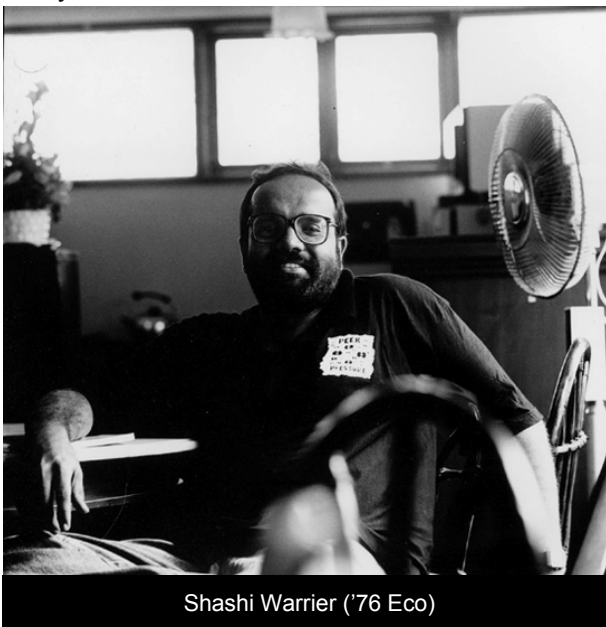BY SANDHYA KRISHNAN ('99 INFO SYSTEMS) AND DIVYA DIVAKARAN ('01 INSTRU)

BITSIANS IN MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

Its not often we pick up a book or an article in a magazine and see 'BITS, Pilani' in the author's profile, but there are those moments when even us eenjeeneeur types are also doing the writings for such type of the things. We spoke with Shashi, Sukumar and Dilip, BITS Pilani alumni who've published several books, articles and other works of literary delight, even blogs.

Shashi **Warrier** is the author of 6 books including two for children and the intense 'Hangman's Journal'. He did his MA in Economics from 1976-1981 and is now a full time author. "Writing is something that just happened and I'm glad it did" he says. "I don't know what I would be doing otherwise". More than a decade ago, while at his parents' house in Kerala, Shashi typed out 'Suzy's gift' on his typewriter and sent it to Penguin. They agreed to publish it and before long his first book had hit the shelves. "It was as easy as that".

R.Sukumar also believes this line of work just happened. He held the BITS ID 86B4A1426 (Math with Chemical for those who don't remember) and passed out in 1991. "I had no family influences whatsoever to take this career, but I think my reading habit contributed to some measure". Currently Sukumar is the Executive Editor of Business Today. He enjoys editing & writing for the popular magazine and lives in New Delhi. But his parents, he says, were initially quite dismayed that he didn't go the typical way of BITS-US-etc.

Enter Dilip D'Souza who did just that… initially, anyway. After EEE in BITS ('76 to '81) Dilip did an MS in Computer Science at Brown University in the US. He lived in the States for ten years, working for different software firms in Texas. Though he harbored no dislike for the country, he soon began feeling vaguely uneasy with his comfortable life there. Dilip eventually moved back to India in 1992 and has lived in Bombay ever since. He is a regular columnist on Rediff and is the author of two books - 'Narmada Damned' and

Dilip D' Souza ('76 EEE)

'Branded by law'.

Writing, though, never starts right after Pilani. While Dilip dabbled in software before jumping to column writing, Shashi worked with consultancy firms and handled contracts for a few years before wielding the pen. Sukumar had a more natural path. After a year with a market intelligence consultancy, he got an MBA from BIM, Trichy and worked with an ad agency in Bangalore. He then reported for Hindu Business Line and went on to become in-charge of all its business features. The shift to Business Today happened in 1997 and Sukumar has been with them ever since.

So what really inspires them to write? "Things around me! I feel like there are stories waiting to be told every time I step out on the road" says Dilip. Traveling, meeting a variety of people and personal experiences

Shashi Warrier ('76 Eco)

give plenty of fodder to both Dilip's and Shashi's writing.

Travels and research in Kashmir forms the basis of Shashi's yet-unpublished book on Sufism while his army background came of good use in 'Sniper'. What about his children's books? "I think I'm a little kid inside" laughs Shashi. "I love fairy tales and cartoons and I guess that may be the inspiration!"

The magazine business is a very different animal. "You are only as good as your next issue, so you can imagine the number of fun and challenging moments there are" says Sukumar.

He has been involved with 26 surveys which is done every year, the 'Best companies to work for' being among the more popular ones.

So how does one go about something as involved as that? "The survey itself is very simple although we, and all the imitators we have attracted over the years, make it look exceedingly complex" Sukumar confesses. "At the core of all such surveys is the simple measure of employee satisfaction ". But editing a magazine, he feels, has definitely made him a better writer.

According to Shashi, it's not very difficult to reach the publishers. You don't need any 'contacts', just a 10,000-word synopsis of what the book will be about and a sample of your writing (which could be the first two chapters). "Pass the word around" says Shashi, passionately.

Even if there are a lot of edits later, if you possess a good idea and nice language the publishers will soon nod their acceptance.

For Dilip, his first time in print was a light piece that got published in The Independent (a now defunct paper). Soon column writing with Sunday Observer and Rediff followed. In 1998 he got a media fellowship to write about denotified tribes. Since it was the first time there was so much of focus on a single subject, Dilip turned out a substantial body of writing on it. The next year he wrote to Penguin and asked them if they'd be interested in a book on these tribes. The answer was yes and after some more research and travel, 'Branded by Law' was published in mid-2001.

Shashi's second book happened after he met David Davidar who wanted to publish a thriller and
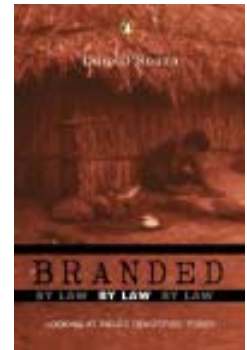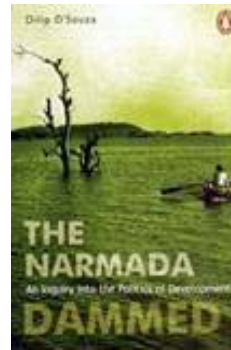
Shashi was only too keen to write one. 'Night of the Krait' was soon on the shelves.

The upside of the writing industry seems to be all the traveling, the meeting of people and the plethora of experiences. The downside, according to Shashi is that it could be years from the conception of a book to its sale. Shashi has several unpublished books including one which is a political comedy. He says that when you feel that all is not right with a book, you can just get stuck. And the book gathers dust.

For Dilip, this career has given him a lot of time with his children and that is what he misses when he has to be away for a few days chasing stories.

So what does the future hold in store?

"I really don't know, but I'd like it to include my wife, my son, my dog, enough Irish malt, hand-rolled Cubans and all the graphic novels money can buy!" says Sukumar. "As you can see work doesn't figure" he adds.

Dilip plans to just write. "Write books, but also essays and articles. I see myself as an essayist/author, and I feel I'm at a stage in my life where I have to make that count." His future book would revolve around the
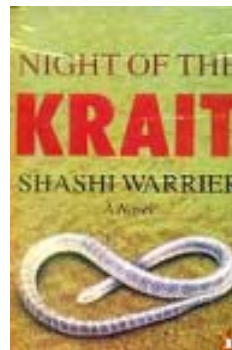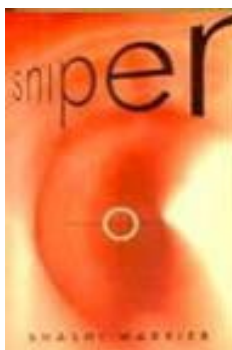
patriotism theme, he says. An essay on those lines won him the Outlook Picador Non Fiction Competition recently.

Shashi plans to do one or all of the following three - a travelogue, short stories and a book on what makes an Indian. He is also working on translating the Bhagwad Gita into English. His version, he informs, would be minus all the confusing pseudonyms and repetitions which he thinks usually make it a difficult read. Sure sounds like something which would be attractive and useful for today's generation.

Just as we wonder if the BITS influence had a role, Shashi says "BITS sure helped- With it's lack of minimum attendance!". The unique structure and various flexibilities help the BITSian develop his personality in a variety of ways - the freedom and independence being an important factor.

Dilip heartily agrees."I think BITS deliberately exposes you to more than just your engineering (or whatever) discipline. It teaches you the value of that wider focus. I think that at least attuned me to looking outside my field, finding interests there. That is the foundation of my attempts at writing."

Sukumar ('84 Math Chemical)

Sukumar refused to be photographed saying "Journalists should be read, not seen."

Sukumar did a bit of writing in his BITSian days. He edited Apogee and Oasis magazines in his second and third years and Cactus Flower in his fifth. The BITSian world had quite some hints of his future career. When asked him his favorite moments in BITS he replies "too many; besides several of them would make me sound like Ginsberg to what I am told are sanitized sensibilities on campus."

Dilip D'Souza wrote the essay which inspired Ashutosh Gowarikar to make 'Swades'.

Dilip's freshest memories seem to be of waiting outside Meera Bhawan and all the women he met then. He quickly adds "But marrying my wife is the best thing I've ever done in my life, the next being moving to India". His wife Vibha Kamat teaches French at Alliance Francaise and they have two children – Sahir and Surabhi.

Shashi is a serious bike freak, his wife Prita says. He has traveled across the country several times and music is something they both enjoy. They live in Coimbatore with their adorable daschunds- Ben and Celine.

One thing that all the three would love to do is visit Pilani. "It would be great fun to go back if I had the right company" says Sukumar.

Dilip is looking forward to going back for an Oasis - "Speaking to alert

and interested students is very stimulating". He has been to BITS twice after passing out- in 1988 to meet a cousin and in March 2004 for the inauguration of BITSConnect.

Shashi has dropped by once too, in 2004 while passing by Delhi. He regrets that he didn't really have much time to spend but is thrilled to tell us that VK redi owner Mahaveer recognized him after all these years. We suspect that his snacks that day were on the house.

According to Dilip, BITS now feels a little less cosmopolitan than in his time. "There seemed to be a narrower cross-section of Indians represented in the student body. I could be mistaken, but this was the impression."

"When I was in BITS it was one of those places which attracted the finest minds from all over the country. These were the people who weren't just into academics but into everything else as well - books, writing, dramatics, sports music. That helped shape several of our psyches" remembers Sukumar.

Shashi did the screenplay for the movie 'Bokshu' although he says he won't do anymore screenplays – unless his life depended on it.

So there, dear reader, you have it. Three incredible people and three more reasons for us to celebrate the wonderfully eclectic BITS Pilani community we're privileged to be a part of.

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BY THE SANDPAPER 2.0 TEAM

MOBILE MEDICS WIN CONQUEST 2005

Budding entrepreneurs from BITS Pilani, with an alumnus as a mentor, win Conquest 2005 and also grab top honors at the Columbia Business School's B-Plan competition

ON a warm afternoon in Pilani a few weeks back, the *Mobile Medics* team erupted in shouts as they were declared winners of Conquest 2005, the annual national business plan competition held by the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership at BITS Pilani. The Mobile Medics team consisted of second and third year students including Sriram Gutta, Kavikrut, Srikanth P, Amit Mirchandani and M Rajashekhar who edged out strong competition from other business plans from around the country that included innovative ideas including Corporate Event organizers, Herbal medicines, RFID technologies, Tsunami relief and educational establishments.

Mobile Medics was a clear winner with a unique and commercially viable value proposition. The students visited

(L to R): Rajashekhar, Sriram, Kavikrut, Srikanth and Amit

Jhunjhunu district and spoke to many villagers, panchayat and doctors. Reminiscent of some of the thoughts in "The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid" written by CK Prahalad, the students proved that there is the potential for profitable ventures in the realm of providing healthcare to the relatively affluent villagers in India.

OPPORTUNITY

Sriram Gutta, CEO of Mobile Medics says "when I read that 41% of the so called doctors in rural areas don't even have medical degrees, I knew there was clearly an opportunity."

Conquest at the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership

Conquest, in only its second year, is becoming one of India's top entrepreneurship competitions. Unlike most business plan competitions, *Conquest* gives finalists the opportunity to refine their business plans by working with mentors located around the world who are seasoned entrepreneurs and managers. The mentors for this year's competition included BITS Pilani alums located in New York, San Francisco, Hyderabad and Bangalore. These mentors have raised Venture Capital financing, founded and sold companies, and hold educational qualifications from MIT, Cornell, Kellogg and Stanford. With backgrounds in IT, Semiconductors, Wall Street and Pharmaceuticals, students receive outstanding mentorship and feedback and are then able to refine their business plans appropriately. The grueling two-days include presentations to judges, venture capitalists, buzzer rounds and problem solving. Victory was not determined by any single event or presentation. *Conquest* is a test of teamwork, preparation and the ability to think on one's feet. Judges included Anita Sakuru, Founder of Ken People, an IT Consulting firm and Jai Gupta of Shaadi Online, an event management company. Vivek Pandita, a venture capitalist from Boston was also present.

The Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership is one of India's top five entrepreneurship centers. It was started in 2003 and is one of the five founding schools for the National Entrepreneurship Network created by the Wadhwani Foundation.

Anupendra Sharma, mentor of Mobile Medics and a BITS Pilani alum added "The Mobile Medics team clearly represents one of the most distinguishing features of the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership. Many ideas coming out of CEL are focused on leveraging innovation to benefit the lives of India's rural population."

INNOVATION

The business plan contemplates delivering high quality, mobile medical care to villagers who can afford an expenditure of Rs 365 per year. The innovative thinking in the plan includes the use of grassroots marketing, mobile doctors and inexpensive hand-held communication and

processing technologies to provide medical care, and enables quick setup operations. The students are seeking Rs 50 lakhs in equity and debt to launch a pilot that would cover Jhunjhunu district with a project payback period of three years.

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BITS Pilani Idea Wins Columbia B-Plan Competition

"It is the year of India" said Lorne Weil, founder of Columbia Business School's Annual Outrageous Plan competition as he presented the check for $5,000 to **Anupendra Sharma** ('87) and **Jordan Tongalson** (CBS MBA 2006) . It indeed was. Eight of the thirty two teams were represented by a person of Indian origin. Four ideas were about starting businesses in India including healthcare, ski resorts, BPO and even toilets. In fact it was the year of BITS Pilani. The plan that won in New York was an idea that originated in Pilani, and won Conquest 2005.

"New York about big ideas, about scale" says Jordan. A native New Yorker, and former M&A banker, he has been a big supporter of BITS Pilani and India. He worked with Anupendra and scaled the original plan into a national company with $38 million in revenues huge brand visibility.

In the two minute video-recorded elevator pitch, which was part of the competition, Jordan acknowledged CK Prahalad, and the potential to build a brand that would be visible in five years to 70 million Indians. The competition was tough with many brilliant ideas backed by Columbia labs, protected by patents, being piloted, run by PhDs. However, a panel of eight judges – venture capitalists, private equity experts, successful entrepreneurs, and a well known writer at Fortune magazine awarded a historic win to the Mobile Medics team and BITS Pilani. Anupendra says " This is a great moment for me personally and for BITSian entrepreneurs everywhere. It also proves that good ideas can come from anywhere."

Most prize money will go towards tuition at BITS Pilani for five team members. For more information please email anupendra@bitsaa.org. To see BITS Pilani's name in the lights, visit www0.gsb.columbia.edu/entrepreneurship/initiatives/outrageous_plan

BY RATHEESH BALAKRISHNAN ('98 INFO SYS) & SALAI SANGEETHA ('00 GEN STU)

BLOGGERMANIA

Are you unable to contain yourself from brandishing your thoughts to the world? Do you feel thrilled by the myriad fame of instant publication – penning your thoughts and having people from all over the world read and resonate with your thoughts? Do you often wish that you took up writing more seriously, and rue the lack of time? Welcome to Blogging.

YOU know something has attained celebrity status when it finds proportional representation in lists of things most loved and most hated doing the rounds on the internet. So, the fact that a word has been voted the "word of the year" and, simultaneously, finds itself on top of the banished words in the English language, says a lot. Celebrities use it to show their *other* side, budding journalists and amateur photographers find solace and a spot to showcase their rejected masterpieces, amateur cooks have come up with a world of new recipes, software engineers indulge themselves in it to kill boredom and everyone finds an audience and a place to voice their opinion. Welcome to the fastest growing phenomenon on this side of the galaxy, voted the next biggest thing after e-mail and k-soap operas on Indian television, taking up reams of space in the internet's public library, and by definition an "unstructured work of art that signifies anything that comprises of words and images and is published over the internet"- the ubiquitous BLOG.

Ever since the internet boom, the virtual world augured an alternative medium of social interaction. Quite a few fads have been doing the rounds since then, including chat rooms, social networks, and, albeit for a brief while, 3D virtual worlds where people could take up roles and project themselves as whole new personalities. Blog – which stands for web log – is the newest kid on

the block.

As the name suggests, a Web log is a personal journal that is maintained over the internet. It can be about anything from snapshots of your daily life to your exploits in your favorite pastime. It can serve as:

- A social forum where people can voice their opinions on a variety of national and international issues from Bihar elections to Oscar nominations.

- A public bulletin board through emergencies, as during the recent Tsunami, when blogs were used to collect funds, request amenities and most importantly communicate information to volunteers from all over the world about where assistance was required.

- A showcase for pockets of excellence and interest groups. The internet is now full of blogs discussing advances in artificial intelligence, new forms of music and art and many other novel interests.

- Or just a simple personal diary to pen a few sweet nothings so that someone across the globe who chances upon it can have

a good laugh or shrink back with horror!

BLOG – an unstructured work of art that signifies anything that comprises of words and images and is published over the internet

Though nothing can really explain how one fine day an innocuous pastime, reserved for the literarily inclined, exploded to become such a global phenomenon, what amazes one is the audience that even a neophyte blogger can call his/her own. There's a whole new breed of people who visit news sites and blogs in the same breath. Almost everyone who maintains a blog spends more time reading other people's blog than writing his/her own. Each one maintains in his blog a list of personal favorites; blogs that he visits often. So once you hit upon a blog of someone you know and continue traversing from one to another (a.k.a blog-hopping in Blogworld terms) you probably will end up in a blog of someone who's writing under the light of the moon from the rain

forests of the Amazon – a classic case of six degrees of separation. The bottom line is – in bloggerworld, "life's like a boxa' chocolates, you never know whatch you gonna get".

BITSIAN BLOGGERS

As in any social network, if one stays around long enough it's inevitable that he ends up meeting a fair number of BITSians, a substantial number of recent graduates, from the 95 batch through to those still on campus, maintain and regularly update their own blogs. As with any BITSian bunch, it's an eclectic mix of people. However, here're a few broad trends based on 45 blog sites that have been collected in the last couple of months.

- 54% of the BITSian blogging population is from the United States and 44% from India.

- 44% of the population comprises of students (from BITS, grad schools and B-schools in India and abroad) and another 40% are software engineers.

- The recently graduated class of 2004 heads the batch wise distribution of bloggers and with a strength of 16, account for 32% of the BITSian population. The '98 batch with 11 bloggers, account for 22%.

- Almost all the blogs are daily journals containing humorous anecdotes, books read, movies seen, politics, religion, philosophy, people met or the color of new dresses purchased. Some notable exceptions are:

Death Ends Fun – Dilip D'Souza's blog talks of his

various experiences in the world of Journalism. Recently, he was in the Tsunami affected areas reported on the status at ground zero (see "Community Service" in this issue for more on this)

A Slice of Tuck – maintained by Krishna hedge, the blog is about his experience as a student in Dartmouth's Tuck school of management.

AI complete – where Nitish and Deepak maintain resources on current research in artificial intelligence and related areas.

Dolly doll – which, though again a personal journal, is a photo blog and says it all through shots captured from Srinivasan's daily life.

Blame it on the undying BITSian zeal or the boredom of everyday life, almost all these blogs are updated regularly – quite a few of them everyday, and more than 70% of them at least once a week.

Apart from the individual blogs that they maintain, BITSians have also started a blog that can be co-authored by any BITSian who'd like to contribute. This blog is intended to serve as a platform for people to relive past experiences, make suggestions, debate, dissect and disseminate new ideas, discuss or announce any BITS related issues, and connect with those on campus and be posted on what's happening on campus. Though the

present crowd is mostly comprised of recent pass outs, it's just a matter of time before word spreads far and wide and BITSians, who by then would have traveled far and wide in different walks of life, come together. This blog would span decades, serve as an excellent platform to communicate ideas and compliment the existing infrastructure of BITSAA chapters and Sandpaper 2.0.

GET STARTED

Though there are umpteen sites that provide publishing services - like *tblog*, *rediffblogs* – the most famous and widely used publishing service is *Blogger* and is powered by Google. It has a brief sign up procedure, a very easy to use interface to maintain and publish blogs and most importantly, is free. There are over two million users using Blogger services and they probably constitute only half the actual population that is blogging.

You can access Blogger at: http://www.blogger.com

The BITSian blog is at: http://camelinthedesert.blogspot.com

A list of BITSian Bloggers: http://wildevogel.blogspot.com/july/bitsian-bloggers.html

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BY TIRUMALA RAO TALASILA ('84 COMP SCI)

BRIEFINGS FROM THE LAND OF THE DRAGON: THE OLD HOUSE

The orient brings with it a secret charm of Zen stereotypically unknown to the West. The author's journey to find his dream house in China, a traditional 'Chinese House', throws a different light on Chinese culture and underscores the not-so-subtle changes that rapid modernization is inducing.

"DID you find the Chinese style Old House yet?" asked Li Qing Fu, one of my Chinese friends. That was a painful reminder to my oft-postponed quest to find a traditional Chinese style house. I always coveted living in such a house, the direct effect of all those Zhang Yimou's movies (of the "Raise the Red Lantern" fame) I saw while I was in the United States.

When I relocated to China in 2003, I thought living in a traditional Chinese Style House was definitely on top of my agenda, and ranked high up on the "coolness" index. Soon I realized that cities and towns in China are not the way I expected. Whole of China is undergoing a mad rush to modernity that lends scant regard to houses and buildings with Chinese style architecture. The old buildings and houses are being demolished at a bewildering pace to give way to citadels of glass and concrete. Cities and towns in China today are bristling with a brash display of skyscrapers announcing the emergence of the new Superpower. First-time visitors to Shanghai are often shocked at the sophistication and modernity of this city that competes with Paris, New York and Tokyo all at once.

> **"When I relocated to China in 2003, I thought living in a traditional Chinese Style House was definitely on top of my agenda, and ranked high up on the 'coolness' index."**

Undaunted by the unfettered adoption of modernity all around me, I decided to give one last try to finding my dream house. The fact that the lease for my current apartment was expiring gave a fresh impetus to my quest. I spread the word that this time I was hell-bent on finding a Chinese style house. This was in a city 100 miles west of Shanghai. I urged my company's staff to contact their friends to help find an "Old House" (in Chinese language, a traditional Chinese House is translated as "Old House").

Comments such as "Chinese people no longer want to live in traditional Style Houses", "If I have money, I would rather live in a modern house", "This foreigner must be crazy to want to live in an Old house", etc… fell onto deaf ears. Weeks passed by with no leads. Impatience set in and I decided to take matters in my own hands.

I hopped onto a taxi and asked the driver to take me to the Roast Duck Restaurant where I remembered seeing a couple of old Chinese style houses. The Taxi Driver told me it was a futile attempt as only native folks live in such houses and they are not available for rent. Even if they are available they are in a bad condition, no toilets, no bathrooms etc. "You foreigners have money. Why don't you live in a modern house?" quizzed the Taxi Driver. I just nodded, as I didn't want to engage in a philosophical debate. Undaunted I pressed on.

Traditional Chinese style homes

I stopped by a clothing store and asked the store lady if she knew of a real estate office that rents old Chinese style houses. She peered at me, intrigued, and wondered if I was insane. But she indulged me and handed the real estate section of the newspaper going so far as to give me a few tips on how to call the real estate agents. I called a few numbers but no answer. Hmm… I thought, maybe it's lunchtime. So I walked around the neighborhood only to stumble into the house of Qian Zhong Shu, now converted into a museum. He is a well-known novelist known all over China for "Fortress Besieged", the book's theme being "those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out". I couldn't resist mentally acknowledging the analogy to my quest for the "old house". Here I am, a foreigner desperately looking to live in a Chinese style house, when most of the Chinese are trying to get out of these and get into modern ones.

I must have been the only visitor to the museum that day. The caretaker was startled to see a foreigner at the museum. I paid the entry fee and took a quick walk around the house. Then I said, "Yes! This is exactly the kind of house I want to be living in". "Sir, this house is not for rent. This is a museum!" reminded the caretaker with a smirk on his face. With all the poetic Chinese I could muster I explained why I would like to live in such a

Modernity looming over the Ancient (at Nan Chang Jie)

house, and why I came all the way from India and the United States to live in such a house. He must have been moved by my eloquence. He said, "No such houses exist in the city anymore. But, my friend, I will write down the name of the oldest neighborhood in this city. You could try your luck there". He scribbled on a piece of paper the details of the neighborhood in the city where it was likely that I would find old Chinese style houses.

My mobile phone rang and I got a fast-talking real estate agent on the other line. Like any eager salesmen he promised to get back to me soon. Lo and Behold, he did get back to me in

20 minutes and told me he had a house exactly like what I was looking for. I wasn't confident he really understood my requirement. The real estate agent took me to the Nan Chang Jie neighborhood. The street was very cramped and it looked like some narrow street in Karol Bagh, Delhi. This was the first time I have seen such a dirty street in eastern China. There was a canal cutting through the neighborhood and all I could see the dark water and smell the decaying garbage probably getting stronger with the onset of the warm spring weather. I couldn't see how a well-maintained Chinese style house could exist in that neighborhood. The neighbors wondered what a foreigner was doing in their neighborhood. The landlord eagerly received me and showed me into a cramped house. I discovered the house was an old-modern apartment and not an old-Chinese style house. "Ah! I have become a victim of the ambiguity in the Chinese language", I mumbled to myself

Nan Chang Si Temple

loudly (Traditional Chinese style house, also translates as "Old modern-style house"). The agent sheepishly apologized for the miscommunication and like any good salesman said he would contact me once he found the real "old-Chinese style" house. So my search for the old-house went in vain. (This was one of the rare instances where I saw such a dilapidated neighborhood in eastern China away from all the glitz of urban China. I would bet in another 3 to 4 years this neighborhood was going to be razed to the ground to give way to a flashy apartment complex or a shopping mall).

In the evening, I want to try again to find the Old House. This time, I asked the taxi driver to take me to Nan Chang Si, a famous temple in the city. "This temple is certainly built with Chinese-style architecture", the driver agreed, "but you cannot live in there. This is a temple! This is only for tourists to visit, to pray and to take pictures", he explained. I said I was trying my luck to see if there are any houses around the temple that are old school. I got off the taxi

and took a walk around the temple. The area around the temple was a tourist area with lots of souvenir shops, beauty clinics and fancy restaurants. "Hmm…", I thought. "This doesn't sound like a place where I can find Chinese style houses". Before I turned to head back home, I spotted a teenager showing off his acrobatic skills on his bicycle. He promptly invited me to check out the dance studio upstairs where his friends were practicing Hip-Hop. I found about 20 odd-teenagers with long hair, baggy pants coming out of the class. They looked like any Hip-Hop kids hanging out in suburban malls in the U.S. I was intrigued. One of them took the initiative to invite me to come to watch their class – scheduled to be held on Wednesdays and Thursdays. For obvious reasons I didn't bother to ask if they knew about Old houses.

Walking around the temple area, I stumbled back into the Nan Chang Jie Street that I visited that afternoon. This time the stores around the Nan Chang Jie were almost closing. The only

stores open were odd-looking Barbershops with cheerful girls milling inside waiting for customers. Obviously, very few folks go into these stores for a real haircut. These are places where prostitution is rampant. These barber shops are not in seedy area, but right where other businesses and residential areas are. I walked through the neighborhood. Later I was told these are equivalent to the slums. Some of the houses seemed to be ok with all modern amenities (microwave ovens, refrigerators, air-conditioners etc). Lots of people were sitting around the dinner table and playing mahjong or cards.

I walked to the other end of Nan Chang Jie and hit a main-road. Right in front of me were four gigantic malls. From the Chinese characters, I gathered they were selling home furnishings. They were very modern stylish buildings – akin to a fancy shopping mall in Palo Alto. I was surprised at the disparity in wealth between Nan Chang Jie and these malls. It was already 11 pm and I waved a taxi back home. The taxi driver was really excited to speak with a Chinese-speaking foreigner. "Who wants to live in those houses?" chimed in the Driver. The Old houses represent the past, and Chinese are eager to demolish them to give way to modern structures. "We want to embrace modernity", he said. That was the epiphany for me that day. The next day I promptly called my Landlady to express my intention to extend the apartment lease. But my dream of living in an "Old House" still lives on.

Maybe one day I will fulfill it…

♦

Shanghai's citadels of glass and concrete

By Dilip D'Souza ('76 EEE)

THIS LITTLE THING CALLED RESPECT

Dogs, biscuits, peahens and CS students who kick butt and take names. Dilip discovered it all on his trip to Pilani.

THE road from Delhi starts out fine, especially if you're looking back a quarter-century. We take the southern-most of three possible Delhi-Pilani routes, and I don't believe I've ever taken this one. (The others are Rohtak-Bhiwani-Loharu and Jhajjar-Dadri). There is, of course, the bottleneck known as Gurgaon. A phantasmagoria of spectacular buildings, each more so than the last -- was there some competition on here? – and shopping centres and roads and dust and construction and traffic like you would not believe... sure, there's all that. But to me, it's a bottleneck and no more. Sorry, Gurgaon-ites: at least as seen from the road, a more soul-less, desolate place would be hard to imagine. We crawled through it, stop and go all the way, my heart beating already only for Pilani.

Beyond Gurgaon, things are smooth and fast: two lane divided highway on which our Esteem hits take-off speed and I could have sipped a cup of hot *chai*, no problem. (Did we

actually take-off?) There are other bottlenecks, by name Rewari and Narnaul and one or two more, and the highway gives way at some point to a more familiar undivided road: but it is still a far smoother ride, most of the way to Pilani, than those of us who look back a quarter-century will remember.

Question, then: why does it still take us 5.5 hours?

The Pilani feeling has been building, but it really starts gelling at a *chai* break somewhere beyond Narnaul. Venu and I stop at a *dhaba*, only to find Raj and Deepak already there, and soon enough Vinod, Vikram and Jayan show up too (the last three in shorts, no less). Something about the taste of the *chai*, the clouds of flies trying to share it with us, the crisp air: the BITS camaraderie -- even though between us, we range across four BITS decades -- is instantly triggered. To guffaws, stories are quickly flying back and forth. Along for the Pilani trip, the Economic Times journalist from Bangalore looks on, bemused. He is, of course, poor deprived guy, not a BITSian. How do you

explain to an outsider about the bond that BITSians immediately feel?

We don't. He guesses.

Venu knew my cousin Kartik at BITS, and rattles off a tale of how Kartik would stick packets of biscuits on his wingies' doors while they slept inside. Then encourage stray dogs to go for the biscuits. The yapping and door-scratching, as the mutts strove to get the treats, proved mighty disturbing to the sleeping dudes.

I listen to this story and laugh, sure, as all of us do. But it must say something about BITS -- and I mean this -- that my dominant feeling is hardly hilarity, but a healthy new respect for my doughty cousin. Dogs, biscuits and doors: what an excellent idea! Why did I never think of it?

Also courtesy Venu is a story about another response to sleeping wingies, this from one Vivek I know in Bombay. Vivek would open their doors, says Venu, and push peahens in... the probably frenetic results, Venu leaves us to imagine.

Healthy new respect for Vivek too.

It's past 8:30 when we arrive at that intensely familiar campus. We float through the gate, already on a high, and turn off immediately into the charmingly-named VFAST guest house, new since my time here. But the adrenaline is flowing, and the last thing I want to do is spend time in a room, even in this fine establishment. I want to be out there, soaking in the smells and the sights and the lights and... oh yes, the sand. So I race through a bath and change, then zoom out of my room for dinner.
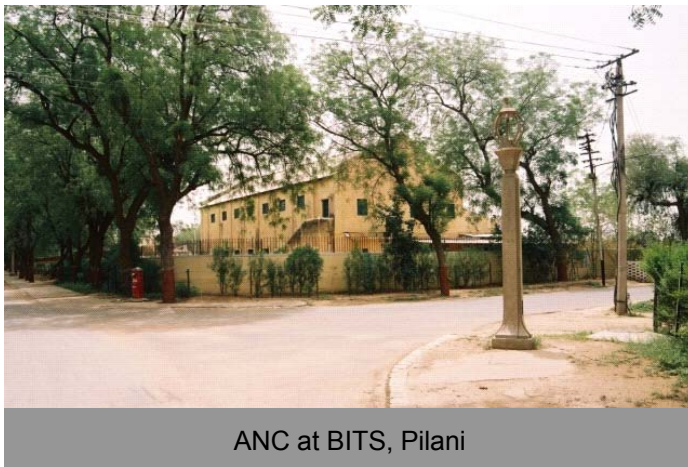
ANC at BITS, Pilani

The adrenaline infects not just me: next door, Deepak is out and ready to go even faster.

Long and leisurely walk around campus later, several of us descend on the ANC, another not-in-my-time feature of BITS (a lot of those to note). This is the All Night Canteen, naturally acronym-ized to ANC, but now called just "ank". One word. It's past 11 at night, but the place is buzzing, crowds jostling for the attention of the servers. Everything from drinks to dosas.

Yet tonight, the interesting thing about the ank is not so much the number of students here, but the number of girls here. Even more, the things the girls are doing. Nothing out of the ordinary, and yet that is in itself out of the ordinary -- but so refreshingly out of the ordinary! -- for us graduates from a quarter century past. There are such a lot of girls on campus now -- close to 40 per cent, someone said? -- that they are no different from the boys. Just other students, that's all. In our time, the sheer scarcity of girls made each one an object of constant and usually unwelcome attention, subject to stares and shouts and curiosity. Now they are just around. Like everyone else. As tonight, in the ank.

In one corner, there's a huge circle of students, most of them girls, playing a game that's even led by a girl. It looks organized and intellectual; the ringleader spends a long time explaining rules and what seems like strategy. Deepak and I, parked just outside the circle and unable to hear her over the ank racket, lean in and ask what's going on. Two young ladies turn around to tell us that these are all CS students. Ah, I think, I really do, they are involved in some eclectic game that teases out some esoteric computer science funda. Wow, and late at night at the ank, what dedicated students...

... and the two young ladies say, we are playing Chinese whispers.

Gotta tell you: my respect for CS students at BITS goes through the roof.

♦

CNN TIME

2 Indians in CNN/Time's 25 Global Business Influentials – Both BITS, Pilani Alumni

Time Magazine and CNN recently released its list of 2004 Global Business Influentials, 25 leaders in a broad range of industries recognized for setting standards in areas like innovation, globalization and effecting change. This year's list includes 2 Indians – Vivek Paul, CEO of Wipro Technologies and Balaji Krishnamurthy, CEO of Planar Systems, both alumni of the BITS, Pilani.

Vivek Paul worked at GE and Bain & Co. and has more recently led Wipro Technologies' growth from a $150 million software developer into a $1 billion force in IT services. He has an MBA from the University of Massachusetts and a Bachelor of Engineering from BITS.

Balaji Krishnamurthy received a BS and an MS in mathematics from BITS Pilani and an MS and a Ph.D. in computer science from the University of Massachusetts. At Planar Systems he crafted a system that rewards rank-and-file employees first, before moving up the management chain founded in the belief that it induces every employee to create greater shareholder value (see this issue's Quarterly BITSian for more on this).

BY ANURADHA SHARMA GUPTA ('86 MMS)

TRANSITIONS – PART ONE
HOME OR THE PROMISED LAND

The diaspora debates and reflects upon the clichéd, yet emotion-filled subject of staying versus going.

INDEED, nothing is permanent except change. Not only is this a cardinal truth; it is part of many religious doctrines, the Bhagwad Gita for one. What does one look for then, when one transitions from one stage of life to another – a sense of comfort, of belonging, of stability or just the feeling of being a step closer to Maslow's state of self-actualization?
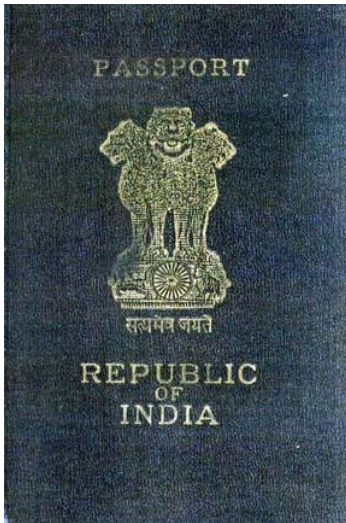
Almost all of us have experienced post-BITS transitions – from being students in India to being students abroad, from one field of study to another, from being a student to becoming a professional, from being single to being married, from being married to becoming parents… you get the picture.

In this issue, we focus on a clichéd yet ever emotional subject: to stay or not to stay? Many of us leave India looking for a better education, an adventure, better quality of life, broader experiences and so on. Some eventually head back. Some don't. The adage of home is where the heart is does not always help, because the heart is often divided and fickle. In a state of suspended animation we try to decide where home lies, with a mix of rationality and emotion, with both left and right brain activity, Mars and Venus, weighing pros and cons, sometimes enlisting the advice of others, often going solo, or just procrastinating endlessly.

TRANSITIONS

This series explores the views of people with different types of experiences, records the feelings they worked through while in the midst of significant change. We encourage you to share your experiences with the alumni community.

Arvind and Priya, a BITSian couple from the '94 batch who returned to Bangalore after a satisfying stint in the US, discuss their experiences with us -- a moving account that triggers a debate in right earnest.

Arvind and Priya, on returning to India:

"Most NRIs frequently keep telling themselves and others who care to listen that they will definitely return to India. Their reasons for leaving the land of opportunities are plenty. For some it is the overpowering guilt of leaving their aged parents alone. For others, it is a feeling of not being able to fit into an alien social circle. For the really exceptional ones, it's a genuine feeling of nationalism and the desire to serve in India. Whatever the reasons, for most, translating their desire into action and making the move seems to be a difficult task. Does this difficulty stem from the fact that the lure for lucre dominates over any other emotion or is it more complex than that?

"My wife, Priya and I grappled with this decision a couple of years back. We had taken the beaten path. Both of us had graduated from an engineering school, Pilani, taken our GREs and went to graduate school. We had a swinging time in grad school and had the good fortune of finding the right kind of a place to work in.

"The two-body problem from classical mechanics finds a ready analogue in the lives of married people. Two people, married to each other, with dissimilar career interests seldom find work in the same geographical area. My belief in this hypothesis had been vindicated by the presence of the many long-distance relationships I saw all around me. However, unlike many other couples around us, we were very lucky to find work within earshot range. We settled down to an idyllic life in suburbia. Life was good – clean air, well equipped gyms and not much of a rush hour to speak of. Both of us worked in research environments that gave us all the freedom and no pressure. We had a great bunch of friends with whom we saw movies and cooked potluck dinners. We traveled to all kinds of lovely destinations on long weekends. Our parents lived in Chennai and we contented ourselves with weekend telephone conversations with them.

"My wife, Priya, and I grappled with this decision a couple of years back. We had taken the beaten path. Both of us had graduated from an engineering school, Pilani, taken our GREs and gone to graduate school"

– K L Arvind ('94)

"As time passed, we found ourselves constantly longing for a more fulfilling life. It is hard to explain to someone who has not personally experienced the feeling. The nagging discomfort when one weekend call reveals that a parent was unwell and a neighbor was kind enough to drive them to the doctor. All assurances that all is well now somehow fail to reassure. It sinks in even deeper, that if your parent requires your help or assistance or even just presence, it will take many hours of planning to get time off from work and looking for good flight deals and 24 long hours of travel before you get home. And then, you will be jet-lagged, sensitive to the weather, food, water and will probably need more looking after than those you had come to look after. And no sooner than you 're-acclimatize', it will be time to start the long journey back.

"This aspect of life away from home is one that is readily articulated and well accepted as collateral damage – worth the sacrifice to live the good life. But is participating earning the big bucks all there is to the good life? Most get-togethers with friends during our stint in the US would see conversation turn to this topic at some time or the other. What is the quality of life in this home away from home that we were trying to build ourselves? On the surface, it seemed great. But dig deeper, and put away the concerns over neglecting family and we found that we still had more reasons that were holding us back from continuing on the well-worn path of green-card-citizenship. We missed India. We missed belonging.

"So one fine day we took the decision to return home. It was just as sudden as it sounds. We grabbed the helm of our little boat that was happily cruising along and turned east. We never felt a moment's doubt. India. Home. This is where our happiest memories were. Nothing, not skeptical friends, not even the plea to rethink this decision of 'throwing away our careers' from our parents could shake us. We applied for jobs on Monster India. The timing was perfect, it seemed. We got good offers from Indian companies, submitted our resignations in the US and started packing.

"We came home to a bewilderment of contradictions. Bangalore seemed to have made tremendous progress, cell-phones, wireless connectivity, on-the-go cappuccinos and jazzy multiplexes. But at what price? Gone were the roads shaded by huge trees. Pre-independence bungalows had given way to unprepossessing apartments. Real-estate had sky

rocketed and the city's infrastructure looked incapable of handling the traffic loads.

"One of the metrics of progress is the ability of the new to co-exist with the old. Bangalore and most of urban India seems to have forgotten this. If the journey to the office was an ordeal, the scenario at home seemed to match it too. So far, we were used to being just by ourselves at home, no maid, no cook and no relatives. Suddenly there seemed to be a lot of people around and life seemed forever hectic. We loved having our folks at home, but hadn't bargained for the steady stream of relatives.

"At this ambivalent stage in our life, we were faced with a new proposition. I was offered a chance to transfer to the US. Memories of clean air, good roads and a quiet household came flooding back. We rationalized thus. We had given ourselves a fair opportunity (nearly a year) to look at life in India and it did seem like a lot of trouble. Maybe we made a mistake and should return.

"This time, we decided not to be hasty and spend some time understanding what we wanted with life. We would count the one month we spent deliberating on this decision as one of the most important periods in our lives. We realized we were getting so caught up thinking about little things like bad roads, traffic and pollution that we were missing the big picture. We were not counting the enrichment the people around us were bringing into our lives. When you walk down the street and the local cycle repair shop owner, now graying looks at you and recalls the time you rented a

cycle from him to learn cycling. You go to a barber-shop and realize that it is the same person who has been cutting your hair for the last twenty years. You meet the neighborhood grocer and he tells you how time has changed since he last brought provisions on a cycle to your house when you were a kid. The secret joy your parents feel that you are around.

> "I feel that every decision has to be based on some sort of logic (personal or otherwise). Accordingly, there are 'musts' and 'wants' for everybody. For me at least, good health, safety and good education are 'musts'. Sense of belonging, warmth and the like are 'wants'."

"These are feelings that can't be possibly quantified or rationalized. No amount of pesky relatives or "necessary social functions" can dilute the feeling of peace one feels with being home. You realize that the warmth and friendliness in your own country can never be matched elsewhere. This warmth is what gives you a sense of

belonging."

Another BITSian elaborates on the emotional aspect of staying back in the US…

His wife is an Indian America, his children are American, he is British by birth, and he feels passionately about America as his second home.

"I'll tell you what Arvind and Priya's account quantified for me. I work in Corporate America where to move up, one needs to move around. It is a concept I abhor for personal reasons though I understand the business ones. I grew up in Delhi, watched the trees my now deceased father planted turn into trees and bear fruit, then turn into seeds and grow into trees again. Leaving our ancestral home for a new one, thanks to the price of progress and real estate in Delhi was, sooner or later, inevitable.

"I live in a house I love, although it is in America. I think about the trees I want to plant, when my children go off to college, I want to remember the many hours we spent talking on the stairs; I want the plants and the trees bear witness to the passage of our time together.

"In the new country that I call home, I am trying to build some constants

from my habitat, for this is the only potential constant for me. Although my barber, dhobi and grocer in Delhi are long dead, and the barber, the grocer and the dhobi will never have the same associations for me, my neighbors in the US will change every five years – spending more time in the house, by the trees, and with my immediate family are the best way for me to call this country home. For, everything else in this country is fleeting.

"For those of us (like me) who don't have the same choices as you (Arvind and Priya) did, who don't intend to ever leave, growing old in our new suburban house may be the only solution. An idea that somehow, I like very much."

And, as yet another BITSian adds, there is of course…

"A fundamental difference in priorities between those who migrate out of compulsion, and those who migrate out of conviction. Most of us fall into the latter category. In my honest opinion, evaluating the pros and cons of living in the US/UK etc. versus India, is relatively immaterial. Conditions both abroad, and at home are conducive for well-educated people like us BITSians. I doubt we would be having this discussion if the IT boom in India hadn't happened recently.

"Having said that, I feel that every decision has to be based on some sort of logic (personal or otherwise). Accordingly, there are 'musts' and 'wants' for everybody. For me at least, good health, safety and good education are 'musts'. Sense of belonging, warmth and the like are 'wants'.

"There is no doubt that in terms of health, safety and education, India has a long way to go. Health and safety are obvious. Education is still a rat race in India, while it is relatively easy to get into some of the best universities here in the US.

"The sense of belonging that Arvind and Priya mention in their article is very real, and we certainly feel more at home in India than anywhere else. There are however, at least two aspects that need to be highlighted:

"The first and arguably the most important factor: Children. I've always known us Indians as a set of people who care more for the future of their offspring than for their parents. I believe that the best way to repay my parents is to be a good parent myself!

"When I think about moving to India, I imagine my 14 yr old kid asking me quietly one day, 'Appa, you came back to India so you could have a sense of belonging. What about me -- why I am toiling so hard to get into a decent engineering school? Why am I unable to spend time on sports? Why did you make me pay?' And I wouldn't have an answer.

"The real question in my mind is: Am I willing to make sacrifices for my kids? Or, do I expect them to make sacrifices about their career, so I could have my sense of belonging?

"Second, there is the possibility of striking middle ground. Some of my friends' parents stayed here until their children were able to fend for themselves (typically until they were in college), and then returned to their country. That way, they accomplished both things -- making sure their children got the best, and yet,

ensuring that they themselves can go back to where they feel they best belong.

"Also, I think that in the end, the most important thing is not whether you decide to stay or leave, but what you do after you've made that decision."

Dilip D'Souza, who went looking for India after having found America – a journey that Columbus did not complete, provides another perspective:
"A thought-provoking discussion all right. You know, I moved back to India in 1992 after 10 years in the States, and to this day I get asked 'why' all the time. I had a green card (since turned in to the Consulate in Bombay), a cushy job, the respect (finally) of my colleagues, a nice home in a nice part of Austin, a fine dog -- well, why?

"But I do miss my dog."

"I usually give two reasons: one, there were things – causes if you like – in India that I was beginning to care about and I felt I had to be closer to them. And two, I wanted to be closer to my parents.

"But after these years of offering those reasons, I have to say I'm never fully satisfied offering them. After thinking about it a lot, I suspect I moved back because of two other reasons:

"A vague, and growing, feeling of unease with my life in the States. Not that I disliked any aspect of it, but it was somehow just a little too

comfortable. Arvind and Priya allude to this too in their thoughtful essay. I felt, not always consciously, that I needed some challenge, some discomfort. By itself, this is not reason enough to move to India – I could have found such challenge in the States, or Ecuador, I'm sure. But it set me thinking about a change.

"A feeling that I'd find India most challenging of all. Fascinating and frustrating, yet challenging. Maybe it's because I write, I don't know: but I often feel it's the frustrations and perversities here that make this such an interesting country. I don't know really what 'loving your country' means, but I certainly love the challenge of daily life here. Now, and even though I look on the US fondly as a second home, I would never live anywhere else. But I do miss my dog."

Pushkala, 95 MMS batch rounds off with an entirely different perspective of moving from India to US -- she merely catalogues, without getting judgmental, the pure experience that life's changes entailed:
"Going to the mess armed with flash cards, pacing up and down MB hallways memorizing wordlists is a familiar scene for 3rd year BITSians. Suddenly Barrons became more important to them than RAF movies and *lachha* sessions. However I never joined this 'clan'. I was eager to go out and start working. I often dreamed of myself as an important executive wearing crisp skirt suits and jet setting around the globe.

"Sure enough, I started working and it was great fun. Attending meetings, having a secretary do the filing and mailing for you, lunches with colleagues, planning evening activities with friends was all great. All that money and freedom. Ah that independence was delicious! Coming home for holidays was the best part. I felt so important to be finally working. I loved buying gifts for the family. My proudest moments included discussing 'work' with Dad.

> **"I went to buy a bagel and the lady asked me, 'What kind?' I was perplexed and not wanting to sound stupid said 'Round!'…"**

"A couple years down the line, office politics, the routine of going to work everyday, the discipline of being a working adult began to wear me down and I longed for the carefree campus atmosphere. Lounging around SKY lawns under the warm sun, afternoon naps, juicy gossip and all the excitement of college seemed so inviting. At about this time I met my prospective husband and everything happened so fast. I was soon to go away to the US to start a new life. I decided to quit my job and do my Masters.

"The US! It didn't seem alien at all to me. I had tons of friends and family here. But life could not be more different. Everything seemed so still and quiet and hushed. Remember the movie 'Pushpak' where Kamal Hassan longs for the din of everyday life? That's how I felt sometimes. The houses looked picture perfect with well-manicured lawns and all that. I still remember I told my husband when he took me out for a drive – 'Gosh these homes look like they have been taken straight out of a photograph'. The next few months passed in a daze. Learning to cook, doing the grocery shopping, weekend outings, throwing parties, meeting the in-laws, my first time skiing and just getting used to the fact that I was now married. I went absolutely nuts during the first snowstorm. It was a lot of fun. But I also missed home and my parents terribly. I missed the familiar sounds and my independence. Heck I couldn't even drive here. Thank god for the trains and school, I soon began to form my own circle of friends.

"The routine of classes, quizzes and tests started and everything somehow seemed to make sense again! One of my funniest Fresh-Off-Boat (FOB) stories is when I went to buy a bagel and the lady asked me, 'What kind?' I was perplexed and not wanting to sound stupid said 'Round!'

"Having been employed, getting being married and then going to school have all been very different. Maybe you don't feel the same way as I do. But when you see the giggly girls and boys that have come he re right after their undergrad you feel they are being silly. You suddenly reach out for those of your kind to share the newly married hubby stories in between classes. Fortunately for me I did have a good balance of both kinds of friends. The ones that took me to the wild undergrad parties and the others that shared *aloo paratha* and lasagna recipes with me. I think I liked that balance and I enjoyed going

to school. The academic system wasn't much different from BITS and that sort of helped me. The crowd was also not that different. Plenty of desis around. But it was also refreshingly different to meet students from various other places once a while. But being married and going to school can also be totally taxing. I had evening classes and a day campus job and tons of assignments to do. The weekends were full. There was always some project meeting or the other, and then there were always the household chores and some visiting to be done. I just got used to running around all the time.

"Life's transitions are inevitable and can be demanding at times. But it is all worth it isn't it? I feel it is something like opening your eyes to a new day. Sometimes you see bright sunny mornings and other times you see dreary dark ones."

While a lot of what we report here might touch a raw nerve or strike a chord with some of you, the US is often considered the promised land, India has always been home for all of us and wherever we are, whatever we go through, a common thread binds us all, that of a shared history, not just of having lived in India but of having been part of Pilani, halooing days,

laccha sessions, Blue Moon Maggi, Sky Lab *chai*, interspersed with classes, music nites, an Oasis in our lives…

Whatever it is we transition through, life may seem like a journey but living in the moment is the biggest joy. On that happy note, we request all our readers to write in with their transitions -- in student life or careers, from careers to part time work, whatever; we invite you to share your experiences.

Share your views with us. Write to Anuradha Sharma Gupta (anuradha@bitsaa.org)

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Is the BITS Alumni Network working for you?

Krishna Hegde ('96 Comp Sc)

Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth

In September '04, I joined Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth. For my post MBA career I wanted to work in the financial services industry but didn't know about specific roles or what it takes to get an internship on Wall Street. I remembered that Karthik Krishna (BITS '93) worked as Vice-President in the Fixed Income Desk at Deutsche Bank, New York. I sent him an email and told him that I wanted some guidance. On a Saturday afternoon, Karthik spoke to me for almost an hour and took me through the details of his work, told me what his firm looked for while recruiting people and what qualities made a person successful in his profession.

After a couple of weeks, I went to New York on a visit and he introduced me to people in his group. I got a first hand understanding of the job of a trader. Subsequently, I interacted with numerous BITSians in the same industry (Adri Guha, Ram Kumar, Nirav Shah, Rohit Khanna - all BITS '95 batch, Vikram Soni BITS '96 batch). Each of them was happy to speak to me and shared with me their experiences in the industry.

When BITSAA organized East Coast Oasis in November '04, I drove over 6 hours participate in the celebration. Meeting BITSians across batches and knowing what Pilani was during their times is always a joy. As I staffed the counter taking orders for BITSAA merchandize, a person came by looking to buy a cap. We got talking and it turned out that the person I was speaking to - Subramaniam Venkateswaran (Mani of 87C4 batch) worked as a Senior Vice President in IT at Lehman Brothers, one of firms I was targeting for my summer internship. On his invitation, the next time I visited New York I dropped by at his office. He told me what distinguished Lehman Brothers from other firms on Wall Street and put me in touch with some people he thought I should meet. Throughout the recruitment process, he has been extremely supportive and I recently accepted a summer internship offer at Lehman Brothers. The BITS alumni network played a huge role in helping me get a summer internship in trading without any prior experience in the field.

It's great to be a member of an extremely close-knit community that will support me years after I've left the hallowed gates of my alma mater.

BY VIKAS CHANDRA ('94 INSTRU)

WHEN ACADEMICIANS BECOME ENTREPRENEURS: DR DESHBANDHU GUPTA

Lupin pharmaceuticals – a niche market operator that develops drugs for diseases like TB – was founded by a BITS Pilani Chemistry professor.

AN honorary doctor of philosophy with a Master's degree in Chemistry, Dr. Deshbandhu Gupta started his career teaching Chemistry at BITS, Pilani. Dr. Gupta then moved onto work for a British pharmaceutical company that is now part of Sanofi-Aventis. However, the scientist within him was not entirely satisfied because he didn't have much research freedom. So he quit his job, borrowed $120 from his wife and bought a tiny Indian vitamin company called Lupin to be the vehicle of his dreams. The year was 1968.

Since 1968 Dr. Gupta has steered Lupin towards the forefront of India pharmaceuticals. In 2004, Lupin posted a turnover of Rs 1168 crore. Thirty-six year later Lupin is the sixth-largest drug company in India and has world leadership in the treatment of tuberculosis, an unsexy disease most drug companies have ignored but India cannot. Gupta and his family own 52% of the company.

LUPIN'S MANTRA

The reasons are numerous, but long-term vision will definitely be on the top. Dr. Gupta didn't set out to cure AIDS or cancer. Instead, he focused on neglected niches like TB. Even with a turnover of Rs. 1168 crore, Lupin is still a small fry in the international pharmaceutical race. "Lupin is a pint-size company but has a very attractive business model," says Jon Thorn, managing director of the India Capital Fund in Hong Kong. The success of Lupin can be attributed to diversification of investment in different sectors. "They aren't betting the whole company on any single element of the business," says Thorn.

There is a $600 million annual market for anti-TB drugs worldwide. Lupin hopes to receive permission soon to go ahead with human trials of a new medicine it has developed to cure TB. The Indian government has funded 40% of Lupin's research bill for the new TB treatment so far. This will be the first new drug for TB cure in 40 years. Most other big pharma companies are just not interested in TB cure drugs because it is a low-profit, developing country market.

Approximately three million people die from TB every year and Lupin's new drug will cut the TB treatment to two months instead of the current regimen that takes six.

Lupin spends close to Rs. 20 crores on annual research and development. Ceftriaxone is the new hot stuff inside Lupin. Ceftriaxone is Hoffmann-La Roche's $1.1 billion antibiotic marketed as Rocephin, going off patent in July 2005. Lupin already has approval for the generic version and has built a new Food & Drug Administration approved factory to churn it out. Research for new drugs is done in Lupin's research center on the outskirts of Pune.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Dr. Deshbandhu Gupta hopes to establish Lupin as a $1 billion company by 2009 and expects that more than 50 percent of Lupin's turnover will come from US and Europe. He is now the 40th richest man in India, according to recent survey by Forbes. Its certainly quite an achievement for a man who started all this by investing $120 into his dream.

◆

BY VERNON FERNANDEZ ('04 EEE)

THE OYSTER LAB

The OLAB a chapel of technology at BITS. The ergonomic chairs at each workstation ensure that only the mind is taxed during lab sessions, which the students enjoy in air-conditioned comfort. 17" flat screen monitors, a central server to which all the terminals are connected… did someone say state-of-the-art?

TUCKED away on the second floor of what old timers speak of as the M-block is the Oyster Lab. With thirty-six terminals, each with a sleek 17" monitor, some of the most advanced software around, surely the label of state-of-the-art is warranted.The walls are adorned with portraits of pioneers in the development of semiconductor devices. The walls also have posters exhorting the students to "Be the next Silicon Revolutionary!" All of these point the students towards the ultimate aim: of producing a microchip developed completely in house, at BITS.

INCEPTION AND GROWTH

The lab is a product of a Rs. 200 crore initiative by BITS and its alumni to make BITS, Pilani the most technologically advanced institute in India. The first of its kind in the country, the lab aims to promote research in silicon technology and chip development. The OLAB will also have an extension at Bangalore to allow the students at BITS to work closely with industry. Partners in the industry will include OpenSilicon, Magma and Broadcom. The Bangalore lab is still in the planning stages and a site will be selected soon.

The OLAB walls have posters exhorting the students to "Be the next Silicon Revolutionary!"

COURSE TOOLS

The OLAB is being utilized for courses like Analog and Digital VLSI Design (ADVD) as well as higher degree courses like VLSI architecture and Analog IC design. Plenty of projects which require use of the the lab's tools have been allotted this semester. The facility is also used by some professors and Ph.D. students for research.

Everyone using the OLAB is learning together, and professors and students often explore the nuances of the various tools at the same time. Some students who have used similar design tools at their PS II stations contribute as well. Demo sessions, in which the usage of the tools is discussed, are held on a regular basis. The students can also interact with professors as well as people from the industry on the forum that has been set up at http://oysterslab.bits-pilani.ac.in

The tools available in the OLAB are the same tools that are being used for VLSI chip design in the industry at present. Having experience of this kind at the under-graduate level will no doubt give BITSians an extra edge.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The OLAB still has vast potential to grow. At present, more courses are being structured to include OLab components, while the projects allotted are increasing in complexity. However, there is a need for more input from the industry. If more challenging projects are offered by the industry, the students will soon gain better skills.

The OLAB is also closely connected with the Technology Business Incubator at BITS. The faculty extends an open invitation to alumni to return and make the most of this cutting-edge technology to aid their own start-ups. The faculty certainly hopes that the lab and other facilities will aid entrepreneurial alumni in the long run.

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By Ashish Garg ('97 Instru)

The Quarterly BITSian
Prof. Autar Kishen Kaw

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education names one distinguished professor from each of the 50 states. They recently bestowed this honor on our own alumnus, Dr Autar Kishen Kaw ('76 Mech), Professor at the University of South Florida.

Please tell us a little something about your time at BITS Pilani

I joined BITS in 1976. Having never gone out of my state (J&K), it was quite a change for me. However, about twenty of my batch mates from high school and pre-college were there which certainly made the transition a lot smoother. I loved the Pilani experience as I learnt to be independent and also achieved my initial goal of becoming an Engineer.

I ran away to Delhi the first two Saturdays I was in Pilani, where my mother was visiting her brother, however, both times she sent me back and I am glad to this day that she did else who knows how things would have turned out. Even showing her the big thick calculus book by Thomas did not change her mind!

I eventually went on to graduate with a BE (Hons.) in Mechanical Engineering in '81.
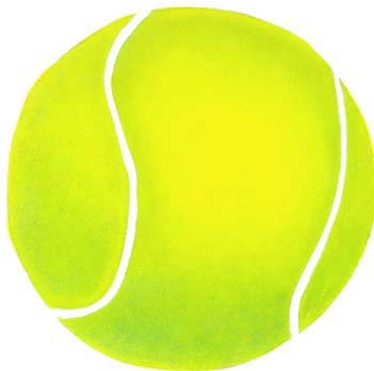
We'd love to hear about what you enjoyed doing at Pilani.

### Any special, particularly memorable moments?

I loved to play BITS-style cricket with a tennis ball and our study chair. It was fun to participate in the tournaments. I also participated in cultural activities like Bhawans nights and in my fourth year was the Cul Sec of Ashok Bhawan.

The courses I liked were the math courses. In fact, the staple course I like to teach at University of South Florida is Numerical Methods for Engineers. If someone were to ask me to pick a course I liked, it would be Optimization Technology as I enjoyed its applications.

What are the three best memories of your time at Pilani?

Most of my memories of Pilani are linked to OASIS. I was always impressed by the organizational skills of BITSians. I enjoyed the concerts of Hemant Kumar, Shiv Kumar and Ravi Shankar.

I also remember the farewell dinner for the seniors of Mechanical Engineering. It was touching to see people's eyes moisten as they left but a sparkle
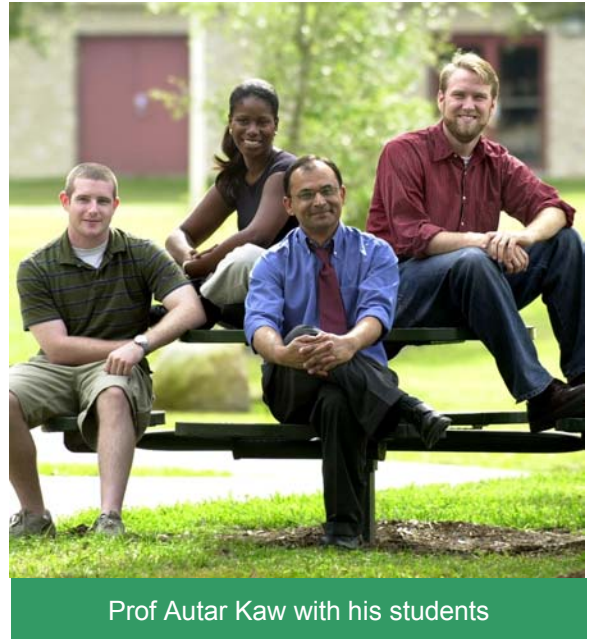
Prof Autar Kaw with his students

at having taking their first step – to make the transition to the US or join India's corporate world. It was one of the few occasions when faculty and students mingled freely without any kind of formality or reference to rank.

Another memory that is close to my heart is the bicycling trip (I forget the place, it has a power station) about 50 miles away. About ten of us went on this trip and our bonds of friendship grew stronger than ever. To be able to rough it out outside the comfort of our hostel rooms was the learning experience of a lifetime, not to say that, on occasion, living in hostels rooms wasn't roughing it out!

Tell us a little about the transition you made from India to the US? What surprised you? What did you like the most and what did you like the least?

With the family at their home in Florida

I've loved neon lights since childhood. To see so many neon lights at night just made my day. Everything [in the US] had a functional system which was refreshing. You did not get shoved from one department to another when you tried to get things done. Getting used to the food here took quite some time.

My mother asked me for just for two promises – do not eat beef and do not marry an American. I ate beef, by mistake, right when I boarded the PanAm Airline in Delhi. I did not know non-veg meant beef, and I'm sure we hadn't left Indian airspace yet. As for the second promise, it took four years to break that.

I did not dislike much about US. I did experience a little homesickness being cash strapped and the racist remarks in the Dixie land of South Carolina. Also, I did not like being dependent on others for car-rides.

What surprised me was that people smiled at you all the time. I was cautioned that just because a girl smiles at you doesn't imply that she is in love with you.

Please tell us a bit about your research. What attracted your intellectual interest?

Over the last twenty-three years, I have conducted research in the fracture mechanics of composite materials, bridge design, and educational research. I have always been interested in applied mathematics. The research in fracture mechanics of composite materials was interesting, as at that time not much was known about how composite materials behave. It also involved two of my favorite subjects – advanced mathematics and scientific programming.

Advice he was given when he came to the US

"I was cautioned that just because a girl smiles at you doesn't imply that she's in love with you."

The research in bridge design happened just by chance when a colleague of mine and I were asked by the Florida Department of Transportation to look at failure during the assembly of the fulcrum of bascule bridges in

Florida. In contrast to my earlier research that was basic, this one had immediate application. Also, it involved analytical, numerical and experimental components, and hence made it a complete study.

More recently, I have developed a holistic website for a course in Numerical Methods. This resource has been quite successful where the website has more than 5000 unique visitors per month.

Have you written or planned any books?

I have written one book on "Mechanics of Composite Materials". It was published in 1997 and the second edition is due to be published in 2005. I have co-authored a book on Fundamentals of Engineering Examination, and also an E-book on Introduction to Matrix Algebra.

The CASE award is predicated on "extraordinary dedication to undergraduate teaching" and we understand that you have been exemplary in the integration of technology and real world problems into the teaching process. Please tell us more about this.

This award has mainly recognized the effort in developing the web-based resources for an undergraduate course in Numerical Methods. For several years, I have incorporated technology as a complementary tool in the classroom, and when the National Science Foundation (NSF) agreed to fund this effort in 2002, we were able to expedite the execution. I have found that students get highly motivated when they see real-life applications in their courses.

Therefore, we use real-life examples to show the need to learn numerical methods. We also encompass several majors of engineering so that students get exposed to majors other than their own. With new technologies being interdisciplinary, this is a unique
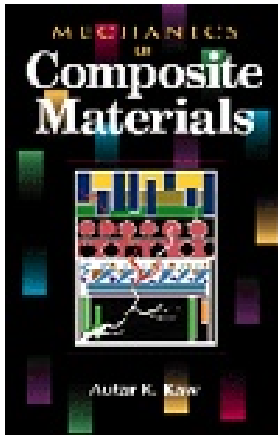
opportunity to introduce them to a wide variety of applications.

Have you ever worked with students from BITS, Pilani? What are your impressions of them in terms of research skills or intellectual abilities? How do you think we are distinguishing ourselves? What do we need to be doing better?

I have worked directly with only one student from Pilani, and he was bright, as expected. We worked on characterizing composite materials for a project that was funded by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. Although a far cry from his training, he now manages the Enterprise Solutions for Wipro for the East Coast of USA.

The research and intellectual ability of BITS students is extraordinary. The holistic education we receive [at Pilani] and the core courses that all students take pays off in the long run. It allows us to acclimatize to new technologies rapidly without having to formally re-educate ourselves.

The only thing I can think of doing better is that the laboratory experience needs to be modern and emphasized more. Hands on projects are

necessary to develop good engineering skills.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing BITS today?

Being accessible to the children of the lower middle class. BITS, in my opinion, has become very inaccessible to meritorious students who cannot afford the high fees and living costs. I would not have been able to go to BITS if it was not for the low cost education in 1976.

What can BITSians do better/start doing to compete with the world's best?

Hire the best professors who are given the opportunity to conduct research at the national level. Make an effort to admit a diverse student body.

What role do you see the alumni playing in making BITS a world-class institution?

BITS alumni have already shown that they come from a world-class institution. I would like to see more of the academic alumni going back for a sabbatical and sharing their educational and research experience with their peers and students.

On making BITS, Pilani, globally competitive

"Hire the best professors who are given the opportunity to conduct research at the national level. Make an effort to admit a diverse student body."

Have you been back to Pilani since? How was the visit personally and professionally?

No, I have not been back to Pilani but would love to do so one day.

Every one of my friends who has visited Pilani has found their visit to be an emotional and nostalgic experience.

What do you read to stay in touch with technology, business and other fields that interest you?

I read several magazines such as the Time, Reader's Digest, Popular Science, and the Smithsonian. I am a Fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and a member of the American Society of Engineering Education. I read several technical journals regularly in the field of composites, engineering mechanics, and computers in education.

What are your hobbies, interests etc.?

In my younger days, I played quite a bit of racquetball and cricket. However, with one's knees not co-operating now sometimes, I like outdoor biking. I love reading nonfiction (it keeps me away from the fiction; that is the only digital divide I have with my wife) and going to the movies. I also like to socialize with my friends. I occasionally write articles for newspapers.

What career/personal advice would you give the student community?

Do what you love, not what comes easy to you. I could be very good at counting money at the bank but that would be boring. Many a times, people will say that you are good in science and math, so go become an engineer. That is a wrong piece of advice anyone can give you. I have instilled this in my own students and also my two daughters. One of them is planning to be a journalist while the other wants to design large stages, a far cry from engineering. I am glad that they get their genes as well as their looks from their mother.

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INTERVIEW BY ASHISH GARG ('97 INSTRU)

THE QUARTERLY BITSIAN
BALAJI KRISHNAMURTHY

He was recently among Time Magazine's 25 Global Business Influentials and the chief architect of an inverted-bonus plan at Planar Systems that put his associates before executives and himself. Greed may have been good for some in the '80s, but Balaji Krishnamurthy ('71 Math) is setting the standard for leadership in this century.

You have a long history with Pilani. Tell us something about your Pilani experience.

My relationship with Pilani goes beyond my BITS days. My father was a Professor at BITS. I finished my high school from Birla Public School and lived in Pilani from 1965 to 1976, almost 11 years. Because of which I knew the place [Pilani] better than most students in BITS might have.

My father lives six months in US and six months in India. In fact he came here in Portland a couple of weeks ago. I get most of my Pilani updates from him.

So you have a long Pilani connection. Were you born in Pilani as well?

I actually was not born in Pilani. My father joined Pilani in 1965 and that is when we as a family went to Pilani for the first time. I finished my middle school and high school in Pilani and then joined BITS.

What degrees did you get at BITS?

The years when I was at BITS were when we used to have the BSc degree and then the idea of integrated MSc came about. I went on to get an MSc in Mathematics from BITS in '76.

Why did you choose mathematics? Was that because your father was a Math professor?

Not really, I actually wanted to study law but people advised me

against it. In fact my uncle took me to the Supreme Court area in New Delhi and showed me how most of these 'black coat' people were standing on the street filling out forms on a pedestal. So that was end of the law degree for me.

Then I wanted to get into management but you couldn't do so as an undergrad so I took the usual route of applying for an Electronics degree but I had just received a National Science Talent award that required you to be enrolled in a science degree for receiving the award. During my

time an engineering degree would not entitle you to the very lucrative National Science Talent scholarship.

I knew BITS very well and I knew how you could enroll in one program while still taking courses in another program. And this is what I did. I pretty much finished an engineering degree while I enrolled into the MSc program.

How about some activities you were involved in during your Pilani days? Any courses you particularly liked?

**Balaji Krishnamurthy
(BITS '71)**
President and CEO, Planar Systems
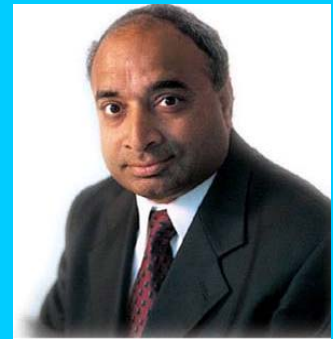
Education
- M.Sc. Mathematics – BITS Pilani (1971-1976)
- Ph.D. Computer Science – University of Massachusetts, Amherst (1976-1981)

Key Accomplishments
- Transformed Planar Systems from a display component manufacturer to a full-service provider of flat-panel displays.
- Effected an "Inverted" bonus plan that rewards associates before executives.

Mr Krishnamurthy resides in Oregon with wife Pat and their two teenage sons.

I was part of the BITS soccer and basketball teams. Those were things I really enjoyed during my Pilani days. We got into a few tournaments around the area and I have some

really good memories from those days. We used to play at the Rajasthan basketball meet of some sort at Jaipur. But we didn't do that well. Those were fun times!

What did you do after BITS?

After BITS, I got a PhD in Computer Science from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1981.
Then I went to work for General Electric Co., where I did research until 1984.

After that I went to Tektronix where I did Computer related R&D activity, ran a research lab, then moved into running a business and never looked back at research again. I was at Tektronix until 1999.

And that's when I joined Planar Systems as the President and CEO.

That's pretty intriguing. In Silicon Valley you find a lot of Indian CTOs but not that many Indian CEOs. How did things work out for you to get this break as a CEO right after Tektronix?

At Tektronix I was running a billion dollar business for about 10 years or so. I had already moved from a technical discipline into general management. The shift really happened one day when I decided that I wanted to run a business.

Were Tektronix and Planar in the same businesses when you became the CEO of Planar Systems?

Tektronix and Planar were in totally different arenas. The fact that both companies were in the same city was co-incidental. Planar was looking for a CEO all around the country and that is when someone called me from the other side of the country and asked me if I wanted to do it. I had already established myself as a General Manager at Tektronix and the time was right to move on to the next thing. And so I did.

> **"That is the advice I would like to give to people – Be very clear about what your aspirations are and then rise to the challenges of meeting those aspirations."**

What were the challenges you faced you when you joined Planar?

Planar was going through a very prototypical transition from a founding CEO who had unfortunately left the company due to health reasons. The company was looking for an external CEO. It is always challenging for a company to transition from a founding CEO to a professional CEO. When I came in as a professional manager, my first task was to revive a business that was heavily focused on a technology (display component manufacturing) that had long become obsolete.

Since then, we have dramatically transformed the company into a provider of flat-panel display hardware and software solutions for demanding applications in medical, commercial, industrial

and retailing markets. We still have more challenges ahead of us.

Was it at Planar that you came up with the Inverted Bonus plan or was this something going on in your head for quite some time?

It was an idea I had developed when I was at Tektronix. It was not quite in this form. I had a few complicated ideas all of which came from the same fundamental value system. These thoughts were that management should definitely be rewarded well when the company succeeded and when the company didn't; institute a certain degree of responsibility. The whole idea is that the management has a stewardship responsibility to the stakeholders who depend on the management for the company to perform. I had that concept in my mind at Tektronix.

When I came to Planar, I had the opportunity to put that into practice. It of course involved a significant amount of thinking, analysis and simplification of complex ideas.

How has Planar Systems changed as a company since you took over.

We have transformed the company significantly from a components supplier to a display solutions provider. We have also achieved some really good financial results.

But over the past twelve months we have performed poorly and have lost our momentum. Our challenge now is to regain that one more time.

How do you drive innovation in

Dome Dashboard
Remote display management made specifically for medical imaging.

your company?

There is a culture of innovation that you need to create in your company.

Innovation, unfortunately, is too often associated with technology. It may not have anything to do with technology. For example, the inverted bonus plan is a very innovative concept. Innovation has to occur in all aspects of business life. Sometimes there is far too much focus on innovation in technology.

How did you feel after getting into Time Magazine's 25 Most Influential Businessmen list?

I knew about this about three months prior to publication of that particular issue of Time. My PR person got the phone call from Time that they are going to do an article on me. I immediately asked her, "How much do they want to get paid for it?" She reassured me that it was not a paid editorial, which I obviously didn't believe at that time. It took me by surprise as well.

Are you in touch with Pilani or any ex-BITSians?

I was more in touch with Pilani when my father was there. After he retired I have not been able to follow much on news from Pilani. My father is in touch with Prof Venkateswaran and even I have exchanged emails with the Vice Chancellor a few times. I get to hear about BITS from my father. I am still in touch with some of my old friends from BITS.

I visited Pilani last about 20 years ago.

Any advice on what BITS students or fellow Alumni can do to emulate your success?

I think you have to be careful in assuming that success has anything to do with hierarchical position in a company or financial worth or designation by some magazine when they happen to pick somebody.

Success has much to do with one wants to accomplish and whether they gave all they had to accomplish to what it is they wanted to do. When you define success more about rising to your aspirations, there is a greater contentment with success.

That is the advice I would like to give to people. Be very clear about what your aspirations are and then rise to the challenges of meeting those aspirations.

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57,000 Sign Up for BITSAT
Computer Based Testing for Admission to BITS

Admission to the integrated first degree programs, both at Pilani and Goa campuses is now being administered through an online computer-based test (CBT). The test – called the BITSAT – will be conducted between April through to June, 2005 at several centers in India. However, toppers in the respective boards would continue to get direct admission irrespective of their scores on the online test. While all admissions will be based on the scores obtained by students on the CBT, the minimum qualification for admission will be a pass in 12th year examination with at least 80% aggregate marks in physics, chemistry and mathematics subjects with at least 60% in each of physics, chemistry and mathematics subjects.

While talking about the test pattern, Dr Venkateswaran said that the three-hour test would be based on NCERT syllabus and would consist of questions from a large question bank. The domain of testing would be Physics, Chemistry, Math, English proficiency and Logical reasoning. Students can get a feel of the real test by going over a sample that has been provided on the BITS website.

Soon after news broke out about BITSAT, several coaching centers immediately scrambled to offer tutoring for the test. One such example is of The Premier Academy for General & Educational Services Pvt Ltd (PAGE) Hyderabad that has even set up a website for this (http://www.bitsatpage.com/) complete with demo tests, mentoring programs etc. For those concerned about the test quality, transparency and security Dr Venkateswaran says that, "The test will be the most fool-proof one ever conducted in the country." The test is expected to be conducted on lines of the GRE and the process is reportedly efficient and mischief free. The testing process is to be completely transparent and the student is given the results immediately just like in the GRE. BITS authorities are excited about the new process and hope that it will provide a fair chance to all students aspiring to join the BITSian community.

BY LAXMAN MOHANTY ('81 EEE)

WANTED SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

The answer to meeting India's challenges in the social sector might lie a new breed of entrepreneurship – one that takes the vision of the non governmental organization and couples it with the principles of management and strategic planning prevalent in private sector for-profit enterprises

MOST countries in the world today are grappling with a plethora of social challenges. In countries like India large percentages of the population have little to no access to basic education, health care or other primal needs. In India's case, even after 50 years of independence the government has been unable to find an adequate solution to this problem. But over the past decade or so the country has clearly emerged as an economic superpower thanks to contributions from technology, pharmaceuticals and other industrial sectors. While on the one hand processes leading to unprecedented wealth creation are unfolding before us, on the other end stark poverty, malnourished children and illiteracy are widespread too.

This anomaly raises a fundamental question. Entrepreneurs and the forces of privatization have taken charge of economic activities of the country and led to a reduction in responsibilities of government in this arena. Similarly, can there be another set of entrepreneurs who can complement the government's efforts in social sector? Can such entrepreneurs induce the government to maximize the utilization of its resources and provide better services those provided today?

To realize such a scenario, there is a need to evaluate different and more innovative genres of enterprises and entrepreneurs. This objective of this article is to present an appraisal of this theme.

Entrepreneurs create wealth not only for themselves but also for the society at large. Not only do they create their self-employment but also create employment for many others within the community. They also bring about recognition for the nation as Indian IT entrepreneurs have done. Some years ago, entrepreneurship was looked down upon except in some parts of the country. While in a state like Gujarat, most people are expected to engage in business activities besides seeking regular forms of employment, in Orissa opting to run a business is often seen as a last resort. The rationale of this social perception has often perplexed me given that the

intellectual demands of running a business surely meet, or arguably exceed, those of a regular job. But the truth is that entrepreneurs are exactly the sort of people who seek opportunities in the face of adversity and dare to go off the beaten path.

A commercial enterprise by definition is more focused on top and bottom line growth and

tries to maximize shareholder value. Though today management literature advocates that an enterprise must also look at other stakeholders and care for society, still, it is the profit motive that drives most of the decision making within the enterprise. On the other hand, there exists a large volunteer sector which works on various social issues like health, education, gender equity, support for disadvantaged groups etc. This sector depends on corporations, government and other sources for the

Community Service

requisite resources. Though lately some Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have initiated income generation schemes to take care of a part of their expenses, most NGOs are by and large dependent upon charitable contributions. Thus, NGOs contrast with commercial enterprises in terms of end goals and resource generation mechanisms. Though some NGOs are managed professionally with clarity in mission, structure, and accountability most depend on the individual notions of their founders. They also do not possess the highly desirable property of scalability as do commercial enterprises. In general, the longevity of NGOs is suspect due to improper succession planning and the absence of other management procedures and systems.

For an enterprise to make a difference in the social sector, it has to have the best of commercial enterprises and NGOs. It has to be a social enterprise that adheres to the end goals of NGOs and retains the passion of their founders but also acquires systems,

procedures, resource generation and strategy formulation practices of commercial enterprises. In essence, the organization must function as an enterprise with social goals. The promoter behind such enterprise has to be a social entrepreneur who does not look for personal wealth creation but intends to make a difference in social sector. She must not shy away from using all the tools that corporations use to manage and achieve their end goals.

I have always felt that BITS is a cradle for entrepreneurship. Though specific courses on "Entrepreneurship" have not been typical of academic curriculum, many BITSians have been bitten by the entrepreneurship bug at some stage in their lives. This phenomenon can perhaps be explained by the system that BITS follows where each student is on his/her own from day one in terms of flexibility forcing good decision making. It may be the wide range of courses that a BITSian is forced to undergo and/or various clubs/activities that one learns to manage. While my conclusions

are certainly not rooted in sound research, I do wonder if the way many BITSians have become entrepreneurs and have created wealth, can we promote BITSian social entrepreneurship too to use our skills and understanding to establish enterprises that can handle some of the social problems that we have today in our country. I am sure then we can have the India that we dream of.

Laxman Mohanty (EEE'81) is pursuing a PhD at BITS Pilani. His area of interest is resource mobilization strategies of engineering colleges in India. He's been an entrepreneur for the last 18 years and has set up a computer organization, Oricom Systems Pvt Ltd and an engineering college, Silicon Institute of Technology, in Bhubaneswar. He's now working to develop a social enterprise in education – the Future Focus Foundation (3F). 3F aims to set up a network of rural and urban schools with coupling of micro-industries in rural schools. Laxman can be reached for comment at: laxman_mohanty@yahoo.co.in ♦

BITSunami: Temporary shelters put up as part of the immediate relief effort

By DILIP D'SOUZA ('76 EEE)

NOTES FROM MY TRIP

A report, in Dilip's inimitable style, on the state of affairs in some of the Tsunami affected areas.

THERE must be hundreds of houses in Bommaiyarpalayam, a small fishing village on the beach north of Pondicherry. The houses closest to the water are all simply gone -- a little shrine here, some bricks there, the only signs that they ever existed. The others are mostly badly damaged. Thirumurugan, showing us around, insists that we must see pretty much every damaged house. "Bombay-le *irindu* patrikar vandirkango" ("Journalists have come from Bombay"), he says over and over again as we walk about. I'm struck, and saddened, by the things the people here do to give the journalists from Bombay an idea of the monster that whacked them and to drive home that idea. It's hardly as if we need it driven home – the destruction and pain is evident. And yet they do it.

There's 45-year-old Muthulakshmi. She tells me that a log from a catamaran hit her in her mouth, knocking a tooth out. She shows me the gap to confirm this. But the blow also loosened another tooth. She grabs that one and shakes it to confirm. Shake, shake, shake, until my appeals not to do it get through to her.

There's Anjalai, 60, who sits on the ground and wails gently, rocking back and forth. Her sari is pulled up to above her knees -- otherwise a shockingly immodest way for a woman to sit, but here I can see why. She was hit by catamaran logs too, but on her legs. She has bandages on both knees. She wants me to see them, beckons to me until I go over. As I get close, she begins to untie a bandage, to show me the wound. Don't do that, I say. Then she starts to pull the bandage down. Don't do that, I say again, sternly this time. Then she tells me her teeth were also broken -- they look fine, but perhaps she feels she has to keep up with Muthulakshmi, who has just shaken her tooth for me -- and the wave has left her deaf.

There's Amurtham with the deep cut on her knuckle. There are signs of pus in it and it looks bad. Why haven't you treated it, or bandaged it, I ask. Doctors came, she says with an almost sly smile, but she didn't have them look at it. I get the impression she keeps it like this solely to find sympathy in visitors like me. My Tamil isn't good enough to tell her it might turn septic or gangrenous or whatever happens to untreated cuts, so I put it simply: you don't do something about your finger, it's going to drop off. She only smiles some more.

There's Chelliamma with the unhealthy pink cast to her face; on her cheek, a scar that looks like a broken blister. Catamaran logs hit her too. She says she has severe pain in her waist from the blow. She points to her waist. Then she actually pulls off the pallu of her sari, her blouse falls nearly fully open, she pulls it up substantially -- again, a shockingly immodest thing for a woman to do -- and points to her waist once more.

And there's Miniamma, just as we are about to leave Bommaiyarpalayam. She offers us coffee. Nothing else. The color of the wave? Thirumurugan thinks for a moment, looks around him. There! He points to the painted strip on the bows of a fishing boat nearby. A dull orange, the strip. That colour, says Thirumurugan. I can't imagine a wave of that colour, but that's what he says.

I don't know if it's because of the colour or the misery the tsunami brought, but every time Thirumurugan and others refer to the wave, they also speak of the "fire" in the water. As in, it brought "fire" in its jaws as it swept into Bommaiyarpalayam and out again. An interesting, and for what happened here, telling metaphor.

But the wave brought something less metaphorical as well, more real. Mud. Elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, we've seen evidence of that -- mud inside clocks, inside pots, plastered on the floor of a room, stinking, everywhere. But in Bommaiyarpalayam, the fisher folk speak of it as bhoomi (earth), invariably with their hands cupped and doing a lifting motion, saying to me that the wave scooped up the very bottom of the sea, the stinky muddy bottom of the sea, and flung it violently at them.

Palani Arumugam's daughter Madina -- a gorgeous and alert two-year-old -- swallowed some of that mud from the wave. Over a week later, says Palani, she still brings bits of it out from time to time. Madina smiles up at me. I try not to think of her muddied insides.

And when this bhoomi-filled tongue of fire dressed up as a wave struck, it

circled the houses -- more explanatory hand motions -- and then went back, taking huge chunks of their lives out with it. How far out? Two kilometers, says Thirumurugan. That's right, he says the sea receded two km after the tsunami. A low tide to beat all low tides, and plenty of bhoomi was on display for a long time.

Tamil Nadu after the tsunami is the third time I've visited where a major natural disaster has struck: Orissa after the 1999 cyclone, Kutch after the 2001 quake, and now this. Something draws me to this, and by now, I often wonder what it is. I'll admit, a certain level of voyeurism is part of it all: a fascination for the fantastic damage nature can do to us.

But only part. In the end, I think my greatest curiosity is for the truly spectacular human spirit you see in these situations: the way all manner of people from every part of the country -- indeed, the world -- spontaneously offer their mind and muscles to help the victims of calamity.

The personification of this spirit, for me, remains a young man called PK Gupta, whom I met in Orissa in 1999. Gupta worked then at Citibank in New Delhi. He seemed to have read the news about the cyclone, got up from his desk and caught the next train out to Orissa. With just the clothes on his back and a towel, he turned up and asked to be put to work. And how he worked: for the next week, he tramped tirelessly from village to smashed village, collecting information, taking relief materials out, helping burn dead bodies, on and on.

Something about what drives a man like PK touches me somewhere very deep. And where great disasters happen, you see it every time. Young and old; Hindu, Muslim, Christian and everything in between; rich or poor; whoever it is, whatever their differences, for a few days they sink them all in the effort to help their fellow human beings who are in terrible distress. It's moving and inspiring, and that's why the days I've spent in these areas are some of the best days of my life.

But ... yes, there is a but. The sad thing is that it is too often goodwill like this that itself causes problems for the victims.

Misguided relief material and effort -- from old clothes that nobody wants, to inappropriate food, to campaigns that last only a few days -- are massive headaches. And yet they are visible after every disaster. We want to help, and that impulse comes from the best of intentions. But all too often, in trying to do so, we end up helping unthinkingly, therefore harming. Because the way we approach the business of relief, too often, ruins relationships, produces beggars, causes logistical nightmares, and compounds disaster.

Fred Cuny -- a thoughtful expert on calamities who was killed in Chechnya in 1995 -- once wrote: "For the survivors of a natural disaster, a second disaster may also be looming." He meant relief.

And this is why the greatest challenge after a disaster is two-fold. One, swiftly work out the best way to help the victims *in that particular situation*, and put that into practice. Two, work for the long-term.

♦

BITSunami -- The temple's destroyed but the idol remains

BY THE SANDPAPER 2.0 TEAM

PARTYIN' AROUND THE WORLD

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEST COAST

April 9, 2005, BITSAA Annual Reunion and Music Nite 2005

It's the time of the year again when BITSians, spouses and friends get together for the biggest (and best) Alumni party in the Bay Area! We are delighted to announce the Annual Reunion and Music Nite 2005. To encourage BITSian spouses to actively participate in BITSAA events, we have planned a 'BITS-style Music Nite' that would feature the bay area band "EasternWinds" alongwith BITSians and BITSian spouses performing live on stage.

Name   Ashish Garg
Contact   805.453.8379

SINGAPORE

April 15, 2005, Quarterly Get Together Series

Continuing the successful and the now famous Feb 18th Get-together (see below) and spurred on by the good time had by all, BITSAA Singapore is proud to announce the next event in our *Quarterly Get Together* series.

Drinks, food, nostalgia and lots of fun, fun, fun! Also, as an additional benefit, meet some of the Greatest Bits Alumni who've lives in Singapore.

Venue: Harry's Bar at boat quay

Cost: SGD 300 per head.

Please email your confirmations to: bitsaa-singapore@yahoogroups.com

Name   Rajesh Krishnan
Contact   rajesh@servion.com

PAST EVENTS

SINGAPORE

February 18, 2005, Singapore

After a long gap, we finally managed to organize a get together of the Singapore Chapter members, Thanks to the initiative taken by Kanags of the '93 batch. We had a very informal get together at one of the Arabic theme pubs in the CBD. For a change, I was there on time and I found two other members to start with... Since I had Kanags mobile handy it wasn't difficult for me to locate him in that crowded pub (Friday evening 6.30, you can imagine!). Finding the rest of them was a challenge to start with and then became a fun game as it went along. We took turns and went to every Indian who was there in

and around the pub (who had a lost look in his face) and asked him if he was a BITSian. We managed to pull some of them to our gang and got an emphatic 'No!' from many of them.

It was a gathering with huge range (from Class of '78 to Class of '2003). There were about 25 of us and we had good fun. Lots of drinks and good natured ragging from the seniors were all a part of the festivities.

We also vowed to bring vigor back into the BITSAA Singapore Chapter and unanimously nominated Kanags as the "President" and Rajesh as the "Secretary" of the new look team. Seniors like Srinivasa Rao, Srikumar, Guru and Venkat Suri shall be the Patrons in Chief.

- Rajesh Krishnan.

Name   Kanags
Contact   Mobile No.91281496

NAGPUR

April 9, 2005, BITSAA Annual Reunion and Music Nite 2005

The 2nd outing of the BITSAA Nagpur was a roaring event - complete with dance, songs and boy, was everyone high spirited at this event!

Alumni Corner

We all began the evening at 4 from Poonam Chambers, minus Akbar who decided it was better to *ghot* for his forthcoming exams. We were welcomed in the traditional Maharashtrian style, complete with *haldikumkum*, and *nagaras* which was followed by sumptuous curried *poha*. Then, we all settled down for some delicious *antakshari*, with Neelam bravely conducting the programme. We perhaps had never thought about words such as "*pyaar*, aanke" with as much vigor any other day!

The *matki* phodana which saw people loose their bearings - *"jaate the japan, pahoonch gaye cheen, samjh gaye na.*." - the boisterous musical chairs and the scintillating dance numbers - the quiz given by Mridulaji - the fortune telling - and the soulful *aarti* - complete with a Mehendi wali, and a giant jigsaw puzzle, it was an evening with multiple dimensions. I tried bringing some sobriety in the crowd and discussed how we could work together better, or with the worldwide BITSAA also. I was surprised that several people were sober enough to listen, and at least I got a few discussions going. We hope to all become

Lunch event organized by the BITSAA Nagpur chapter

Linked In members with the BITSAA flag firmly tied around our necks and waists :)

Folks who missed it – wish you hadn't, and folks who were there, thanks for being such great company! Folks who had cameras and stuff, please, please oblige by putting them up on the groups album location.

Name Sangeeta Patni
Contact
sangeeta_patni@yahoo.com

NAGPUR

December 15, 2004, Lunch, Anyone?

Members of the Nagpur chapter played host to Chandra Bhopale (BITS '77) during Chandra's trip late last year. The group discussed the role of the alumni association in promoting a stronger BITSian community and exchanged ideas on how to further enhance its efficacy towards this goal. Chandra also shared his professional experiences garnered over a twenty year career.

Contact Sangeeta Patni
Contact
sangeeta_patni@yahoo.com

♦

BY PRASAD THOTAKURA (COORDINATOR, HELP-BODDU VOLUNTEER TEAM)

MIRACLES DO HAPPEN

Sai Prasad Boddu ('93 Comp Sc) is back in India

IT was a long journey from an automobile accident to comatose to semi-conscious to fully conscious state to critical care to general ward to outpatient therapy to long-term rehab in India. But, we the volunteer team pulled it through along with Sai Prasad Boddu. Congratulations to the volunteer team for the job well done.

As you know, Sai Prasad Boddu, now 28, who graduated from the University of North Texas, Denton, TX met with a major automobile accident on an ill-fated night of Oct. 16, 2004, that left him with severe shears in his brain.

Saiboddu with his family

Sai Boddu a graduate student of BITS, Pilani came to the US from India on a student Visa had no medical insurance, no income and very few friends in the United States Now, Sai is in full conscious state, can move his both legs and arms freely, recognizes everyone, responds very well to all questions, can write and say few words including I'm fine in a low voice though he can't walk yet. He gets nourishment through only feeding tubes. As per Doctors, he needs to go through a long-term rehab and only time will tell how soon he can can fully recover.

Boddu family has decided to take Sai back to India when Doctors told them that there was nothing more they could do for him, he is fit to travel, needs to be in a long term care, and provided the necessary home-care medical equipment and supplies for a week. Laxmi Praveena the sister of Sai who is a Doctor by profession has learned how to care for her brother.

Fortunately, with the help of one of my good friends at Lufthansa, we were able to get two business class tickets at a very high discounted price and a free business class upgrade to Mrs. Boddu on Lufthansa. Boddu family left to India on Dec. 26th from D/FW and reached home safe. Just, I spoke with the family who are on their way to Bombay Hospital.

Sai's father Mr. Kanaka Das Boddu called from India to specially thank the whole community for taking care of his son during this horrendous period of his life. Mr. Boddu mentioned that he had made all arrangements with Bombay Hospital where Sai would be admitted for a long-term rehab.

I specially thank Sai Kolli, Praveen Malraj, CK Mandava, Daniel Mutyala, Korie Wagner, Vikranth Bangaru, Vijay Vemapti, Synthia Morrison, TANTEX President Chukkala S. Rao, volunteers from ISA-UNT, BITS, Dallas Methodist Hospital staff and hundreds of people who have contributed.

"I was moved by the generosity of our Indian American community, they have been giving from the heart to help someone in need, people who read about Boddu have been a steady resource for the family since the accident. We were able to rise close to $40,000 which was earmarked for his long term rehab expenses."

ISA of UNT, alumni of BITS, local and foreign newspapers, websites and many more people played a key role in spreading the word about, generating funds, sharing the responsibilities to help out Sai Boddu.

We have mailed out receipts to all donors with a cover letter. We are closing the account by the end of next month and still accepting contributions up to Jan 31st, 2005.

THANK YOU!

The entire BITSian community is proud of and indebted to Prasad Thotakura, Sai Kolli and Praveen Malraj for their exemplary display of concern, caring and commitment.

CONTRIBUTIONS

People who wish to donate can write checks payable to "TANTEX – Help Boddu" and mail it to:

3952 Larkspur Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76137. For more information, contact Prasad Thotakura at 817.300.4747.

♦

THE BITS2BSCHOOL TEAM

DREAM A LITTLE MBA DREAM

Within the last seven months the bits2school group's membership has grown to 600, a clear indicator that many of us have an interest in getting an MBA and are keen to understand the admissions process better. In this issue we underscore the value proposition of an MBA from a top school.

EVER dreamt of an MBA from the world's top business schools?

Did you ever want to be an entrepreneur but lack the business acumen to raise Venture Capital? Wanted to work on Wall Street? Do Investment Banking or Trade bonds on the Chicago Exchange? Be a McKinsey consultant to the worlds' biggest companies? Market for Sony & Samsung, or do business development for Intel & Johnson & Johnson. Or work in private equity and venture capital investing in businesses around the globe?

You have graduated from one of India's best engineering schools. You are intelligent, ambitious and have leadership skills. It is within your reach and BITSAA intends to help you achieve your MBA goals. Did you know that?

a. You can finance your education at top schools without savings of your own
b. You don't need a high CGPA
c. You don't need to max the GMAT
d. Lots of BITSians are here to help you through the process

WHY ATTEND A TOP BUSINESS SCHOOL?

a. To make that career switch you so desperately want to make
b. To get a boost in your current career
c. To expand your breadth of knowledge and make new friends
d. To get access to a powerful network that can rely on throughout your career

Age is no barrier. There are BITSians willing to advice on getting into executive programs as well. And it's all free of cost since we all are in this together.

Starting salaries for graduates of top business schools exceed $120,000. With improving economic conditions, students are able to work in industries of their choice. An MBA is an investment that will pay off faster than you can imagine.

A typical business school application needs 2-3 recommendation letters, 4-6 essays and a valid GMAT score. Most applicants have at least 3 years of work experience.

BITS2Bschool is a BITSAA Initiative to enable BITSians to attend top business school in larger numbers. It consists of prospective students, BITSians enrolled in top MBA programs and alumni from these schools. You can get guidance the whole

B-SCHOOL CAPTAINS

Berkeley – Rahul Chandra
Chicago – VR Venkatesh
Carnegie Mellon– Nikhil Kolar
Cornell – Anupendra Sharma
Dartmouth – Suraj Prabhu
Erasmus – Ajay Garg
Indiana Bloomington – V Ramaswamy
INSEAD – Kanags
Kellogg – Ishmeet Singh
London Business School – Abi Murthy, Krishnaraj Inbarajan
MIT Sloan – Jay Sappidi
Michigan – Manish Bansal, Shobhit Rana
NYU – Sriram Padmanabhan
Oxford – Himani Gupta
Tuck – Krishna Hegde
UCLA – Ajay Malhotra
Wharton – Pramod Chakravorthy, Mukul Chawla

To become a b-school captain, please email Anupendra Sharma (anupendra@bitsaa.org)

process – right from preparing for GMAT, short listing business schools to writing that killer application. We don't know how many BITSians make it to the world's top 40 schools. But if we get 2 per year, that's approx. 100.

This initiative should try and double that number by giving you better advice and making you realize it is within your reach.

Join bits2bschool

Send an email to bits2bschool-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

OR…

Enroll online at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bits2bschool/

Please identify yourself using your BITS ID and provide a few details about yourself in the email/sign-up. This is a highly restricted site so only BITSians will be allowed access.

600 BITSians are signed up already. They have access to the latest rankings, articles on schools, resumes of BITSians who succeeded recommendations and much more.

Each B school has a BITSian champion – either a current student or an alumnus. Here is the current group of BITSians who have attended some of the top schools.

We also encourage more people to sign up to be advisors and help this cause. If you want to start on an MBA in Fall 2006, you need to take the first step NOW! And start dreaming a little dream.

◆

Au contraire

Inasmuch as it's generally agreed upon, although not always to the same degree, that attending a top b-school does help one with career management as well as opens doors to people and places, it is equally underline untrue that choosing not to go the MBA way implies that business success is unattainable. Several surveys and research studies have found no strong correlation between success in the business world and having a formal MBA.

In fact Jack Welch, Larry Ellison, Bill Gates and the like, frequently asked to speak to b-school students never did attend any b-school, let alone a top ranked one. A factoid that students at b-school rather sheepishly admit to feeling a trifle vexed about.

The intent is not to position the MBA as *the* path to corporate success. The decision to pursue a adopt a certain career choice is very personal and can only be made through introspection and following one's instincts. In fact, the essential skills that b-schools attempt to impart to their students such as the development of exemplary leadership skills, a strong work ethic, an understanding of industry dynamics and business functions can, arguably, be acquired independent of formal study too.

As one BITSian, currently a student at Wharton, puts it "focus on developing yourselves as leaders with courage and self-confidence, not as business school admits and the MBA admissions will follow. In fact, you may not need to go to business school. Think about that!"

In encouraging BITSians to "dream a little MBA dream", the implicit message is to dream big, have faith in your own ability and not self select yourselves out of the top ranked institutions. Wayne Gretzy, the legendary hockey player once said, "I miss every shot I don't take". Take your best shot.

By Pushkala Venkataraman ('95 mms) and Ashish Garg ('97 Instru)

Bitsian Faculty @ B-schools

While most BITSians are aware of what business school's like from a student perspective, fewer among us know what it's like from a faculty perspective. We spoke with Kartik Hosanagar, Assistant Professor of Operations and Information Management at the Wharton School of Business to learn about his career path and experience as faculty at one of the world's premier business schools.

Meet BITS Alumnus

Kartik Hosanagar (94-98), Assistant Professor of Operations and Information Management at Wharton Business School; A keen math enthusiast, an ambitious and dedicated researcher, a thinker who looks for ways to better community experiences in various fields, and a person who still finds time for fun and the outdoors.

A dabbler in many senses, Kartik or HK as he is known to many, spent time at BITS with the Photography Club (DoPy), Mime team, Dance club, EDC, and with writing. An ardent Math lover, HK enjoyed courses like Engineering Graphics, Data Structures, Linear Algebra, Complex Variables and Management Information Systems though he does say that his attendance record was not one to write home about! His best times in BITS include the good times during Oasis & Apogee where he worked with various departments. He also performed during OASIS'97 with the Mime team. Most importantly he met his wife Prasanna at BITS.

After BITS, HK started off with wanting to do a tech focused MBA. As he sent enquiries to Professors, a couple of them suggested that he think of doing a PhD. They shared some of their papers and he found Management research fascinating. Soon, he changed

his mind and decided to do a PhD. Since he had a background in technology (Electronics and then Information Systems at BITS), he wanted to look at business issues in the tech sector. It was a good way to wed his engineering background with his management interests. While his advisor steered him towards Operations, his own interests veered him towards strategic issues. Today his research looks at Operations and strategic issues surrounding IT-intensive product s and firms.

HK went on to obtain an M Phil and a PhD from Carnegie Mellon University. Having been exposed quite a bit to the west via the Indian media, his transition to the US was relatively smooth. There was very little that shocked or surprised him.

Life as an academic appealed to HK aplenty when the "What Next?" question popped up after the PhD. This was because of the ability to choose what to work on and to let go of work that seemed relatively unexciting, the flexibility in day to day schedule, the ability to pick consulting projects based on time and interests, executive education, travel, etc. Though he wasn't totally excited by teaching early on, he has been

**Kartik Hosanagar
('94 Comp Sc)**

Assistant Professor of Operations and Information Management at the Wharton School of Business

Education
- BE Computer Science – BITS Pilani (1994 – 1998)
- MPhil & PhD. Carnegie Mellon University

While @ BITS
- DOPY, Mime team, Dance club, EDC, writer. Also loved Math courses!

Areas of research
- Content delivery; web caching; pricing, software agent design,

finding it increasingly satisfying more recently.

He believes that a strong research tradition sets Wharton apart. World class professors impart state-of-the-art knowledge to their students which include a deep understanding of business issues that is possible through research. Wharton has also excelled in reaching out to international

stakeholders, and to business executives (including the MBA alumni) through executive education programs, faculty consulting, etc which in turn enriches their programs.

HK's research thus far has focused on Operations and Strategic issues in the e-commerce and telecom domains. Specifically, some of these domains include Information Retrieval (search engines, comparison shopping sites like Froogle), wireless computing (3G cellular, WiFi, WiMAX, wireless security), retail e-commerce, and content delivery (Peer-to-Peer networks, Content Delivery Networks). While the research certainly requires an understanding of the technologies, HK's focus has been on issues such as service design, pricing, customer segmentation, new product rollouts, etc. For example, how is the pricing of IT-based products different from pricing of traditional goods and how do you identify customer segments that are most likely to be interested in a new product.

 "Methodological rigor – mainly quantitative and analytical skills" is what HK says is a highly desirable trait for a student applying to the PhD program at Wharton. He goes on to add that since BITS trains students well in quantitative and analytical areas, students who have excelled in that environment (particularly in Quant courses) will likely do well in the PhD program. In

Huntsman Hall, The Wharton School.
Photo credit: www.wharton.upenn.edu/

addition, Wharton looks for demonstrated interest in research and in application areas in the business realm. This he feels is not a natural strength of a BITSian application because of our limited exposure to undergraduate research and to domains such as Economics and other social sciences.

His impressions on BITSians versus American students: "It's hard to generalize, but there is the following broad trend" he says. "BITSians are trained better technically and quantitatively. However, they are less likely to take risks or think out-of-the-box (at least early on in their careers). BITSians are also less likely to have a broad set of perspectives informed by social sciences, medicine, etc".

Kartik feels that a big challenge for BITS is being able to attract

the best students. He also strongly believes that urgent attention needs to be given towards improving health care facilities. Another area where he feels BITS needs to improve is to do more to participate with the local community in Pilani. He feels that it is unfortunate that the local community has not derived significant benefits from having such a fine institution and talented students in Pilani. He also agrees that BITSian alumni association can do a lot towards making BITS an institute of high standards.

"Alumni engagement is an extremely important ingredient of university success". Apart from monetary contributions, HK explains that other forms of alumni engagement can include participating in student mentoring through formal and informal channels like Practice School, convincing decision makers within one's organization to share resources of value in teaching and research with BITSian professors and ultimately by being good ambassadors of the institution.

His enjoys reading the New York Times, Business 2.0 and select columnists of the Times of India and Photography is his favorite pastime. Being a bit of a purist, he still uses a fully manual Nikon FM2N camera that operates without batteries in the era of digital cameras.

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Classnotes

BY BATCH REPRESENTATIVES

SELECTED CLASS NOTES

Notes listed by BITS batch (entering year). For a full listing, please visit the "Classnotes" section on the BITSAA Sandpaper website.

1964

Hari Balan (Electrical) He graduated '1969 and worked for a year in Calcutta. 1970, he immigrated to USA where he worked at CBS New York for few years and then got married in 1975 and moved to Los Angeles. In 1980 he formed his own Engineering Design company, Mark Balan & Associates, providing Electrical Engineering Design Services primarily to the wastewater and water treatment and recovery system. He has been very successful and has designed over 100 treatment plants and over 300 pumping facilities. He was awarded a US Patent for redundant control system, which is widely used. Hari lives in Anaheim Hills, California, USA.

1972

Ashok J Galgotia (Electronics) lives with his wife, Beena Kothari in Dix Hills, Long Island, New York. He moved there in 1990 after having served RSEB for more than 12 years. Ashok is currently CTO for Telephonics Corp. They have two children: son Beeneet and daughter Nivea.

1976

Nasir Memon He lives in New Jersey now and teaches at the Polytechnic University in Brooklyn, New York. Nasir married Yuhong Yu (a fellow PhD student at Nebraska) in 1992 and live in NJ with their only child, Yuwen.

1977

Ram Nagina Tripathi He's been working with the municipal corporation of Lucknow since 1987 after working at plenty of places including Chittorgargh and Patna. He was transferred to Allahabad in 1994 and came back to Lucknow in 1996. He was posted in Lucknow Development Authority in 2000 and in May 2004 was promoted to Executive Engineer and posted in Agra Municipal Corporation. Ram Nagina lives in Agra, India.

1983

Avijeet Ghosh (Bio EEE) Avijeet set up his own consulting shop recently after several years with Deloitte & Touche in the US. He joined Thermax Software after BITS and then went on to complete his MS from Arizona State Univ. Goose lives with his family in Seattle (Washington). Connect with him at aghose@avicosolutions.com.

Arvind Khungar VP, Business Devevelopment, Digite. Prior to Digité, Arvind was Regional Director & Country Manager-Strategic Customers, with Parametric Technology Corporation (PTC), Prior to PTC, Arvind worked with Intel Corporation and Scientific-Atlanta Inc. with their sales operations in India. He also was one of the founding members of HCL-Comnet. Arvind started his career with HCL Limited in India. Arvind lives in Mountain View (CA), USA.

1984

Tirumala Rao Talasila TT Rao is currently the Head of China

Operations for iGATE Global Systems. He relocated to Shanghai, China in 2003 after completing a 15-year stint in the United States. After graduating from Pilani, Rao moved to the US where he earned a Masters in EE at Northeastern University in Boston. He also pursued graduate study at the Graduate School of Business at University of Chicago. Rao's professional career has taken him through several firms such as IBM, Intersolv and Intraspect along with numerous consulting engagements with Fortune 100 firms.

Prakash Narayan (Electrical) Prakash has been with Intel Santa Clara and joined them after his post-BITS Masters in EE. He finally chose to relocate to Intel's global design hubs in Asia in November 2004 after over 14 long years. Glaxo is part of the original Vyas front-wing gang, has regularly stayed in touch with Bay Area wingies and is one of the last few really eligible bachelors available. Besides his long stint with Intel Glaxo also took a lot of pride in accompanying visitors to the Intel Museum at their Robert Noyce Bldg. Prakash lives in Santa Clara/Bangalore, India

1987

Chandrasekhar Reddy (Bio-Chem) Since BITS-Worked with CEAT Tyres and then with Good year. Got involved with ERP implementation at GoodYear and sucked into the SAP boom of 90's. That brought me to USA in 1999. Presently settled in Marlton, New Jersey and working on U.S. Army Logistics Modernization Project since last 4 years. Married to Latha and we have 2 sons, Harshith (6) & Rahul (4). Chandrasekhar lives in Marlton, USA.

Classnotes

Vinay Nigam Vinay's been with ANZ since 1992 and now looks after Strategy and Business Performance in their Corporate Banking Division. He lives in Melbourne, Australia, with his wife, Prima, and their two kids, Rahil (5) and Anika (3).

1988

Suharsh Dev Burman After Pilani, Suharsh completed his MBA in Int'l Biz from IIFT whilst finding his wife to be amongst all extra curricular activities he was involved in. Corporate life beckoned for a while and then he went the entrepreneurial way for a while before returning to corporate work with a vengeance. He is currently abusing his body whilst doing odd shifts in the BPO industry. Based in Delhi, Suharsh has a lil baby daughter Aanya who turns one in Dec. 2004. Still rocking to music of the 60's to 90's, his current favorites include Dave Matthews, Phish, et al while his daughter swings to Beatles, Stones and G-Dead. Suharsh lives in New Delhi, India.

1989

Jai Natarajan got an M.S at UCLA and worked as a techie and then an artist for many years in Hollywood visual effects at Industrial Light and Magic, George Lucas's outfit, followed by a stint at Sony in the bay area. He's now back in Mumbai in 2003 after almost 8 years in California.

Arvind Balaraman (Phy-Chem) works in IT after graduating from BITS. He got his MS and MBA in the US. He's been in CT for the last 9 years. Favorite pastimes include photography, traveling, cricket and caroms. He lives in Stratford, CT, USA, with his wife Radha.

1990

Harsh Honmode (Electronics) currently works with Saint-Gobain's Indian delegation where he handles the Performance Plastics business. He is also responsible for establishing new business divisions. He is married to Meghana and they are expecting their first child in Feb 2004. Harsh lives in Bangalore, India.

Ruchira Mathur (Civil) got married in January 1995 to Pawan Mathur. They have two boys, Aditya and Arnav. She is pursuing a PhD in computer Science and currently works for the US Army. Ruchira lives in Huntsville, Alabama, USA.

1991

Bharath Prabhakaran (Computer Science) works in Oracle Corporation in Redwood Shores, California. In March 2002, he got married to Sona and they currently live in Mountain View, California. He co-organized a '91 batch Bay Area reunion in 2001.

1992

Raghu Sethuraman (MMS-Chemistry) is nestled in Seattle managing the worldwide capacity planning group @Amazon.com. He and his wife Aparna, son Arjun (2-months old) live in Bellevue & and in their spare time enjoy classic movies, traveling, hiking and a variety of other outdoor activities.

Krishnakumar Subramanian (MMS) After graduating from BITS, Kiku worked for Tata-Unisys Limited, Ericsson Hewlett-Packard Telecommunication, SSI-Technologies & Vodofone Information System at Germany. Currently, he is working for Reliance Infocomm at Navi-Mumbai.

1993

Rajat Padhi (MMS) works with Ampersand Software as Business Development Manager and is based out of Syracuse, NY. He married in 2001 and his wife Mona, a PhD in Marriage and Family Therapy, is Asst Prof at Syracuse University.

Meena Ramakrishnan completed her Masters in Information Systems from Drexel University, Philadelphia and is a Software Engineer at Sybase Inc, in Concord, Massachusetts. She married her BITSian sweetheart Mani Sundaram (93 batch) and helps Mani out in organizing BITSAA New England activities.

2000

Karthikeyan Krishnamurthy (CS) works at Sun Microsystems in Bangalore. He's staying in Domlur with some of his wingies. Karthikeyan lives in Bangalore, India

Vinod Raghunathan (Elec-Instru) works at AMCC Technology Solutions Ind Pvt Ltd, Bangalore. His hobbies in include playing TT, Carrom, listening to instrumental music, meditating. His vision is "To serve the poor in any possible way". Vinod lives in Bangalore, India.

To submit classnotes, please visit http://www.bitsaa.org/sandpaper/classnotes/class%20notes.htm

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BY PRASENJIT CHAUDHURI ('84 CHEMICAL)

NETWORKING – HOW KINGMAKERS CAN BE MORE POWERFUL THAN KINGS THEMSELVES

With a growing emphasis on relationship building and networking as one of the keys to success in the business world, many of us have discovered the power of the BITS Pilani alumni network through online communities such as Yahoo! Groups, Linked In and our very own BITSAA classnotes.

SINCE BITSAA came into being, many many BITSians have expressed a wish to reconnect with their long lost wingies and batchmates. Some resorted to setting up private networks as extensions to the cliques they formed on campus. Others simply waited for word of their pals in an anticipated serendipity of cosmic connections.

While there are lots of interactions as evidenced by the chatter within private BITSian networks, we wonder if members in these networks would like to share their batch achievements with the rest of us folks. It's certainly clear there is a lot of obvious pride within us to take the time to celebrate such BITSian achievements. We recently analyzed the activities within our own BITSAA ClassNotes network and noticed some interesting patterns.

The sharp "digital divide" between the pre-'80 and the post-80 batches has some obvious reasons. When I joined BITS somewhere in the early '80s, HP-1000 and punch-cards were still the norm in the electronic world (or was it only at BITS?). Internet and email were not yet common words in our vocabularies. Cellphones and iPods did not exist even in science fiction (well maybe cellphones in some form did exist).

Meera Bhawan "inmates" respected the 9 PM curfew regulation and Malviya was still the much feared super-senior domain for male BITSians. We worshipped lone-ranger superstars (personified by Clint Eastwood and Amitabh Bachchan) as heroes. Much has changed since then. Those lone rangers and angry young men have now been replaced by Gen Xers, Gen Yers, Internet pioneers and VCs.

Open source communities, Yahoo groups and Ryze networks are really the worlds we have begun to reside and test our reality in.

It seems that the power behind Six Degrees of Separation and Metcalfe's Law of Networks* have come to be recognized universally by our collective selves. Networked communities have become the bridge to our future existence.

The ClassNotes as it exists today is part of our constantly evolving effort to make it easier to connect BITSians worldwide. The Sandpaper community congratulates these leaders and seeding agents who worked behind the scenes to pull their batch-mates together and expand our own BITSAA community. They have truly foreseen the tremendous potential of professional networking among BITSians globally. The BITSAA ClassNotes crown this year goes to the members and batch reps of the '97, '98, '94, '88 and '84 batches.

To the lone rangers in other batches, we invite you to see how BITSAA has grown and how you too to can do your bit and be a part of this formidable and evolving organization.

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BITSAA ClassNotes Activity

Batch	Activity
1960-65 Batches	3
1965-70 Batches	6
1970-75 Batches	12
1975-80 Batches	14
1980-85 Batches	34
1985-90 Batches	58
1990-95 Batches	65
1995-'00 Batches	107