

# Another kind of celebration...

## BITS

Pilani is an exception to stereotypes *and* realities about women in engineering, technology and related fields. We know it to be an extremely progressive institution; A BITS press release of December 2005 established that our enrollment statistics indicate that girls opt for Engineering, Pharmacy and Management programs just as they for in Science programs. The Press Release further stated that low female enrollment in Engineering can be found at institutions even across the USA (with exceptions like MIT where women currently makeup 36 percent of all undergraduates). If this is the case in the United States, one would expect a country such as India with a sliding sex ratio, instances of female feticide and women just making up 6 percent of the workforce, to have low levels of enrollment for higher education, particularly engineering. However, our Institution provides proof to the contrary.

In addition to trends in the enrollment statistics of women, we also wanted to critically assess how BITSian women have fared over the years. What kind of professions are they in? What has the journey been like for them, both through their Pilani as well as beyond?

Our cover story in this issue of *Sandpaper* attempts to answer these questions and celebrate the achievements of BITSian women. It not only addresses our curiosity, but also serves as an inspiration for us, for both women and men. It answers fundamental questions like 'how' (have women achieved success) and 'where' (what companies) and 'what' (sectors – Engineering? Business? Non profits?) BITSian women have pursued their interests.

Furthermore, it only stands to reason that this cover story would be authored by a team led by the first Woman President of the BITS Student Union, **Aditi Pany**.

For good measure and with *Sandpaper's* affinity for the humorous, we called the team that



Anu and her family – flying high!

worked very hard on about 'half' of this issue – The Better Half!

We interviewed women spanning multiple BITSian generations, attempting to discover what their experience at Pilani was like. We delved into their post-Pilani lives as well. We walked down memory lane revisiting the joyous and the sorrowful times that made up some of the best days of our lives. We explored the biases women face in technology, the business styles that contributed to women's successes and transitions of a different kind. There are many women in the non-profit sector. In fact, the first BITSian women who attended the first ever social services project by BITS Pilani, i.e. BITSunami, has recounted her story in this issue.

Our Quarterly BITSians are two outstanding women from the corporate and the academic realms. **Punita Pandey (EEE)**, an exemplary entrepreneur is the Chairman and CEO of netCustomer, founded in 1999, which is a leading provider of advanced applications support services. Her initial years at netCustomer were studied by Stanford University as part of a case study, which is now taught at various business schools.

**Dr. Reena Aggarwal (MMS)** is a Visiting Professor of Finance, Sloan School of Management, MIT and Stallkamp Faculty Fellow



Our daughters and sons - making the World a better place

BITSian guys in making our Institution progressive. Moreover, this is not merely to placate BITSian men who felt left out from this issue!

The **BITSian Women's Council (WOC)** was established just six months back, like an inspiring Old Girls' Club and it has burgeoned to over 300 members. We also did have one BITSian guy arguing gender discrimination, who tried to become a member. Very original!

That's what makes BITS so special. An original bunch of people pursuing their eclectic careers, chasing their dreams.

and Professor of Finance, Georgetown University. She was named among the "Outstanding Faculty" in the Business Week Guide to the Best Business Schools. Through her career, she has been Visiting Research Scholar at the IMF (2004, 2003), Fulbright Scholar in Brazil and Chile, Academic Fellow at the US SEC (1997-1999), Consultant with the NASDAQ, UN, IMF, IFC, IDB, Credit Suisse etc.

Previous *Sandpaper* issues have focused on different subjects (which is not to say, we leave them stranded subsequently). To begin with, we did feel that restricting ourselves to subjects like Entrepreneurship or Social Service or BITSians in Finance would be more neutral than focusing on women. I too was of the view initially, but this issue has indeed become a celebration of the accomplishments of BITSian women who hail from one of the most progressive universities in India, BITS Pilani.

In the last issue, **Buvana** talked about how women can overcome constraints and return to work after a break. Success, part time work, constraints, joys, transitions, sabbaticals apart; adapting their styles and overcoming biases, or just being themselves, BITSian women have done us proud. Those we have talked about, and those we have not. Those we know about and those that we, unfortunately don't.

Forget gender wars on campus. We have come a long way and cannot discount the role of

In addition, another reason this issue has been special for me is that this is Sandeep's last issue as Chief Editor. He has meant a great deal to me, doubling up as somebody I've enjoyed working with, and somebody who's become a friend for life.

And for all of us,  
Oh you can sneak time,  
and you can dream time,  
But just like some drummers  
we've had the often damaging experience of  
working with -  
You just can't keep time.  
Yes, we've had the time of our lives!

**I can vouch for most BITSian women, 'Yes, we've had the time of our lives.' Now let's read about it.**

**Anuradha Sharma Gupta ('86 MMS)**  
Guest Editor  
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