

BY KARTHIK RAMAN ('95 EEE)

# AUR EK, AUR EK AND AUR EK

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**When** I was leaving for BITS, Pilani, everyone told me that I would only need English to survive there. That the little Hindi I had learned as a third language since 5th standard would be more than enough for "emergency purposes". Unfortunately, no one remembered to tell this to all the *dhobis*, the *raediwalas*, the mess workers, rickshaw *walas* and the restaurant owners in the quaint little town in the middle of nowhere, otherwise called Pilani. Consequently, there were quite a few embarrassing moments when my Hindi did not keep pace with my thought process. However, my only consolation was that, however bad my Hindi was, there were always others who would beat me hands down when it came to making asses of themselves.

The cool thing about BITS was that the best and the brightest from every part of the country came there. However, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh accounted for the majority presence there so much so that Pilani came to be represented in our state maps (Actually, I once saw a post card delivered wrongly to my hostel by a dyslexic postman who misread Palani, the temple town. But I'm digressing here!). But what bothered me so much was that while almost everyone, irrespective of what state they hailed from, could speak fluent Hindi, the "shady characters" that went from Tamil Nadu alone couldn't speak a coherent sentence if our lives depended

on this. I guess this is what comes of living with a Government that has had a history of anti-Hindi protests and probably still harbors illusions about making Tamil the national language. So when it came to Hindi bloopers, some of the stuff we said and did were legendary. For example, let me take you to the 'camel milk' incident. A bottle of camel milk was being delivered outside a guy's hostel room everyday, even though he had never asked for it. When this routine did not stop for a while, he decided to do something about it. So he kept an alarm for 5 o'clock, promptly woke up and waited for the milkman. When he heard the bottle outside his door, he went out in a huff and, in what he perceived as Hindi, told the milkman he did not want any milk from then on. Mission accomplished, he came back and happily crashed for the rest of the day. Understandably, he was quite proud of his achievement, and strutted around the next day throwing some "saalas" and "arre yaars" for good effect. This lasted all but one day. The next morning, he got up, came out of his room only to find two bottles of camel milk, instead of one.

Yet another incident: a friend went to the coop buy a few notebooks. He needed 15, but could only count till 10 in Hindi. So, he told the shopkeeper he needed "dus notebooks ji" and patiently waited for them to arrive. When the shopkeeper brought them to him, he came up with this master stroke - "aur ek, aur ek, aur ek, aur ek and aur



ek". My EEE wing was not far behind. Once, we went to grab a bite at ANC (All Night Canteen) around midnight. I had ordered masala dosa while my friend "mandai" (big head bony body) had ordered a plain dosa. The waiter, under the influence of a few hundred filterless beedis, mixed up the orders. So mandai went up to him and loudly and clearly said "uska dosa mera paas... mera dosa tera paas". We still haven't let him forget that fateful night.

Another time, a guy was trying to negotiate with the jeep wala. After some frenetic hand gestures and syllables that could have come straight out of the *Mayan* civilization, he thought he had struck a great deal. Only to be told by his friends later that he had managed to negotiate 250 rupees for the trip when the driver had been perfectly happy with 150. Turned out he was a little confused about "daed" and "daayi". I'm still hopeful that someday, the genetic inconsistency that is solely responsible for the 'Tamil and Hindi are mutually exclusive' syndrome would be corrected as a result of inter-cultural marriages and more Hindi movies starring Rajni Kanth.

