

# SANDPAPER

The BITSAA Edition

# 2.0

BITS Piloni alumni magazine  
Spring 2009



QUARTERLY BITSIAN:  
Dr. Adil Mistry

Aakash Ganga: a social enterprise



the new community site  
**bitsaa.org**



Sarathbabu contests 2009 Lok Sabha polls!



Burning Taj, burning BITSians!



**READ ONLINE @**  
<http://sandpaper.bitsaa.org>

# I can hear the rumble...

By Dileepan Narayanan (2000 Mech)

The BITSian community today is teeming of a rare energy that promises much for tomorrow.

I can hear the rumble...

A BITSian is standing as an independent candidate in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Many BITSians are actively leading various social initiatives. Many are writing books. Serving in administrative positions. Raising money to fund people that need it. For education, for health and for everyday sustenance. The alumni network is more active than ever. If you are a BITSian, these are truly exciting times. I can hear the rumblings of a teeming unrest.

When I started compiling this issue, I found it incredible that we received an article from a 1946 batch BITSian! Eventually, we received a few more from the sixties and seventies batches. All these writings exhibit great fondness for BITS and the BITSian community. And we are seeing today that this fondness is translating to action. BITS is becoming bigger. BITSAA is becoming bigger. And the BITSian is scaling bigger.

The tremendous initiative and alacrity shown by the BITSAA team has resulted in a new 'one stop' portal for BITSAA. As more and more people sign up and get involved actively, we're going to find that our alumni network is going to be a potent global force. This is a critical step that has facilitated some of the real work, and hence we chose it as the cover

story to have more people read about it and sign up.

Dr. Adil Mistry, a versatile Multimedia expert and a 1974 batch BITSian, went back to BITS to give something back to the students. He is our Quarterly BITSian.

Among the prominent features is Aakash Ganga, a project that started as a dream. Aakash Ganga is a mission to harvest domestic rainwater to alleviate Rajasthan from acute water scarcity problems.

The number of quality creative writing pieces we received had me overwhelmed. I read through each one of the stories, laughed

with the protagonists and cried with them, and found that I could not decide which article I liked more.

We also had enthusiastic reporters from BITSAA reunions sharing their memorable moments with us.

This issue has been invigorating for the entire team to compile. Each article exudes an energy that is more contagious than, as they say these days, swine flu. Regardless of whether the contributor is from the forties, seventies or the current millennium. For this sheer reason, I really like this issue.



THE BITSAA EDITION

# Sandpaper [2.0]

## ON THE STANDS

### FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Under the banyan tree ( <i>editorial</i> )	2
From the desert sands	6

### COVER STORY

The creation of a new BITSAA.org	7
----------------------------------	---

### UNDER THE ARC LIGHTS

BITSian Sarath Babu to contest Lok Sabha elections from South Chennai	11
The Aakash Ganga story	14
A life changing experience	20
Grassroutes: take a road trip for a change	23

### QUARTERLY BITSIAN

Dr. Adil Mistry: back to the home turf	26
--	----

### 26/11: THE BITSIAN REACTION

Of terror, gunmen and lensmen	29
Condemnation in a time of terror	31
I vow to remember	33

### CHIMAERA

Business (ad)ventures of 1977	35
A mother's letter	37

### CHIMAERA (CONTD.)

Down the memory lane	42
Faith	44
An unforgettable celestial phenomenon	45
Imported scales	47
Tamilnadu Express	51
The bet	55
Random reminiscences	57
Knowledge is ignorance	78

### CAMPUS SPEAK

NYOTH	58
tRebel	61
B'Quizzed	64
The experience that is BITS-Pilani, Dubai	66
Workshop marathon in Goa Campus	68
Student initiatives at BITS-Pilani, Goa	71
Glimpses from the fresher and the senior	73

### THE BITSAA DIARIES

The 40 wing commanders of Shank76	75
BITSAA-NZ Meet	77

### CLASSNOTES

80

# Sandpaper Online

<http://sandpaper.bitsaa.org>

## Issue Highlights

-  **Cover Story:** The new BITSAA.org website
-  **Under the arc lights:** Sarathbabu's election candidacy, Aakash Ganga, Grassroutes
-  **Columns:** Dilip's jottings, Anu *rather* scrawls, Misra's missive
-  **Quarterly BITSian:** Dr. Adil Mistry

## TEAM SANDPAPER – 540 Mansion Park Drive, Santa Clara, CA 95054 USA

<b>CHIEF EDITOR</b>	Dileepan Narayanan
<b>EDITORIAL BOARD</b>	Anupendra Sharma, Dilip D'Souza, Sandeep Mukherjee, Anuradha Gupta, Ashish Garg, Dileepan Narayanan
<b>ASSOCIATE EDITORS</b>	Meenakshi Chatterjee, Satish Poliseti
<b>NEWSLETTER</b>	Satish Poliseti (Editor)
<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>	Vivek Iyer, Satish Poliseti
<b>PRODUCTION</b>	Saawan Ebe, Satish Poliseti
<b>PILANI TEAM</b>	Arun Bhat (Team Lead), Sandip Gangakhedkar, Nilanjana Bhattacharyya, Hema Manjunath, Rohit Varghese
<b>GOA TEAM</b>	Gowri Thampi, Ojas Mehta (Team Lead), Aditya Sanyal, Nilesh Gaurav, Nithya Ramachandran, Kasturi Bhardwaj
<b>DUBAI TEAM</b>	Piyush Singh (Team Lead), Reshmi Mukhopadhyay, Achyuth Krishnan, Haksing Zimik
<b>COVER PAGE</b>	Saawan Ebe
<b>COVER STORY</b>	Sandhya Krishnan, Anuradha Gupta
<b>QUARTERLY BITSIAN</b>	Satish Poliseti, K. K. Prasad
<b>WRITERS' BLOC</b>	Dilip D'Souza, Anuradha Gupta, Rahul Misra, Aparajith Ramnath
<b>CHIMAERA</b>	Meenakshi Chatterjee, Rahul Misra, Anuradha Gupta, Aparajith Ramnath, Ashok Kadian, Sivakumar Koorapati, Santosh Salve, S. B. L. Mathur, Prashant Mohan, Nishant Pullabhatla, Enakshi Chatterjee
<b>UNDER THE ARC LIGHTS</b>	Nilam Agrawal, Ashok Malhotra, Pilani team
<b>THE BITSAA DIARIES</b>	Arindam Mitra, Vish Sarma

### 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 organisational 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:  
Dileepan@bitsaa.org.

BITSAA International has been granted 501(c) 3 tax-exempt status by the IRS, and is registered in New Jersey, USA.

© All copyrights for these articles belong solely to the authors unless stated.

# BITSAA SANDPAPER VISION

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

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

Increase BITS brand equity

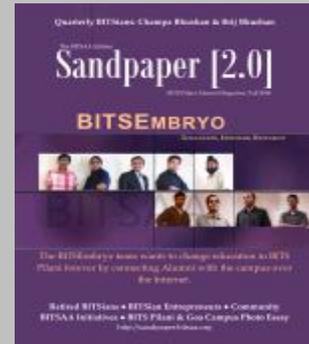
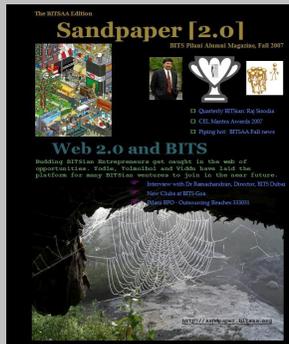
**participation**, evoking feelings of nostalgia, **pride** and

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://sandpaper.bitsaa.org>



## From the desert sands...

*While hunting for BITSians involved in the strike we chanced upon Sridhar Rajan who, along with a few others started 'Sandpaper'. So here's some more history.*

*As of 1980, the campus magazine was called CamelPost but there weren't many issues for a couple of years after. Around 1983, a few BITSians, including Sridhar revived it under the name of Sandpaper. Sadly, not too many issues came of that either.*

*The most prominent publishing initiatives back then were The Sunday Dialect, the Cactus Flower, and the Oasis mag.*

*The Sunday Dialect was the idea of Ahmad Danish Afroze, who then recruited 7 others for the cause. A weekly tabloid-sized newspaper, printed on a letter-press and on newsprint, it was cutting edge technology for Pilani in those days. It made a regular appearance for 8 weeks till logistics and other campus obstacles played havoc.*

*The first Cactus flower issue was released in 1984. This was printed on an offset press in Delhi, again, a quantum leap. Sridhar edited the creative section for that issue. However that was the last issue seen for quite a few years.*

*The Oasis mag was apparently a lot of fun in those bygone days. Fuelled by raw energy, banned substances, and the shenanigans of the visiting teams, it was quite the vibrant nerve centre of the festival according to Sridhar. "For the last few years that we ran it, we called it the Oasis Press Magazine - a pretentious name conceived entirely to spawn the acronym OPM, itself a not-so-veiled reference to one of the aforementioned contraband. The editorial tone was, of course, lurid yellow, and nobody was spared." Too bad that changed to a sober and plaid EPC - English Press Club.*

# The creation of a new BITSAA.org

Sandhya Krishnan, 1999 Infosys  
Anuradha Gupta, 1986 MMS

A successful relaunch for some, a historic moment for most. BITSAA.org... bringing BITSians around the world together on one page.

## The old order changeth

We graduated, picked up our BITSAA souvenirs and moved on. A select few registered on a BITSAA website and never looked back. Not until a couple a months ago when BITSAA's brand new portal was launched. The new [www.bitsaa.org](http://www.bitsaa.org) has changed the face of social networking, at least for us BITSians.

triggered the idea towards the creation of a community friendly web portal for BITSAA.org. The old website had been put together over a period of a few years, and had grown very fast with the help of many volunteers. While it served the needs as and when they arose, it eventually got unwieldy. The then BITSAA.org website was not an efficient content management system, neither was it sufficiently application

pulled in Sarath to be a part of what would soon be the genesis of a tech team. Sarath started discussions with KK, Anupendra, Prasad and Anand regarding the need of a community portal for BITSAA. A few vital pieces were put together including a sign in, alumni profile features in 2005 and 2006. The portal idea was presented and welcomed during the East Coast Diwali Reunion in Nov 2006 in New York.



It started back in the summer of 2005, when Anupendra reached out to the bits2bschool yahoo group for a new set of applications to be developed for BITS2BSchool initiatives. This

oriented. More importantly, it did not support some key requirements of an alumni portal. Prasad Thamminenni and Anand Rajaram were handling the website during this period. They

However, it was around then that the BITSAA team went through a transition. KK moved back to Asia and others went off to business schools and became

busy with their personal lives, burying the idea under some dust. Towards late 2007, Ashish was asked to become the BITSAA CEO by Anupendra and SP Kothari. Rebuilding a new BITSAA team was the first step with the relaunch of Alumni Directory in a portal as one of the main goals. The Tech team was reshaped and team goals were put together. The ideas of the relaunch were not new since they had been proposed and requested by a lot of alums over the years but the team had to now map it all out. Vivek Iyer, who had already worked on Sandpaper and the SVC chapter for a couple of years was drafted onboard the BITSAA Technology Team in Dec 2007. Over various brainstorming sessions, a document was put in place to chart the course of the relaunch. Aalap, Kapil, Anviti and Kiran were the other tech team members who toiled through the night to bring this plan to fruition.

### Goals and timelines

When the tech team got to work they analyzed the website in place, how BITSAA communicated with various chapters and yahoo groups, how fund raisers came together and how a remote group was managed. They then tied it all together and discussed if the team could build this from scratch. The three main aims were clear—helping BITSAA as the umbrella organisation, helping network groups and chapters, ensuring a clear access to the alumni through logins and profiles.

There was a big discussion on whether the portal should be built or bought. Both options had different consequences for time, effort and expense. The team took

a quotation from two companies in California and India for developing various features of the portal. The quote they got ran into six digit figures, something BITSAA could definitely not afford. So the focus shifted to in-house volunteer work, help from BITSian startups and other options.

The team worked over phones and emails over the next few weeks. Bhadri from SVC helped with the proposal for front end templates and website organisation based on the essential needs of BITSAA and BITSians. Vivek and Sarath developed the plan for the corresponding backend applications and functions.

Pennywise Solutions, a BITSian startup, was requested to put together their perspective of what the portal should have. A solution by a BITSian startup, Zancara that provided career search networks for communities, was evaluated as a possible foundation to build upon towards the complete portal. Many more freeware/low-cost Content Management Systems were evaluated to be the underlying foundations towards building the complete integrated portal.

The other alumni portals like Harvard, Wharton, IIM (A) and MIT Sloan were compared and contrasted. They were understood, mapped with some fact finding and requirement gathering and then tailored to match the BITSAA community needs.

### On fast-track:

In May 2008, a roadmap from the goals to the implementation was framed with the complete

building of the portal on top of other available solutions envisaged to take 2 to 3 years.

On a parallel track BITSAA Executive Team under the leadership of Ashish and Nikhil initiated the BITSAA Leadership Drive with the goal to galvanize and onboard enthusiastic BITSians all over the world towards key initiatives of BITSAA. A resounding 40+ leaders joined the BITSAA team by July 2008.

Ashish, in the meantime, chanced upon a portal solution called YourMembership.com (YMC). This, he thought, when customized, would help in the development of BITSAAA.org at an optimal cost. There was a need to evaluate BITSAA tech goals against what the software solution provided and see how it would serve the needs of BITSAA.

BITSAA leaders went through 3 training sessions with YMC in July/Aug on how the features were to be used and how we could make the changes that BITSAA required. In Aug 2008, the tech team (by now 5 in size), put together the phased plan for a brand new BITSAA.org website and portal to support many Alumni activities. The first phase would involve a list of basic features to be developed and subsequent two phases were meant to build upon and add more features. The tech team presented the plan to BITSAA Executive team, BITSAA Board and BITSAA Leaders and was soon signed off for execution. The Tech team and communications team were given the task of a Nov 1st launch of the new BITSAA.org.



The tech team feverishly worked prototyping and putting together the foundation for the 44 chapters, 60+ batches, 10+ initiatives and the entire website – all in all – 600+ pages to be built in 2 months.

### **Enter the Communications team:**

The Communications Team took over under the aegis of Sandhya when the foundation work with YMC was complete. Consisting of 7 members in 5 different time zones was only the first of their obstacles. Collaborating solely over email, they developed the look, the feel and the essence of the website. They chose images, fonts, styles, designed banners, edited content and helped the tech team select layout and features. Several nights out, BITSian style, went into the effort, all to make sure that everyone had our stamp by November 1st.

### **The dough**

YMC had a fee of \$8000 for the 1st year to be paid in two installments and the BITSAA leaders and both teams explored whether we should charge for membership. However, this plan has been held in abeyance because we want to welcome people to sign up and enjoy the benefits of the community. BITSAA relies on donations from philanthropic BITSians to manage its operational expenses and the various initiatives sponsored by BITSAA all by providing many community services via the portal.

In 2006 and 2007 some money was raised through donations for the web portal. Four methods have now been envisaged for raising money in the long term:

1. Launching a career centre where jobs are put out exclusively to our community for

a fee and members who get jobs through this service pay a nominal fee as well

2. Providing infrastructure for chapters and batches for alumni get-togethers, holiday celebrations, cricket matches, golf outings or any such events through event sponsorships

3. Advertising opportunities on the website and other marketing communications to community members. The website has analytics where information can be gleaned for clicks and can be analyzed demographically and geographically to provide good information to advertisers. Different levels of advertisers are envisaged, Gold, Silver, Platinum and their ads on annual reports, marketing collateral, choosing sponsor of the month, and showcasing these advertisers in various ways.

4. Donations from BITSAA community members. drive with such versatile careers and such a positive response.

Pilani going out to all the alumni groups around the world. The

With the amazing input from all BITSAA Leaders, 2 phases were crashed in within the timeframe of Phase 1.

The team was international and versatile and getting them together was a challenge.

*"Getting the team together with two people based in India, one in Germany, one on the West Coast of US, one on the East Coast and synchronizing time in itself was a big challenge!" – Sandhya*

*"Working until 2am to 3am in the morning so the team members in west coast could interact and work together with the members on the east coast while going on with day jobs/schools was reliving a BITSian compre night experience!" - Sarath*

Recruiting the team mid year was another treat with almost 40 people involved in the leadership

CEO Speak- Ashish Garg on the website and how it came about

### History: **What's the idea behind a brand new portal?**

The idea has been around forever. We made several attempts but the key stumbling block was the investment it takes to make a good quality directory . We didn't want to do a half hearted job.

### **How did this finally happen?**

I heard about Yourmembership.com from Prem Jain who had implemented it for the Jain community in the Silicon Valley. There was no upfront cost, a pay as you go feature and unlimited space. There was most definitely an initial sticker shock – but when you put together the math, something is this complexity and quality would take at least \$200K - \$300K to build, maintenance being separate. We decided this will help us focus on driving initiatives instead of spending resources in fixing web bugs.

People who made this happen? Sarath's leadership (Tech team) and Sandy's leadership (Comms team).

### **What does the web portal do for our community?**

- In the Internet world an organisation is perceived to be as good as its website – the new site marks a new chapter. BITSAA is going professional!
- This is a one stop shop for everything BITSAA – it consolidates everything that BITSAA does under a single umbrella – projects, initiatives, chapters, batches.
- It helps us inform BITSians what BITSAA is up to
- It provides means to find BITSians wherever in the world you go
- Connect, network with fellow alma mater wherever you are
- It is an effective fundraising and project management tool

### **How everyone can help?**

1. Register – takes very little time
2. Participate
3. Spread the word

### **And a new portal is launched:**

The launch of the portal was very well received. The Communications Team had a publicity roadmap worked out with emails and posters of BITS

portal managed 2000 enrolments in the first couple of weeks.

3500 people have signed up so far from every possible batch starting with 1948 exploring all kinds of networking opportunities and looking for old friends and batch mates.

All in all, quite a journey from inception in 2005 to the actual meaty work in 2008 and the momentous launch at the end of 2008. Yet, if you haven't signed up our work isn't complete!

**Sign up now and join us at [www.bitsaa.org](http://www.bitsaa.org).**

# BITSian Sarath Babu to contest Lok Sabha elections from South Chennai

Reuters

Hear, hear! Sarath Babu has declared his candidacy for Lok Sabha elections 2009. He is standing as an independent candidate from South Chennai, sporting the 'Slate' as his symbol. For updates on his campaign, visit <http://sarathbabu.co.in/in>.

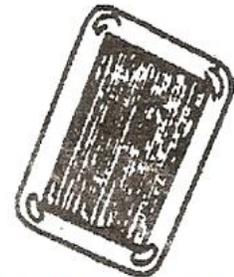
## The one who didn't fit

"To get a party ticket, one has to be associated with the party for long," says IIM-Ahmedabad alumnus and Chennai South candidate, the 30-year-old Sarath Babu. "And frankly, it is very difficult for young, educated people with no political background to break in. Parties are not merit-oriented. They draw their power from either money or muscle."

From a humble background—his mother at one point sold idlis by the roadside—Babu opted out of campus placements to launch a catering service that provides jobs to the underprivileged. Joining politics for Babu is taking that job creation to a much larger scale. "If I were to follow the conventional party route," he says, "I'd no longer be young by the time I get my chance."

~ Sarath Babu, on running as an independent candidate, Outlook, May 11, 2009

SarathBabu's 'Slate':  
symbolic in more than one way



தேர்தல் சின்னம் : சிலேட்டு  
POLL SYMBOL: SLATE

**SARATH BABU IIM (A)**  
**SARATHBABU for SOUTH CHENNAI**



**SarathBabu with future leaders of India**

Sarath Babu with future leaders of India.

## Sarathbabu's announcement

Sarathbabu E.,

Independent Candidate, South Chennai

*Thank you very much for attending the press meet amidst your busy schedule. Indeed your presence means a lot for me and it will accelerate my future plans and actions.*

*India, one of the world's largest and youngest democratic nations which predominantly depend upon the policy makers for its development, is facing turmoil in these modern days. It seems India would easily be the only nation where we have 1000 political parties with 10,000 ideologies and 10 lakh aspirants aiming for Prime ministerial post. Isn't it an inappropriate thing to expect these people to work for the welfare of our country? Can we call ourselves unfortunate if we get carried away by the promises of our politicians? We can do better than blaming them for our suffering. We don't need any new ideology to architect a new India. What we need is a single minded pursuit for excellence in all aspects of the growth of our country.*

*Our honourable former president, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has visualized a road map for the development of India as a better society. With the inputs from TIFAC (Technology, Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council) he scripted what the policy makers are expected to do in all relevant sectors. If we follow his sermon of "dreaming, transforming dreams to thoughts and thoughts into actions", crores of our people will be benefitted. In other words, it is high time that all of us not just aspire for developmental politics but witness it for real. We need educated and selfless youth to drive this country to the next developmental phase. Instead of looking at politics as someone else's job and act as if we just have to enjoy luxuries of a comfortable life, the youth with dynamic personalities should come forward with courage and get into active politics.*

*As I am insisting on 'WE' and 'ALL', I will need to take the initiative first. I would like to take the road map defined by our noble leaders. I strongly believe that I would be able to make the difference with my efforts. I am not entering politics to earn name or fame as I already that with what I have done. Then why am I entering politics? I am entering politics to make my society a much better place for my fellow human beings. It is with this selfless attitude that I am aspiring to be a part of legislative body. I wish to do politics the way it was intended to be done. With equal pride and humility I wish to assure you, that my victory will be definitely looked upon by honest people and common people as their victory. It will unleash new energy from the youth and educated people who will help our country grow further. Let us all take a vow to teach the political parties that it is time to focus on growth and development. It is the youth's turn this time to make the positive difference we deserve.*

*With this note, I request all South Chennai constituency voters to vote without bias for any party, caste or religion and elect the candidate who they think will definitely do what they deserve and the country needs.*

JAI HIND

### Banking on youth

E Sarath Babu, 30, has a vision to see India free of unemployment in 20 years. Sarath, who's the proprietor of a brand that has business spread in four states, is an independent candidate from South Chennai. He says, "Fifty five percent of our population is young and it's important for a vision to be translated into reality at least during their lifetime. Young leaders are needed. I've worked on my project of encouraging young students to take up entrepreneurship and I've joined politics as it gives me more scope to implement my ideas." Also Sarath has no ideas of abandoning his business — "I've invested money in my business and I've invested my time in politics," says Sarath, whose site calls for volunteers and donations to help him fight the elections, quite a contrast to netas who distribute 'notes'.

- Times of India, May 3, 2009



**Sarath Babu with Former President APJ Abdul Kalam**

Sarath Babu with former President of India APJ Abdul Kalam in the Youth Convention Meeting



**Sarath Babu with Infosys Chief Mentor Mr Narayanamurthy**

Sarath Babu with Infosys Chief Mentor Mr Narayanamurthy during the launch of Foodking

### 'Slumdog Millionaire' hoping to make it in politics

This story of an Independent candidate in fray for the May 13 Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu would certainly elicit a broad smile from the maker of the much acclaimed Oscar winning film ""Slumdog Millionaire".

He does not an astronomical sum as salary. The reason: he was reluctant to leave his roots behind. He still lives in the slum in which he was born! His ambition now is to get into politics through this election to Parliament from south Madras constituency. He is unmindful of the formidable candidates he has pitted himself against, the ruling DMK's R S Bharathi, opposition AIADMK's Chitlapakkam Rajendran and the BJP's L Ganesan, not to forget Gopinath of DMDK'.

- Mynews.in, April 20, 2009

# The Aakash Ganga story

Nilam Agrawal

**Aakash Ganga: a project that started as a dream and now spawns across dark villages of Rajasthan, bringing water, relief and happiness to the lives of hundreds. Nilam Agrawal narrates her experience.**

*"Dhola thare desh men, moti marvan aant.  
Daroo milti mokali, paani ki koni chant*

Oh, Beloved!  
In your land  
Wine is plenty  
Water is scarce  
How would I survive?  
But for your love  
Thus laments a bride.

~ Nilam Agrawal

We are in Sardarpura, a village approximately 30 KM from Pilani. "*Pani aagayaa. Paani aagayaa,*" the children are running and yelling in its dusty streets. Women wrapped in colours rush with their *matkas*, large clay pots, on their waists - only to join the queue of *matkas* that arrived before them. The water tanker



had just arrived. It took only two weeks.

I set up my gear to begin shooting. Immediately, I am flocked by women with their pleas for water. I ask my father, Dr. BP Agrawal, to translate my questions into Marwari – the regional dialect, "How scarce water is, I ask?" A voice speaks from the crowd "Why ask? Just count the number of bachelors." I am puzzled. What is the relationship between water scarcity and number of bachelors? Another voice unravels the mystery. "No father or brother wants to marry off his daughter or sister in this village as she would then have to spend all day fetching water for her new family." I'm rendered speechless.

From Sardarpura, we drive to Lasedi. Images of the USA and the villages flash back and forth. I am forced to reflect on the daily water consumption of 500+ litres per person in the USA with the 10 – 15 litres in Sardarpura. I reach Lasedi shrouded by a pensive mood — hoping for someone to lift the pall of pensiveness. Raju Bhardwaj, our escort, takes us to a dug well, 200' – 300' deep. It is mid-day. The sun is bright and hot. Women, with rope tied to their waists, are drawing water, oblivious of the hot mid-day sun.



Vicki Williams, a University of Virginia student, is snapping photos of women and camels.

Amazed with their hardiness, I approached Shanti with "*Mai* (respectful variation of Ma), how old are you?" Her answer lifts the



**Shanti: humour and hardiness!**

pall — I crack up: “Just count the wrinkles.”

Humour and hardiness!

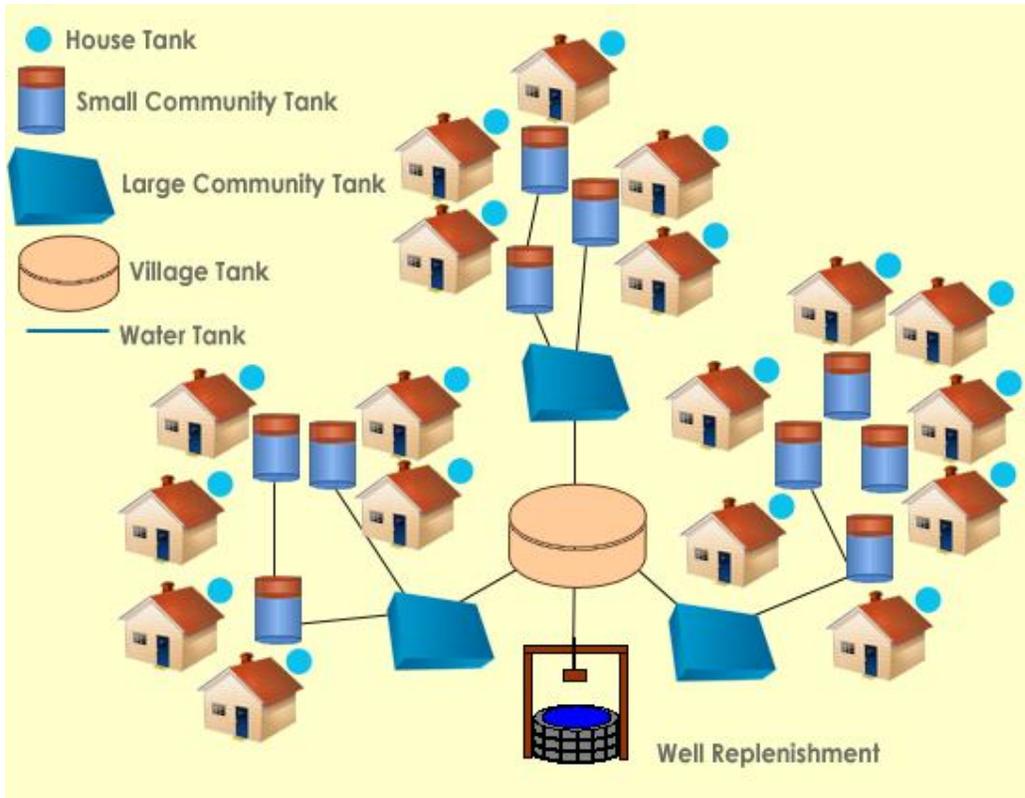
World Bank cited *Aakash Ganga* for its holistic sustainability - economic, cultural, social, technological, environments, and

*Aakash Ganga* just got a big break. The Government of Rajasthan signed a letter of intent with Sustainable Innovations

([www.sustainableinnovations.us](http://www.sustainableinnovations.us)) to implement *Aakash Ganga* in 50 villages as a public-private-community partnership or social enterprise. On completion, *Aakash Ganga* will provide drinking water to 125,000 people for generations, in perpetuity.

How it all works: *Aakash Ganga* (AG) harvests domestic rainwater in the “dark zone” of Rajasthan to alleviate the perennial scarcity of drinking water.

AG channels rooftop rainwater from every house, through gutters and pipes, to a network of multi-tier underground reservoirs as shown in Figure 1: Rooftop Rainwater Harvesting Network. AG has the capacity to collect and store rainwater sufficient to last for an entire year with average rainfall (up to 100,000 Ft<sup>3</sup>). AG is implemented as a social enterprise or public-private-community partnership (PPCP) to acquire rights from home owners to harvest their rooftop rainwater for a fee or subsidy. The harvested rainwater is supplied to the village as per a socially equitable distribution policy. Part of the water is used for revenue generation and cost recovery.



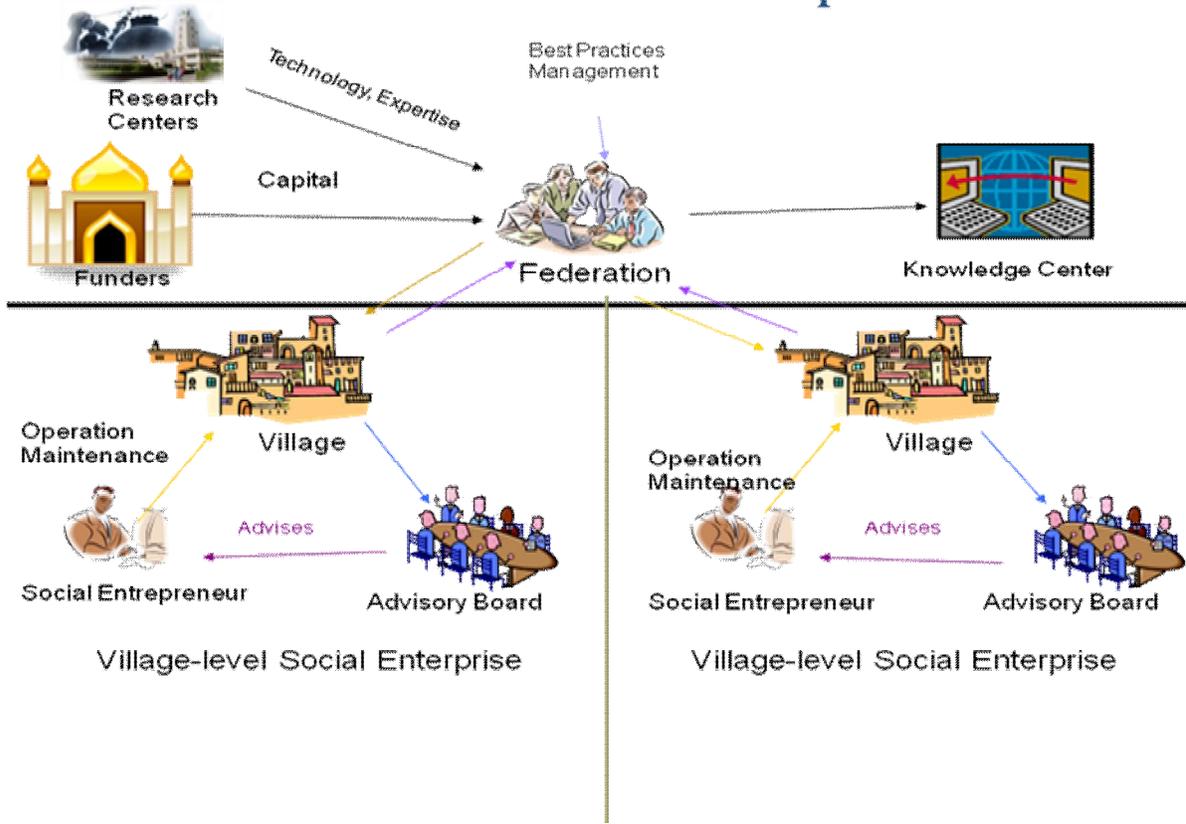
**Rooftop Rainwater Harvesting Network**

Let’s rewind. In 2003, *Aakash Ganga* (River from Sky), was conceived by Dr. BP Agrawal to alleviate the perennial shortage of safe drinking water in the “dark zone” villages of Rajasthan. Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) joined the effort. Shortly, thereafter, the chronic shortage of drinking water propelled the Rajasthan Association of North America (RANA) to provide seed funding for *Aakash Ganga*’s incubation. Three years later, *Aakash Ganga* won the World Bank’s 2006 Development Marketplace grant of \$200,000 in the global competition for innovation in the water and sanitation sector.

organizational. Now, *Aakash Ganga* has been piloted in 6 villages: Pilani, Raila, Indrasar, Kakreu Kalan, Lasedi, and Harinagar. The implementation partners were BITS, Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR) and Boruka Charitable Trust (BCT).

*Aakash Ganga* has been perfected as a two-tier social enterprise, refer to figure below. The first tier, village-level enterprise, manages *Aakash Ganga* in one or a cluster of villages. The Second-tier ensures flow of capital, technology, and management to the village-level enterprises.

# AG – A Social Enterprise



## Aakash Ganga social network

*Aakash Ganga* deploys quotidian ingenuity of villages, modernizes ancient levy traditions, adapts advanced technologies for rapid absorption by the communities, and ensures holistic sustainability – economic, cultural, social environmental, organizational, and technological. The social enterprise model is especially noteworthy. AG is organized as a two-tier social enterprise. Refer to Figure 2: AG – Two-tier Social Enterprise. The village-level enterprise (VLE), first tier, comports with century-old, socially-accepted, and ingenious levy traditions. The federation, second tier, ensures flow of capital, management, and technology to the VLEs. AG plans to recover the cost and grow organically.

How have rural citizens embraced AG? During my visit to Lasedi, people invited me to see their own innovations or quotidian ingenuity. One entrepreneurial homeowner had devised a way to hide the rainwater-channelling pipes by building awning. Another, individual built a platform around the in-home reservoir to serve as family gathering quadrangle. Yet, another devised a method to monitor the water utilization. Indeed people have embraced *Aakash Ganga* as their own project, the first step in ensuring *Aakash Ganga*'s continued success! As for me, I am awestruck with my sister's quotidian endearment, who, after visiting BITS along with my Dad, re-baptized us sisters as "Bits" short for "*bitiyas*." That is the BITS magic.

*Editorial Note: SI plans to raise \$1.5 million from donors to match the potential government funding of \$8 million and community contributions of \$1.5 million for the 50 village implementation. Your contribution is tax deductible. We plan to set up an Aakash Ganga Club at Pilani for innovations, social entrepreneurship, and knowledge dissemination. If you have passion for volunteering, write to [info@sustainableinnovations.us](mailto:info@sustainableinnovations.us). Every little bit helps.*

## Aakash Ganga: Photo Gallery



**Photograph 1: House reservoir, Raila**



**Photograph 2: "My cow's milk has doubled." Badami (Prior to Aakash Ganga, Badami didn't have enough drinking water for her cows)**



**Photograph 3: Shared reservoir, 400,000 litres**



**Photograph 4: Shared reservoir with plantation**



**Photograph 5: Waiting for water**



**Photograph 6: The wait ends**

## A life changing experience

Dr. Ashok Malhotra  
SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor

**BITSian Dr. Ashok Malhotra was invited to the Democratic National Convention in Denver. He shares with us some precious nuggets he recorded there...**

At the Democratic National Convention in Denver (September 25-28), Hillary Clinton, the maverick Senator from New York, helped America made history by unanimously nominating senator Obama, the first Afro-American, to be the president of the USA. This daring act concretized Robert Kennedy's prediction and fulfilled Dr. Martin Luther King's dream of 40 years ago.

This is the first time in the US history that any political party has performed such an extraordinary act. Hillary Clinton is the first woman, who came real close to getting this coveted nomination for herself but courageously and elegantly passed this mantle on to Senator Barack Obama. Through this gracious and bold act, Hillary Clinton attempted to restore integrity, solidarity and unity for the Democratic Party. Because of this insightful initiative, Hillary Clinton displayed to thousands of participants at the Convention and millions of viewers in the USA and the world that the American vision of "Anyone can reach the highest office of the land irrespective of their race, colour or creed," was not just an idealistic dream but a pragmatic reality. Through this miraculous act, Hillary Clinton revealed to the world that the Democratic Party not only talks but "walks its talk."

This was a life transforming moment for me. I have been a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Oneonta for the past 41 years. During this period, I had dedicated my services to founding the philosophy department,

desire to experience first hand the way American democratic system worked.

From August 25 to 28, 2008, the Democratic National Convention in Denver offered me this opportunity to participate in



**Dr. Malhotra with Kennedy**

starting its major and minor, writing books for the undergraduate students as well as taking students to India on a "Learn and Serve" study abroad program, where the participants helped build four Indo-International Schools for the poorest of poor children of India. Though during these years of teaching and community service, I had not been fully involved in a political party or political action that made national or international difference of any significance, I had an unconscious

once-in-a-life time experience that I shared with more than 4000 other delegates from the 50 states of the United States.

To my delight, this turned out to be a life altering experience where as a delegate from the 24th district of New York State, I was not only part of history but was making history by being involved in a democratic process that nominated the first African American President of the USA.

These four days at the DNC Convention were packed with informational, exciting and inspirational speeches. Each day started with half a dozen speakers during breakfast and luncheon sessions followed by another half a dozen speakers at the Pepsi Center and Invesco Field.

Super delegates from New York State consisting of Hillary Clinton, Chuck Schumer, Sheldon Silver, David Paterson, Mrs.

Paterson, Andrew Cuomo and Charles Rangel as well as such invitees as Caroline Kennedy, Janet Napolitano (Governor of Arizona), and Mayor of LA, were speakers at the breakfast sessions. However, the luncheon speakers included Reg Weaver (NEA President), Robert Kennedy Jr., Governor of Arizona, Governor of Delaware and a number of other distinguished mavericks in education. Evenings at the Pepsi Center and Invesco Field were packed with entertainment and electrifying political speeches given by Michelle Obama, Ted Kennedy, John Kerry, Reg Weaver, Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, Joe Biden, Caroline Kennedy, Jesse Jackson Jr., Al Gore, Jimmy Carter, Janet Napolitano, Senator Barack Obama and others. These speeches were aimed at motivating the listeners to register to vote in this historic election.

Since I was invited by the American Federation of Teachers



**Dr. Malhotra with Rangel**

(AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) to join their luncheons, the theme of these speeches was the significance of education in grooming the future leaders of America and the role that the government could play to make the funding of education its national priority. Since the schools and colleges were the breeding ground for the future leaders of America, the choice of the right kind of person to be the next president was of utmost importance.

Along with these speeches, Michelle Obama organized a community service day on Wednesday, August 27, 2008. 1500 delegates and volunteers participated in this project where they visited various school sites in Denver. The delegates and other volunteers created a playground, painted a playground, constructed a garden around the playground, read stories to children, and were

involved in other similar service projects.

My partner Linda Drake and I participated in a program where we joined fifty delegates/volunteers from New York, Vermont, California and N. Hampshire to build a garden around a playground at the Force Elementary School in Denver.

In 2007, a 5th grade child was shot to death at his home. The school created a playground as a memorial and our volunteer group created a garden in the child's memory. I interacted with children from 3rd to 5th grades by telling them stories of animals from India. Close to fifty children held me captive for more than thirty minutes asking me questions about elephants, camels, monkeys as well as the Taj Mahal. They were so enthusiastic about the animals of India that they offered to join me in my next "Learn and Serve" study abroad



program to India. I had a ball telling them the fun stories of elephant rides to the Amer Palace in Jaipur.

The focus of the evening speeches given by Michelle Obama, Ted Kennedy, John Kerry, Reg Weaver, Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, Joe Biden, Caroline Kennedy, Jesse Jackson Jr., Al Gore, President Carter, Janet Napolitano, Senator Obama and others at the Pepsi Center and Invesco Field was on unity, solidarity and integrity of the political party and political system. The speakers repeatedly stressed the importance of issues that were on the minds of Americans. They emphasized an open discussion where the issues were presented in detail and where candidates offered ways to deal with them by setting up deadlines to achieve the results.

Though the audience was deeply touched by the enthusiastic speech of Ted Kennedy and the unifying speeches of both Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton, the highlight was the final speech of Barack

Obama on September 28 at the Invesco Field. Here, history was being made in front of 80,000 people who had packed in the Invesco Field like sardines. This historical moment dramatically concretized the American ideals of diversity and equality in front of the largest gathering in the history of America. With standing ovation and applause from more than 80,000 people, Senator Barack Obama, the first African American man, accepted with great enthusiasm, the Democratic Party's nomination to be the President of the United States. His speech highlighted his position on economy, foreign policy, environment, health care, war in Iraq and education. In his emphasis on education, he touched upon the following:

The restructuring and refinancing of Schools; bringing parity of teachers' salaries to other dignified professions; bringing reforms to update schools to the 21st century; scholarships for students; recognition of teaching excellence; changing attitude towards our kid's education by

more indulgence of parents with their kids; their home work and going to bed on time; more parental involvement and counselling; and community service.

Since coming back from the DNC Convention, I have been talking to students, faculty and members of the community asking them to register to vote. My goal has been to reach all the 5800 students at SUNY College at Oneonta.

Moreover, I have been talking to members of the local community who believe that "Mr. Obama and Mr. McCain should stick to the issues and debate them rather than waste time on negative and baseless propaganda."

The ten problems of utmost importance that should be debated between Senators Obama and McCain are: Economy, Education, War in Iraq and Afghanistan, Environment (Global Warming), Sustainable Energy Policy, International Terrorism, Universal Health Care, Labor, and Taxes. Since we have only five weeks left before the big decision, the candidates should concentrate on issues and not waste time on character assassination. I urge the members of the community to: first register to vote; second, encourage your friends and family members to vote; and finally, read up on each candidate's position on the above issues, and then use your rational judgment on the Election Day. Whoever wins the election; you will be making history as well as be a part of this history only if you get out and vote.

# Grassroutes: take a road trip for a change

Pilani Team

Grassroutes ([www.grassoutes.in](http://www.grassoutes.in)): social journalism as a vehicle for bringing social and environmental issues to the forefront.

India is a very accommodating country. We are very pliant, sometimes to the point of being lackadaisical, in our approach to life. Whether it is foreign policy, civic sense or social awareness, Indians have always been at the bottom end of the respective world indices. The crux of the problem lies in the upbringing and moulding of our youth, which is a product of our attitudes and mindset. Societal and environmental issues have rarely perturbed the typical Indian, who is much embroiled in the daily

rigmarole of life. This coupled with a lack of opportunities for participating in social change makes us blissfully unaware of the problems that plague our society. Grassroutes ([www.grassoutes.in](http://www.grassoutes.in)) is a novel venture by a bunch of recently graduated BITSians that will use social journalism as a vehicle for instilling awareness among India's youth about social and environmental issues. To achieve this, Grassroutes is hosting a National Fellowship Program that sponsors teams of motivated youth for touring

locations where social activism by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is readily witnessed and providing them the means to study, document and publicize their experiences.

**Grassroutes** is the virgin project of YoFa or Youth Factor – a non-profit organisation started by a bunch of young BITS alumni – Abhilash, Sriram, Keerthikiran, Gowtham and Shravya. For the first edition of Grassroutes this December, three teams of 4-5 people have been chosen to visit



three locations in South India for a period of about ten days. In an attempt to deconstruct the Grassroutes program, the Sandpaper Pilani Team spoke to Abhilash Ravishankar ('03 EEE), Co-Founder of Grassroutes about the dynamics of the program. "The program is extremely flexible and simple for the Fellows. Barring a few deliverables, the Fellows will have complete freedom to plan their activities. The teams are expected to travel extensively with the activists at the respective NGOs, reach out to the local community, and interact with the activists and the beneficiaries alike – in short, understand the issues from a grassroots level. They are also expected to develop a documentary-style video footage of the challenges and solutions via interviews and personal experiences. To cap it off, the teams will devise three ways in which the society in general and the youth in particular can help the NGOs and the local community alike." The Grassroutes program will take care of all the costs involved and also provide logistical support in the form of video equipment and travel arrangements to the teams. "We have organised an orientation program in Bangalore for briefing the teams before they embark on their trips. We have also arranged for a documentary-making workshop to enable the Fellows to be comfortable with the filming

equipment". The Grassroutes Team has collaborations with Flaunge, a Bangalore -based short-film Production House and the organizers of Bangalore/Chennai RoofTop Film Festivals (BRTFF) to help create quality documentaries.

So what are the societal and environmental problems that the Grassroutes Fellows will tackle during their road-trips? "We have three assignments for this Winter Edition– Environmental protection in the Nilgiri Mountains, Rural health in Chhattisgarh and the Weaving Industry in Pochampally, Andhra Pradesh", quips an enthusiastic Keerthikiran, Co-Founder of Grassroutes. "The parent NGOs at these three locations are WWF India, Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS) and Aksharakriti respectively. These organisations will accommodate the Fellows and spend time with them, sharing their trials and tribulations, as

well as their achievements. The Fellows, in turn, will help document and film the ground realities with the express aim of sensitising the larger society to the problems afflicting the local community and the NGOs". After the road-trip, the Fellows are expected to help the NGO and the community by implementing the aforementioned three targets. "The Fellows, with the use of social media and alternative tools, will strive to build a dedicated community of passionate people that, we hope, will snowball into a social revolution. This community, in the long run, is aimed to work as a hub for ideas, resource sharing and inspiration for more youth to get involved in on-ground social work," says Abhilash.

Any new initiative requires a solid support system. For Grassroutes, it is in the form of two advisors – the ever-enthusiastic former editor of Sandpaper 2.0, Dilip



**Voyage snapshot of the Grassroutes team**

D'Souza, and the first female Students Union President of BITS, Aditi Pany.

"One man that we admire a lot is C S Sharada Prasad who works for Arghyam, a NGO in Bangalore. CSP, as he is called, travelled from

Kanyakumari to Kashmir on a motorbike studying water issues across the length and breadth of India.

An engineer by profession, he quit his job and travelled for months on end to do his bit to contribute to change – he epitomizes what

Grassroutes aims to subtly imbibe in its Fellows. CSP has helped bring to Grassroutes, a wealth of experience regarding the link between travelling and social change. Many BITS alums have also chipped in with invaluable support and advice," quips Abhilash.

Now the big question: where does Grassroutes go from here? Keerthikiran is upbeat about the future, "The first thing that we always remind ourselves and our community is that this Winter Edition is a pilot. We spent very little time in publicizing beyond our existing network mostly filled



with BITSians. We made no fancy advertisements, no attempts to reach the mainstream media and no extra effort to reach out to colleges; all of which we have shelved for our expectedly better and bigger Summer Edition in 2009." The abundant and exclusive use of social media like blogs, podcasts, and videos on YouTube and updates on Twitter has been a characteristic of Grassroutes' publicity campaign, considerably enhancing their online presence. It will be interesting to observe if enthusiasm on the internet can translate to tangible results and proactive measures on the part of the Fellows. Their immediate

priority is to set up a system where Grassroutes Fellows can share their experiences with a larger public and thus inspire a large section of youth to contribute towards social change. They hope to see an increase in the number of road trips per edition and grow the advisory team to enable the Fellows to explore various kinds of issues. They are aiming to create a strong alumni group of Grassroutes Fellows dedicated to social change. And while they are at it, the road-trip experience is sure to energise a few young guns ala *Rang De Basanti* style.

# Dr. Adil Mistry: back to the home turf

Interview by Satish Poliseti & K. K. Prasad

Having left the Pilani campus in '79 Dr. Adil Mistry displayed his love for it by choosing to do his sabbatical at Pilani. Satish and Prasad caught up with him for a tête-à-tête.

Revisiting one's alma mater is an experience every graduate looks forward to. Like old wine the experience would be fantastic if you return to the place where it all started, after a long time. For Dr. Adil Mistry it was no different,

having left the Pilani campus in '79 he displayed his love for it by choosing to do his sabbatical at Pilani. A multifaceted professional, he is one of the few who have tried their hand at a range of professions. Having worked in India after

his graduation, Dr. Adil moved to New Zealand seeking to expand his knowledge. His work in New Zealand and Australia spanned across engineering, business, sales and teaching. A fairly emerging area in the mid 90s, "Multimedia" caught Adil's attention which led to him getting a diploma in the same. His experience at teaching evening classes coupled with his interest for it led to a career in teaching and currently he is a

faculty at Western Australian University. He graduated with a major in EEE (74-49, back then it was for five years). We had a chance to speak to him during his recent visit to India and here are a few excerpts from the interview.



India, MN Dastur Consultants and Mahindra and Mahindra in India before leaving to New Zealand where I worked in many different areas related to engineering, teaching and art. I tried a hand at business and sales

in Sydney which did not grab my fancy too much. I took a complete turnaround at this point and got a diploma in Multimedia which was a fairly new area in the mid 90s. At this point I had the opportunity to teach evening classes which ultimately led to a full time teaching in

this area."

**Sandpaper (SP):** Hi Adil, first of all I shall start by thanking you for your time for this interview. I am sure our readers would like it.

**Dr. Adil Mistry (AM):** No Problem.

**SP:** Shall we start by speaking about your journey from Pilani to your current position as faculty at Western Australian University?

**AM:** "After graduating from Pilani, I worked with Siemens

**SP:** How has the experience been teaching a course on Multimedia to students at Pilani? How was the students' reaction towards it?

**AM:** That has been extremely rewarding and wonderful. The students can speak for themselves but for me personally it was far more than I expected. Introducing something like Animation generally pursued as

hobby after you graduate, in a semi formal way proved to be successful. Analytical studies like engineering and creative courses like multimedia provided the right balance. It seems there are students enrolling to take this course next semester which is good news.

**SP:** *Can you give us an overview of how the course was structured? What was the lab components like?*

**AM:** I tried to keep it as practical as possible. I stuck to the most sought industry software in this area: 'the Adobe Creative Suite'. We compressed a course that is normally taught over 4 years to six months. Hence it is more of an introductory course and I think it worked as students who were novices at the start came up with something that can be displayed as a finished product, by the end of the course. The students had 4 – 5 assignments which they had to finish over the semester. There was one theory paper testing theoretical knowledge in compression techniques and multimedia aspects. However, the major component was the project where they had to work in teams of 3 – 5 people where majority of the class chose to shoot and edit video while some of them worked over animation. I was impressed with some of the class who prepared flash games; they went beyond what was taught in the class.

**SP:** *We're going to pick your memory: can you compare for us the BITS of the 70s to the one at present? Do you miss anything?*

**AM:** "What do you want me to say (*smiles*). Prof Maheswari invited me for a three day trip to the Pilani campus and it was like going back home. I was on a high that I found it difficult to sleep

through the night. Goa for it's similarities in the course structure with Pilani is quite different actually. We didn't have things that students today take completely for granted. We didn't know what a computer was. Technology is obviously different but the inquisitiveness of the students has remained reasonably intact. My experience has been extremely rewarding. It is a wonderful idea to give students a broad based education. Some of the textbooks and teaching hasn't changed which was a surprise for me."

**SP:** *So How did you spend your time at Pilani? Did you have time to catch up with the changes, go around the campus and meet people?*

**AM:** "I think Prof. Maheswari and Nattu (Dean Dr. B. R. Dr. B. R. Natarajan). My batch mate planned it well for me. I had just two meetings and spent the rest of the time catching up with stuff. I arrived in Pilani at 1 in the morning, couldn't sleep (*laughs*) and I went to Budh Bhawan where I stayed for two years. Lot of things have changed, new wings have been added (the pi wing), the Woodstock (the used to keep a pile of wood over there) at the back of the *bhawan* is gone and we can't directly stare into the desert anymore (which they apparently did 30 years back). I sort of unwillingly accepted that the kind of ashram life we had is not there anymore."

**SP:** *Were you part of any departments / clubs when you were in Pilani?*

**AM:** "I spent a lot of time in the green room. Ours was a great musical batch. Some of the old labs had storage rooms where there was a lot of US army junk that was left in Pilani after the war. We discovered that there

was enough equipment to build a transmitter with some parts from the Friday markets at Jama Masjid in Delhi. For the very first OASIS ('74) we build a transmitter as people involved in organizing hardly had a chance to have a feel of the functions. Things went well until the police in Chirawa picked up the signal (*laughs*) and we had to dismantle it. We were one of the first batches to build the structure in front of the clock tower (the current Art n Dee structure). Back in those days OASIS was called Mayuri and we build a peacock. I remember we had some 400rs to do it. We had pets back then. There was a monkey called Minki who used to ride with us on the handles of the bicycles. These are some of my nicer memories."

**SP:** *So Adil, any plans of returning to Pilani or Goa to teach courses?*

**AM:** "After this experience, I would definitely say yes. I would also recommend alumni to do something like this as it is extremely rewarding".

**SP:** *There is a general perception that courses taught on campus do not have any practical application. What is your take on this?*

**AM:** "This is something that you would realize only years later. I don't regret doing any of the courses that I did. In retrospect it is a part of the process of learning and there are no complaints. It is not the actual course content but everything that goes with it, the whole homogenous process is what is important. However, I feel some of the courses are not given sufficient importance, but that would just be a matter of sitting and deciding on what is the correct way."

**SP:** *So do you see any scope for improvement in terms of curriculum, infrastructure etc?*

**AM:** "Keeping up with cutting edge technology and ideas is not an easy task and Pilani or any other college would face a challenge. It is not about lack of resources but it is the inertia that a person who has been an expert in a particular area for the last 30 years. People need to be encouraged to go back to industry and familiarize themselves with the latest technologies. We desperately need higher connection speed (smiles). We don't have the speed that cutting edging universities function at. However it is a huge credit to the students that they are doing what they are doing despite those setbacks. We have the money and ability to upgrade ourselves. However, we can have cutting edge equipment and still let it rot without having the proper expertise to maintain them. This is definitely an area of concern."

**SP:** *Any chances of collaboration between western Australian university and BITS-Pilani?*

**AM:** "I would be definitely looking into it once I get back. Our biggest asset here is our students who have a work ethic which could sell them anywhere."

**SP:** *How do you compare students from Pilani to students in other countries like Australia?*

**AM:** "Our students can hold on anywhere in the world and our alumni have found it. It is a lot of hard work to make our students ask questions. They end up wasting the class time by being reticent about asking questions. That is something that I think we need to improve upon. Otherwise, our students can

compete with the best anywhere in the world."

**SP:** *Did you get a chance to interact with any other alumni associations; their activities from BITSAA could take lessons? You might know of many initiatives by BITSAA.*

**AM:** "Not any direct observations but I have a feeling that IIT alumni are very active. They have far more resources than we do and we as an alumni association can look into it. Our greatest strength is the feeling of a family that we have. We have shared 5 years of life in a place like Pilani where there was nowhere else to go. So that is a feeling that remains dormant."

## RAPIDFIRE ROUND

**Favourite Pilani hangout place:**  
Backstage in auditorium

**And why: you get a chance to see girls closely?**

*(Laughs)* We did not have girls; there were 4-5 girls in entire engineering stream, but we hung out nearly equally at museum lawns, just go there to chill irrespective of what happened,

**Favourite food in Pilani:**

Redi food. *Aaloo tikkis*. I still owe some *redi walas* money!

**Number of make ups:**

Zero, but many of my friends lined up before exams for prescriptions

**Number of BITSian girlfriends:**

Zero. Ratio was like 600:1, but in our fantasy world, all the 4 girls were our girlfriends!

**Your favourite BITSian lingo:**

Fundas, everything was a funda,

everything was shortened: all places and names. The director was diro and his daughter, diri (smiles). I think she still remembers

**Your BITSian name:**

Mistry

**Craziest activity:**

We made lot of noise for good food, Also, before elections we used to paint streets for campaigning.

**Message to the BITS fraternity:**

I'd say, develop the ability to look with one good eye and one bad eye. Don't be too optimistic or too cynical.

# Of terror, gunmen and lensmen

Shyam Krishnan, 2000 EEE

As the horrific events of 26/11 unfolded, Indians stood sleepless and helpless in front of their television. As the tyranny unleashed in Mumbai, the media sprang up to convey, communicate and channelize public angst to the world around. Shyam explores how today's media are shaping the Indian civil society.

As I answered the phone on a quiet Sunday evening following the horrific terror attacks in Mumbai, I heard a high-pitched voice in the background interspersed with some pleasantries from my friend Ram.

I asked him what was on TV - and expectedly, it was one of the many debate shows on one of the very many media channels that are now thriving in a media-hungry and tech-savvy Indian setting. While Ram and I were discussing the attacks, the dialogue did swerve towards the media coverage.

"What did you think of the coverage?" Ram asked me, and I told Ram it was something I'd rather write to him about. Not because I did not want to talk to him, or not because I was upset, or not even because there was someone at my door - it was because I wanted to give a measured response. And certainly, textual form of conversation allows for far fewer glitches than a real-time conversation does. My take on the media coverage during the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai is the topic of my piece here.

While I would have been expected to start off with a statement or two describing the attacks, and talking about how



K(Q)asab & Co. held our financial capital to ransom, I will refrain from getting into detail on that front. All of us have seen the event unfold in front of our eyes; most of us hardly slept during the 60 hour siege. Many of us were horrified at the inept nature of our system and the men who run the show in our country, while some of us quietly went about our duty while resigning to fate. All said and done, the nature of attack

was new, and something we had not seen or heard of in India. In that background, the role of the media assumed much larger significance than it normally would. They had to bring the story to the discerning audience who needed real-time updates, while also guarding against leaking confidential defence/strategic counter-terror information on a public forum.

## Analysis of the coverage

NDTV, CNN-IBN and Times Now were the most watched channels across India during the terror attacks. The TRP ratings of all regional and entertainment/sports channels took a beating - not surprising to say the least. The need and the

right to information and knowledge about the attacks led to people being glued to the television sets. But it probably extends beyond those factors. The news channels and media hubs have indeed become an indispensable part in the daily life of the common man. They have encroached upon the space otherwise reserved for family or a quiet meal, or even the time

reserved for sheer boredom. While there is the viewpoint that the media does sensationalize even a mundane event, the duty to bring unbiased facts to a viewer's home is the sole objective of the media personnel when the coverage is on. In the context of terrorism, there is probably no word called sensationalism in the dictionary. Terrorism is an easy way out for the willing individual to gain attention and to add on to what would most likely be a posthumous and notorious resume. When the media deals with such a venomous phenomenon, there has to be a lot of caution exercised to ensure there are no further mishaps due to lapses arising out of information dissemination.

As far as 26/11 is concerned, all the major news channels and the print media did a commendable job while covering the event - most journalists and reporters went without sleep till the siege ended; and they were ready with personnel at the very scenes of attacks. This was certainly new - not just the terror strikes, but also the efficiency of the media on public view. From the Nariman House, to the Taj to the Oberoi and the CST, no stone was left unturned to gather sufficient information in an efficient manner. There have been a lot of reservations and anger expressed at the way the media went about trying to seek opinions or insights or a quote from survivors or the kith and kin of the victims - but the truth certainly is that real time coverage of a terror attack is something no journalist can put a finger on. There will be hits, and some misses, but overall, to stay on top

completely for 60 odd hours and still convey public anger and opinion in a watered down yet meaningful format takes a lot to achieve.

### What the future holds

The print and broadcast media have certainly come of age in India, and are making their global presence felt. CNN in the US



repeatedly broadcast visuals not just from IBN, but also from NDTV - which does prove that their faith in Indian media channels is not biased but holistic. We, the people can take heart from the fact that for every life that was lost in the attacks, there will be many more to grieve and not just walk away in a nonchalant manner. With 3G set to thrive in India, the impact of the media is going to be well rounded - the pulse of the people will be closely monitored and relayed. People will communicate

at the speed of light while digesting information as always; something we all will come to terms with. With many of the personnel at the helm being quick to adapt, the Indian public are set for a record decade or so as far as print and broadcast media are concerned. World-class real-time coverage (broadcast, web and mobile-based) followed by a thorough editorial analysis on the

next day's newspapers are factors that shape a citizen's general awareness - and we certainly owe it to the manner in which our media has been proactive in attempting to achieve that. Trying to over-emphasize certain glitches would be a disservice to what the media strives to accomplish, but at the end of the day, criticism and plaudits are a part of the game. As conscious citizens and more importantly, BITSians, our aim should be to support the media, spread awareness about social change and do our bit to reform the existing system. Easier said than done and clichéd? Yes.

But there is a new start to every single idea emerging from within. And this could be the start required to use the right avenues and to channelize the anger amongst the people in this moment of crisis and grief. 26/11 has changed India in more ways than one. And there will be positive changes, for the betterment of the Indian civil society - largely enabled by the awareness created by the media.

## Condemnation in a time of terror

Dilip D'Souza, 1964 EEE

### "All I want to hear from all of us is categorical condemnation!"

As I'm sure happened on innumerable different discussion groups, my BITS batch has had a vigorous back and forth about the attacks on Bombay. At one point, one batch mate sent out a note that started like this: "All I want to hear from all of us is categorical condemnation."

I should mention that this friend has lived horrible tragedy in his own life. As he himself wrote in a letter to his US Congressman, "My father was killed by Islamic militants on August 24, 1990 in Kashmir for a singular reason – he was a Hindu."

In his note to us, the next sentence named three of his batch mates in particular. First of those three names was ... mine. Perhaps he assumed we would not categorically condemn what had happened.

I wondered about this.

I mean, I wandered the downtown streets of my city for two days as terror raged, my mind whirling with anger and depression and confusion and fear all at once. I watched families break down outside the Trident

hotel as they finally heard about their loved ones, either dead or utterly traumatized by being held hostage. Through it all, I felt a tide of helpless anger flowing over me like one of the waves crashing on the tetra pods off nearby Marine Drive.

Why would this friend think that I, or the other two he named, or anyone he or I know -- or, in fact, any reasonable person in the world -- felt anything but condemnation for what these guys did to my city, to people I know? Why would he think it to the extent that he "wants to hear" it from us?

And the truth is: I've felt the same anger and depression for years, through many other wanderings.

I felt it when I roamed the streets

of my city in 1992-93, fearing for my life because Mumbaikar was killing Mumbaikar all around me – over a thousand dead in the most horrible way. I felt it when I went to hospitals after the March 1993 blasts and met bewildered victims who couldn't even comprehend what had hit them. I felt it as I roamed through Godhra and elsewhere in Gujarat in 2002, not least when I was in Dehlor and I began to feel the entire village would like nothing better at that very moment but to kill me; or later when people threw stones at me because I was walking with a saffron-clad monk, thinking foolishly that my arm around his shoulders would protect him. I felt it in 2004, when I visited Kashmiri Pandit families in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar and in the Purkhoo camp in Jammu, and found out not just



about the misery and squalor of their lives -- sadly, I already knew I'd see that -- but also about the inexplicable hostility towards them from their neighbours outside the camps. ("They are all thieves", one Jammu housewife told me). I felt it when I walked through the streets of my city one pouring night in July 2006, half an hour after bombs had torn apart the bodies of 200 train travellers.

And I remember feeling it in November 1984, even though I was very far away from my country. At least three good friends -- two of them BITSians, one a batch mate -- called to say that they felt completely betrayed by this country that they and I had grown up in. They said they could never think of returning. Had they been in Delhi instead of the US in those crisp days of early November, they realized with disbelief, they would have been killed. Like 3000 of our fellow Indians were killed.

Killed, because they wore a certain piece of cloth on their heads.

What do you think I felt like, listening to these friends saying this? What could I tell them? Would it have meant anything to them then had I interrupted to say: "I categorically condemn what happened in Delhi"?

I feel wretched inside at what happened to my friend's father in August 1990. I am not sure I would have the strength to carry on as admirably as he has, after that tragedy. I happen to know a man whose teenaged son was sliced to pieces in January 1993 in Bombay. Just as my friend's father was targeted for his religion, this

kid was picked on and killed for his religion. (I deliberately am not mentioning his religion, because it does not matter).

I cannot see the difference between these two atrocities. Yet we are not even willing to acknowledge what happened to this kid, and across Bombay in those horrible weeks of 1992-93, as terrorism, let alone demand action as we are all angrily demanding action for what happened last week. I honestly cannot understand why. Can anyone reading this explain that to me?

**We live in a world where terrorism is, unfortunately, a reality. But that doesn't mean we can't fight it. We can fight it by building a country where justice is available to all. That makes it that much harder for terrorists to get a foothold here.**

After all, about 1000 innocent people were slaughtered in Bombay, along with that boy. Why is that any less of an attack on India than the slaughter of 200 innocent people in November 2008? What would we have thought if ten men arrived in boats and killed that boy and a thousand others, as they killed 200 in November? Would we not call that terrorism and send the NSG and Army after them? Why then do we not call what happened in 1992-93 terrorism? Why have we gone 17 years without even beginning to punish those who killed those 1000 people? (As you can imagine, the same questions apply to the massacre of 1984, or 2002, or various other times).

It's not that I care about applying the label "terrorism" to one or the other great atrocity. The label does not define the crime, the crime does. It's just that I care that we see slaughter as slaughter, period -- and an attack on us all, wherever it happens, whoever is responsible. If we are going to be selective about what we react to, my feeling is we will never find a way to fight terrorism.

Because terrorists must count on that selective reaction.

We live in a world where terrorism is, unfortunately, a reality. But that doesn't mean we can't fight it. We can fight it by building a country where justice is available to all. Because then we build something substantial and strong, that all of us have a stake in. That makes it that much harder for terrorists to get a foothold here.

A voice raised for only some victims of terror is a voice raised for none.

So let's blame the politicians and their Z-security ways, sure. There's plenty of that anger going around. I saw some of it first hand outside the Trident, when a ten car convoy filled with armed cops brought Deputy Chief Minister Patil to the scene. The same Patil who later pronounced that small incidents happen in big cities like this one. No, let's never give up on anger like that.

But let's also blame the fences we erect in our minds. If this atrocity, this tragedy, has to have any silver lining at all, my wish is that it will get us to challenge those fences.

# I vow to remember

Rahul Misra, 2000 Civil & Computer Science

"Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."



This morning, one of my friends had a splitting stomach ache (a mild case of food poisoning) and I drove him to the nearby hospital. At the entrance, about 50 meters from the entrance to the Emergency Ward, we were stopped because the car needed to be screened by the security guards. At any other time, we would have been extremely happy to see how meticulous they were. But right then, in a snail-paced queue, when the pain

seemed to increase exponentially every passing moment, my friend lost it. I've never heard him shout that loud. In response, the security guard's response was a shrug of utter helplessness.

For me, that shrug epitomizes how we felt that fateful night on 26/11, and will continue to for many days to come. Like many of us, I was also awake watching the Taj burn. I shared the helplessness, anger and horror as we saw what

they could do to us, how they could bring us down to our knees. I saw live images of our policemen fighting AK-56 automatic weapons with .303 rifles. I saw slow Mahindra jeeps trying to chase down zipping Skodas. I saw firemen on rickety ladders and commandos with little knowledge of the hotel layouts. I saw some of our finest going in and not coming out. I saw sacrifices so supreme that even writing about them seems



disrespectful. More than anything else, I saw a will to survive, to fight back. And like all my fellow countrymen, I vowed to stand up once again. Taller. Stronger.

I also vowed to remember.

I vowed to remember the anger that I felt when they came in and violated my freedom, the anger that taunted me, reminding me that my helplessness was of my own making. I would remember it when I sat at a coffee shop in a 5 star hotel, when I passed through a crowded train station, when I saw that policeman with a *lathi* and wondered how he was going to stop a terrorist. I vowed to remember that he doesn't have the equipment because I didn't fight for him. And he's still going to be the first in when the maniacs arrive.

I vowed to remember what happened the first time I felt the

same anger, when they came and tried to bomb our Parliament. I vowed to remember how our politicians reacted. Instead of introspection, they conveniently shifted all our attention towards the wrongdoings of our neighbours. I vowed to remember the *crores* spent in mobilizing our armies which stood at high alert for over a year. If that money had been spent in building a disaster management infrastructure, wouldn't it have served a better purpose? But for that to happen, our politicians would have had to accept their mistakes...

So, more than anything else, I vowed to remember to fight. It may not be an open fight; it might even be played out in our minds, determined by our perceptions, baptized by the stain of black on our fingers on Election Day. But I vowed to remember to fight for all those who fought for me - for the police

that needs better equipment, for our armies that need better intelligence, for our commandos that need better backup, for my countrymen who decided to unite, for those because of whom, even in this dark hour, we can hold our heads up with pride.

When filling up my tax forms, while the devil and the angel within me argued over overvalued HRA slips and false medical bills, I vowed to remember the policemen who died trying to save me, shot through their substandard bullet-proof vests...

"Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

## Business (ad)ventures of 1977

Sivakumar Koorapati, 1974

Two high-flying BITSian entrepreneurs and one Redi-wallah make a mouth-watering combination to hatch two simultaneous business ideas. As expected, nothing goes right!

*(This is a true story from Sivakumar Koorapati and Santosh 'Fatso' Salve from the BITS Pilani 1974-1979 batch. Unfortunately, Santosh Salve passed away in an accident a few years after graduation.)*

It was probably May 1977 when Fatso and I were just finishing up the 3rd year 2nd semester and getting ready to go to CDRI, Lucknow for PS1. We were sitting at the KB redi enjoying a bread *tikki* and *chai* when a couple of new business ideas were born during casual chatter with Bisu – the KB rediwala then. Our conversation went something like this....

Fatso: "It will be nice if we could just leave our stuff in our room all summer, won't it?"

Bisu: "*Aaramse chai peeo bhai, aisa kabhi nahi hone wala hai!*"

Siva: "How about if someone could cart away luggage from our room and bring it back to our new room next sem?"

Bisu: "*Wo to ham shayad kara sakte hain, aap logon ki madad se*"

And so an idea was crystallized. We will rent a place outside the campus, arrange for tractors to come into each Bhawan to cart away the luggage right from your room, stack them up neatly with a coding scheme for easy retrieval on return, and finally return them

to your new room when you get back! Will students pay a little extra for this special service? You bet!



Bisu immediately arranged for a big empty warehouse somewhere in town and about half a dozen tractors. We decided on a price per bag to cover all expenses and profit. Fatso and I came up with some fancy baggage tagging scheme and printed tickets to sell. Fatso was a gifted cartoonist and came up with some brilliant posters to promote our business

with humorous cartoons. We stuck these posters on all mess boards and common room poster boards in every hostel. All of a sudden, we had a brisk business going and I think we were sold out pretty soon.

At the same time we came up with another business idea to charter a couple of buses and bring them right into the campus to pick up students from each hostel for their ride to New Delhi! With our sophisticated marketing efforts, pretty soon we were overbooked on both buses!

Our planning and organization was almost flawless and then we came to the moment when we had to actually execute on these plans! Students did their part by neatly tagging their bags and leaving them right outside their room doors as instructed. We were rolling in the first 2-3 tractors into the campus when we were met just outside the campus main gate by a large number of *rickshawalas* carrying *lathis*, chains, sticks etc to beat us to death. Oops...this was not a part of our plans, what happened here? We must have eaten their lunch! I had never felt that kind of fear ever before or after in my life!! By God's grace, their leader was an old bald headed guy by the name of Thakur who used to gate crash



some of our Nutan *chai paani* sessions and we had to buy him 1-2 bottles of *deshi tharra* every time. Thakur recognized us and prevented all his men from attacking us saying "*Ye log to hamara dost log hai. Ruko, mein baat karta hoon inse...*" Thakur launched into a long lecture... "*Garibon ke pet me lath mara...yeh acha nahi kiya tum log...etc*". We had to choose between the devil and the deep blue sea! If we let the *rickshawalas* have their way, students would kill us! Bisu spontaneously came up with a brilliant idea to strike a deal with Thakur. We would cancel the tractors and pay the *rickshawalas* to cart the luggage instead and they are not to charge the students. Of course, we had to pay some to the tractor guys or else they would kill us! And so we managed to cross that dangerously complex

hurdle and still take good care of our customers!

We then went to bring the 2 buses thinking it would be a cakewalk. Boy weren't we wrong! These 2 buses happened to be Haryana state transport buses and it was illegal to charter them. There were 2-3 cops waiting for us in Nutan bus stand! We had to tip the cops and the 2 drivers to move. Finally, we rolled the buses into the campus and *rickshawalas*

showed up again! By now of course, we had experience dealing with them! The buses were parked near the gate and the rickshaws carted the students there, of course at no charge to the students.

After all these massively unforeseen expenses, we were not left with much profit! Only thing we could do was to throw a party that night at KB!

I learned a few invaluable life lessons then:

- Expect the unexpected
- Think on your feet
- Honour your commitments to customers
- Quitting is not an option
- Everyone needs a Bisu to spark new ideas now and then
- And, more importantly, everyone needs a Thakur sometime to save his/her life!

# A mother's letter

Meenakshi Chatterjee, 2000 Physics & EEE

Mohua is a successful lawyer in the city. Single, beautiful and vain, she emulates her mother. She is caught up in her busy routine when a neatly stacked bundle of pages arrives: the first letter written by her mother, and the last...

As she rummaged through her post, Mohua did not expect to find anything other than a few annoying credit card requests and her monthly PG&E bill. It definitely surprised her to be holding a rather bulky envelope. It was addressed to her in neat, large, beautifully shaped letters. To the careless eyes, it would appear printed. This handwriting had won several prizes at school. It belonged to her mother.

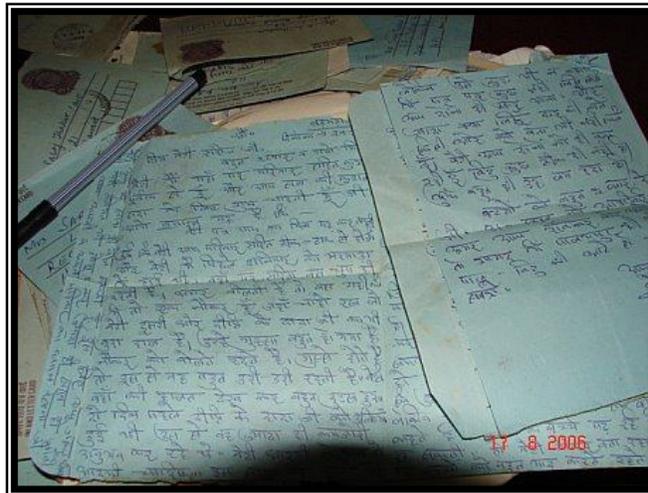
The sender's address was missing. "From Indrani Roychoudhury" was all it said.

Mohua stood holding the envelope. It was of an ordinary white complexion. The edges looked torn- perhaps documenting the long journey it underwent to reach her hands. She stood alone in the dimly lighted alley near her garage. Why did people construct post boxes so far removed from their homes? Did they not expect mails very often? Random irrelevant thoughts jumped about in her mind. With a sigh, she picked up her laptop bag and made her way up the stairs.

Mohua lived alone. Being a lawyer, she could afford the lavish apartment all by herself. Long years of education had been beneficial. As soon as she reached her couch, she dropped her bag

and the rest of the post on the coffee table. Clutching her mother's letter, she walked into her bedroom.

Standing in front of the full length mirror, undressing, Mohua admired herself. She was beautiful. Large black eyes, long curved eyelashes, a perfectly oval face, a slender neck making way to her well endowed breasts, her narrow waist – Mohua stood proud on her well toned legs.



Your looks aren't in your hands but she had the splendid blend of beauty in her genes. Her mother had won a state beauty pageant in 1970 and her dad had been a handsome but unsuccessful movie star.

As she smiled at her reflection she remembered her mother. As a child, she had seen her mother undress. Just like Mohua, she

stood poised in front of the mirror, praising God's handiwork.

Sometimes her dad entered the room, unwittingly and left almost immediately. Even in the brief moment, Mohua saw a glint of pride, sensed a desire for this beautiful creation. She knew who she wanted to be when she grew up.

While other children wrote essays on becoming a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer, even a housewife, Mohua's essays were about becoming her mother. Little do children know how much life's ambitions change with the passage of time.

Getting into her night shorts, Mohua debated about dinner. Was it better to have a lazy omelette with toast or cook an elaborate meal with salmon? Her mother's letter made up her mind for her. Omelette it was.

Hurriedly she finished her dinner. The anticipation of what lay inside that envelope was killing her. Arming herself with a pillow, a blanket and warm slippers,

Mohua made her way to the couch. Dimming the lights everywhere except near the sofa, she settled down comfortably. Sitting cross legged, she gently tore open the envelope. Neatly folded white pages tumbled out. Unfolding the stack, she noticed that every page was numbered. Every page had a small symbol of "OM" at the top centre and a small "PTO" (please turn over) at the bottom right. Her mother seemed to be writing a story to her.

Pushing her Gucci spectacles closer to her eyes by crunching her nose, she tightened the blanket around her. Perhaps Mohua wanted to substitute her mother's warmth with it? She started reading.

*"Mohua,*

*"This is my first letter to you. I have never written to you because I never felt the need to do so."*

Mohua stopped. It was true. She had written every month, then every alternate month, then finally every year before she stopped writing. Not a single response for all those excited lines of news she wrote. Her mother didn't use any salutation for her – no "Dear" or "Dearest". She read on.

*"Even though our communication in the past has been sparse, you have constantly been on my mind. The gold-brown ornament box is now filled with all your letters. Every single one of them. Having no ornaments has its benefits after all."*

Mohua smiled. Her mother had a sense of humour. Women, irrespective of the century, usually lack wit. Her mother was



a gem at that. She was the life of every party- and there was no dearth of parties in her childhood. Dressed in scandalously revealing blouses with plunging necklines, saree wrapped clingingly to reveal her ample breasts, her alabaster white skin and navel – her mother tantalized the senses of whoever beheld her. Mohua remembered her mother – walking down the stairs, with a glass of wine – like a queen descending her throne. All pairs of eyes were upon her. A little tilt of her bejewelled bun and a subtle smile was all it took to command any man, and perhaps any woman. Women hated and loved her. Manju aunty, Shalini *mashi*, Sharmila *di*, loved and copied everything her mother wore. They also bickered, dissected and denounced everything she spoke. As far as Mohua knew, her mother couldn't care any less.

Her mother joked, danced, touched and stood very close to men. Mohua had heard from Manju *mashi* that young pubescent boys fell prey to her charms as did older men. Of

course Manju *mashi* wasn't praising this talent.

*"Mohua, do you recall the New Year Party at our Ballygaunge house in 1978? The party was a grand success but our lives changed irreversibly that night of January 1st. Your father changed, I changed. Perhaps you changed too, although you were only fourteen. But you have always been a smart child and I trust you perceived the change in our lives."*

Mohua remembered the party. Her parents were planning it six months in advance, inviting people two months in advance and decorating the house for one whole week! All the fuss, hubbub of activity made her extremely happy. She was busy choosing her party dress, planning on looking the prettiest among all her teenage friends. She even wanted to skip school, forego home works for the entire week. That didn't happen. When it came to studies, her mother was a tough disciplinarian. She had a master's degree – something that was rare among rich beautiful Bengali women. Her father on the other

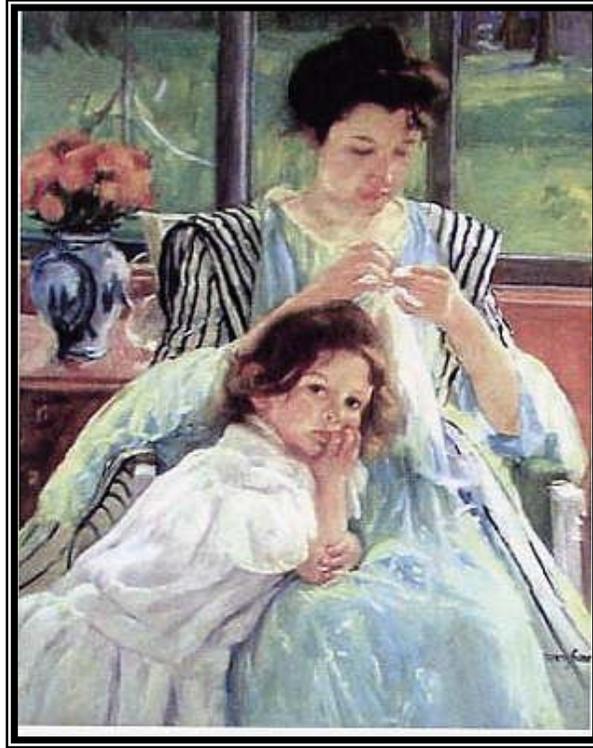
hand was a college dropout. He was rich and when his rich parents met Indrani's rich parents at a party, they happily discovered the coincidence of having two perfectly suited marriageable kids! They hooked them up. The rest is history.

The clock ticked. It was 1 AM. Mohua shivered under her blanket. All the background noises had subdued. It's strange how you notice the absence of these unknown sounds which in their presence get completely ignored. People had fallen asleep. Tomorrow was a working day and Mohua had a client meeting at 9 o' clock.

It had been a year since she joined the firm. She had been extremely hard working and her efforts had been noticed and rewarded. She rose in ranks faster than her peers. A lack of relationship, very few distant friends made it easier to spend long hours at work. She had no regret. Unconsciously she was avoiding men – those interested in her. She didn't realise what a profound influence her mother's life had been on her. That party of 1978 had indeed been a turning point.

*"Mohua, when I was young I always held a firm belief that marrying someone who loved you more than you loved him was the wise idea. I never really loved your father. I liked him. He looked good, he provided well for the family and he treated me well. Ideally that's all a woman of my generation craves for. But I was one with great expectations. I wanted my husband to be perfect – in everything. Your father couldn't make me happy – in life, in love and in bed. I might sound risqué but this is the truth. The parties, the drinks, the flirtations, the*

*jewellery, the shopping, even a few random flings kept me distracted in the household. I forgot my pain. I met many men in my time. Men didn't stop even though I was married. I didn't stop them either. None of these relationships ever became serious*



*enough for me to consider abandoning my family. That night, I met the man who made it possible."*

Mohua didn't realise that she was holding her breath. Thoughts cascaded like Niagara Falls on the plateau of her mind and evaporated instantly. She couldn't focus. Everything she believed for the past twenty-eight years of her life came crashing down in a mere moment.

*"Rajorshi and I had 'love at first sight'. Dressed in traditional Bengali designer dhoti and kurta – he was the epitome of male attractiveness. His curly hair, mischievous smile, fair tall physique, his wit, his compliments stole my heart instantly. He was a self made man. Unlike your father he*

*inherited nothing from his parents, except his looks. When I first met him, I knew I had been waiting for him all my life. That very night we spent hours together. Eyeing guests, nosy neighbours, your father's disapproving glances, even you – couldn't daunt my spirit. I came alive in Rajorshi's company and I wanted to live every moment of it.*

*"We separated with a promise to meet. It took us less than a month to transcend the boundaries of acquaintance, to friendship to ardent lovers. Your father made no attempt to stop me. I think he stupidly believed that he could set his love free and allow it to decide to return to him. He was foolish. He took to drinking heavily. You noticed how irascible he became at home, how we fought every night, how I howled in despair. I think you blamed your father. He was lessening my guilt in your presence. He loved me*

*deeply, something I fail to fathom even now. In order to protect my dignity he took the blame of my disappearance. He sensed I would elope and tried his best to pretend that living with him was surviving in hell. He succeeded. Maybe he wasn't a failed actor after all.*

*"The entire world justified my elopement by denouncing your father. You did too.*

*"The only thing he loved more than me was you. Every time I was away with another man, he consoled himself with the knowledge of your existence. He loved you with all his heart. Only the very best clothes, the very best schools and the very best gifts were reserved for you. He pampered your*



every whim. Ironic isn't it? I never did half as much and yet you adored me a thousand times more.

"After I eloped, you started despising your dad. Half a month of tortured existence at home led you to run away. You reached Mira mashi's house. Your dad made sure of your well being and was responsible for your admission in the most reputed school in Dehradun. Of course you assumed it was Mira mashi.

"I didn't know all this and neither did I care. I can shamelessly admit that though I was a mother I didn't care about my only child. Rajorshi was keeping me extremely happy.

"Being five years younger than me, his zest for life was stupendous. His enthusiasm was so infectious that I got sucked in his relentless life full of fun and activity. For the next five years we

travelled. Europe, America, Australia, Japan – we were teenagers in love and in wonderland. Everyday was an adventure. I had never been this happy. Your thought crossed my mind occasionally. Whenever the urge to know overwhelmed me, I called Mira mashi. Knowing you were well and hearty was good. Even if you weren't, I doubt I would have come rushing back. I wouldn't have left if I had to return.

"You grew up into a lady. I expected no less. You graduated with flying colours and the doors of opportunities opened wide for you. You decided to study law. I wonder what it was you wanted to defend yourself from. Mankind?

"You never went back to your father, just like me. You inherited my stubbornness with my looks. I heard from Mira mashi of how you always

made your dad return from the doorstep without a glimpse of you. Of how every one of his several letters went unanswered, perhaps unread and unopened as well. Life is strange. While you neglected every of your father's epistles, he tended to all yours, addressed to me. The address Mira mashi gave you was made-up. The post box you religiously wrote to never delivered them to me. Your dad collected and saved each one in his locker. Perhaps waiting for a day, when all of us would gather around the

fireplace, warming our toes with the heat of our palms, munching potato cutlets and reading each other's letters. Laughing, joking, and hugging each other in joy. The bitter cold outside not daring to enter the circle of warmth within. His dream keeps him alive. He steadfastly believed I would return and with my homecoming his lovely daughter would run back into the house and into his arms. Every picture of yours has been thumbed endlessly and soiled with his tears. His family was all he had. As your father grew weaker, you grew stronger, independent and self-reliant. As his hopes got dashed, yours soared. The more successful you became, the worse-off he grew. For the past fourteen years you never saw his face and lived happy. For the same fourteen years, you father died every single day.

*"I was, am and shall remain happy with Rajorshi. We haven't married. Our relationship was neither normal nor conventional. I retained your father's last name, "Roychoudhury", the last vestige of my broken marriage. We don't have any children. I did not want to conceive. I wanted you as my only child. In some absurd way I intended to punish myself for your loss. Suffice it to say that the past fourteen years have fulfilled my dreams of being a woman and a lover. That helped in keeping the thoughts of my being a lousy wife and a mother at bay.*

*"I have never questioned myself. I have always been a free spirit. Meeting the man, my perfect match, even though I was married with a child, did not deter me from pursuing my happiness. In my eyes, I am justified.*

*"You perhaps wonder, why I chose to pen this letter after all these years of silence. Mohua, I lived till now, watching you dad soundlessly perish under the burden of your untamed wrath. He is suffering from cancer and has a few more months to endure. Mira mashi has been taking care of him for so long -. His condition had deteriorated and I am aware of his dying wish; that of seeing me and you once again. I know I shall never go back. I know he has forgiven me. I know he would hold my hand as if we were the same young couple touching each other for the first time. As if the last fourteen years have been a bad dream. I don't want him to wish away reality. I might seem exceedingly harsh, but I won't deny the reality. In a part of my heart I can't accept his unquestioning love and magnanimity. Perhaps I wish to die, with your father's*

*unrequited desire on my head, and face my punishment in another world, in another life.*

*"I am writing this letter to introduce your father to you. He has suffered far more and far severely than he deserved. I am not requesting you to meet him in his dying hour. I leave that decision unto you. At least you know the truth. At least you know how misplaced your adoration for me was. I never cared half as much as your father did for you.*

*"Rest in the knowledge that this is my first and last letter to you. Our paths separated a long time ago and shall remain that way.*

*"Before I end, I wanted to let you know that you have made me proud with your achievements. Every single piece of news you wrote to me has been well received. (Mira mashi had sent*

*the stack from your dad's locker.)"*

Indrani Mohua got up trembling in haste. The pages scattered about on the carpet. It was 3 PM in India. People would be awake. He father would be awake. Mohua ran into her room and feverishly looked for the number Mira mashi had scribbled on her notebook.

As the rings sounded at the other end, her hands started shaking. She recalled her father's habit of placing the phone next to his bed stand. Did he still do it?

"Hullo," a broken raspy voice greeted her. The booming sonorousness had suffered miserably and changed completely.

*"Bapi, I am coming home".*



# Down the memory lane

S B L Mathur, 1946 Mechanical

"Dear Editor,

"Here I am with the article that my father dictated and I hurriedly typed in.

"Time has changed almost everything including BITS. Please take into consideration that my father is talking of the times when the college buildings were still under construction and the students more or less studied in a gurukul style... under thatched roofs!

"Hope you find everything in order.

"Thanks,  
Nupur Mathur"

I am now probably one of the oldest of the alumni of BITS, Pilani. It has been my fortune to have seen the Institute grow from being merely a small engineering college in a remote part of the country to becoming a mammoth of an Institute, whose fame has spread worldwide. It was, of course, the vision of one man initially, but has grown with the help of competent staff and students through the years.

Looking down the annals of my life, the best years that I spent were the ones at BITS Pilani. Those were the good old days, when life seemed lush and green. I lived in an oyster of happiness where gaiety and mirth surrounded me. My batch was the very first one at the college which was then called Birla Engineering College. At that pioneering time, every experience was new. My batch mates and I were a vivacious lot – all the times up to all unimaginable pranks. We were 230 students in Mechanical and Electrical engineering streams.

Now when I remember those days, I feel elated and would love to re-live that carefree life, the days when I had no worries, no ailments and no shackles to bind me down. Life seemed to flow along like a song!

I was from Agra, and mostly travelled to & from college in groups consisting of other batch mates. There were several other boys from and near Agra. On one occasion, while returning to college after vacations, we got into a public bus as usual. All went well till one of my friends got the smell of something delicious. He looked around and found that it emanated from a basket kept above his seat. The aroma was too tempting and finally, he took a peep into the basket. To his great delight, found it to be filled with *besan ke laddoos*. He looked around for the owner and noticed an affluent looking 'Seth' dozing in his seat. The 'Seth' wore a turban, had several gold rings on his fingers and generally looked prosperous. My

friend lost no time, tasted the *laddoo* and began to pass them on to us all. We even offered them to the other passengers and had the audacity to offer one to the unsuspecting *Seth* himself! We worked hard on the laddoos till we touched the bottom of the basket, after having thoroughly enjoyed the feast and also the mischief. As we neared our destination, we readied to jump out and run into the sanctity of our college, before the 'Seth' realized what had happened.

The 'Seth' must subsequently have guessed whose handicraft it was that his laddoo laden basket stood empty. He approached our Principal – Prof V Laxminarayanan to complain. Our principal was a gem of a man and probably guessed the entire situation. He requested the 'Seth' to come back next morning when a recognition parade would be held of all the students. Same evening he came to us and without taking us to task, advised the mischief-mongers to disguise

themselves in some way during the recognition parade. So, we dressed up differently, some wearing a turban or a hat, whiskers or beards and cake walked through the parade unscathed. The 'Seth' could not recognize any of us and left chin down.

Not to be outdone, we went a step further and burnt down his huge stack of hay near the Pilani town. If today my children or grand children were found to be up to such a trick, I would give them a proper dressing down, but at that time we really enjoyed the incident. Never again did our principal mention it or point a finger at us. He was simply a superb head of our institute.

On another occasion, my chum developed fever just as it was time to leave for vacations. We made arrangements and boarded the train along with the ill boy. But as luck would have it, his condition worsened, and he developed a very high temperature. The coach attendant informed the next station to have a doctor look at our ill friend. It was then that we learnt that the ailing boy had tetanus and soon passed away. We had no other option but to remove his body away from the passenger coach. The attendant suggested we move his body to the goods compartment. As anyone can guess, returning home for vacations meant we had very little money. We all pooled in and

could collect the required Rs.550/-. The deceased boy's parents were informed and from there they took over. This was one of the most nightmarish episodes that we all went through. Who could tell that a simple bout of fever would turn out to be so grisly?

When our junior batch joined, we did not trouble them one bit, by



way of ragging, but had a special function arranged where the juniors were asked to introduce themselves and exhibit any talent they had, like singing, recitation, dancing etc. We were too busy in our own world and mischief to hurt or trouble anyone.

Another incident that tickles me till date and yet gives me goose pimples is the one we had in the hostel. Unlike other boys, who oiled themselves with mustard oil and basked in the sun, I hated even the thought of it! My friends teased me over it but I shrugged them off. One day, as I stepped out of my room, they pushed me onto the mustard oil which they had poured all over the floor. They rolled me over and over again till I was fully drenched in

the oil. I was furious and all my pals had a hearty laugh. Never again did I dare to make fun of the oil-sun bath of my hostel mates.

We frequented Pilani town often – if only to gawk at the girls there. We also visited a library at Pilani town. The library needs a special mention because other than the head librarian, there were no other employees to hand over the required books to us. We made all the entries ourselves and the beauty was that no book was ever reported missing. We even visited Mr. G.D.Birla's mansion at Pilani to meet Mr.Rajendra Prasad before he took over as the President of India. Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru visited our college on the invitation of Mr. G.D. Birla.

BITS Pilani has progressed and prospered by leaps and bounds, from what I hear. Today when I hear about its growth and achievements, I swell with pride knowing that I am a part of its glorious past and a brighter future.

I wish my Institute, and all its past and future progeny and staff, all the very best. My good wishes and blessings are with all of you, always. May BITS grow in terms of its value and stature in the years to come and become truly globe-straddling in every sense of the word.

# Faith

Rahul Misra, 2000 Civil & Computer Science

**"Without the promise of a fulfilled life.....on the altar of faith"**

A queue that stretches for miles,  
Millions pushing in,  
Bare feet on hot concrete,  
For a four second glimpse of the deity,  
Hands hurriedly folded in prayer  
Lest they be pushed away,  
Without a divine image in mind,  
Without the promise of a fulfilled life.

\* \* \*

Her prayer,  
A tiny boat in a storm of thoughts,  
Struggling as she mutters  
Silent incantations,  
Incense sticks in hand,  
Her thoughts elsewhere,  
Hoping her Gods would hear her still,  
"It's 2 a.m.  
Why isn't he home still?"

\* \* \*

A bustling market  
On a Saturday night,  
Flashing lights,  
Soon to turn black  
When time will stand numb,  
Before the flames of horror explode  
And the circle spreads further  
Claiming a few more sacrifices  
On the altar of faith.



# An unforgettable celestial phenomenon

Prashant Mohan, 1994 Maths & EEE

As BITSians gathered 100 km away from the campus to watch a once-in-a-lifetime experience, the moon could not help feeling she was putting up an OASIS performance in the audi!

We were in our second year in 1995. The BITS physics society was going to organise a trip to witness the most important event in the sky (the real one!). There was some hype in the newspapers that the event was going to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for most people in the narrow latitude belt that extended from Diamond harbour in West Bengal up to the western deserts of Jaisalmer. And, guess what, the latitude to witness such a grand event was as close as 100 km from Pilani!

Sam and I decided we were going to take the plunge. We roped in other BITSians and gave our names and money to the organisers of the trip.

The morning on 24th October 1995 was fresh. It was the day after Diwali, and the campus was still empty. We boarded one of the two buses that were headed to a place called *Neem ka Thana*, at 4 am! We BITSians got into the bus, bleary eyed and sleepy, and instantly flopped on to the seats and fell asleep.

There was talk of mythology: of how Shri Krishna created a solar eclipse to win the war for the Pandavas. This kind of phenomenon apparently hadn't happened in India since those days of war at Kurukshetra. The

conversation and suspense of what lay ahead was building up. The organisers distributed those special glasses with which one was supposed to view a solar eclipse to prevent the UV rays of the sun from destroying corneas.

After an uneventful journey through the bumpy Sikar district

As we all settled into our respective positions, we made further conversations about the eclipse. I was quite excited by the new pair of sun viewing glasses. Sam and I chatted about the other funny characters in the bus. About, how so-and-so was hitting on so-and-so and how obvious it was during the bus journey.



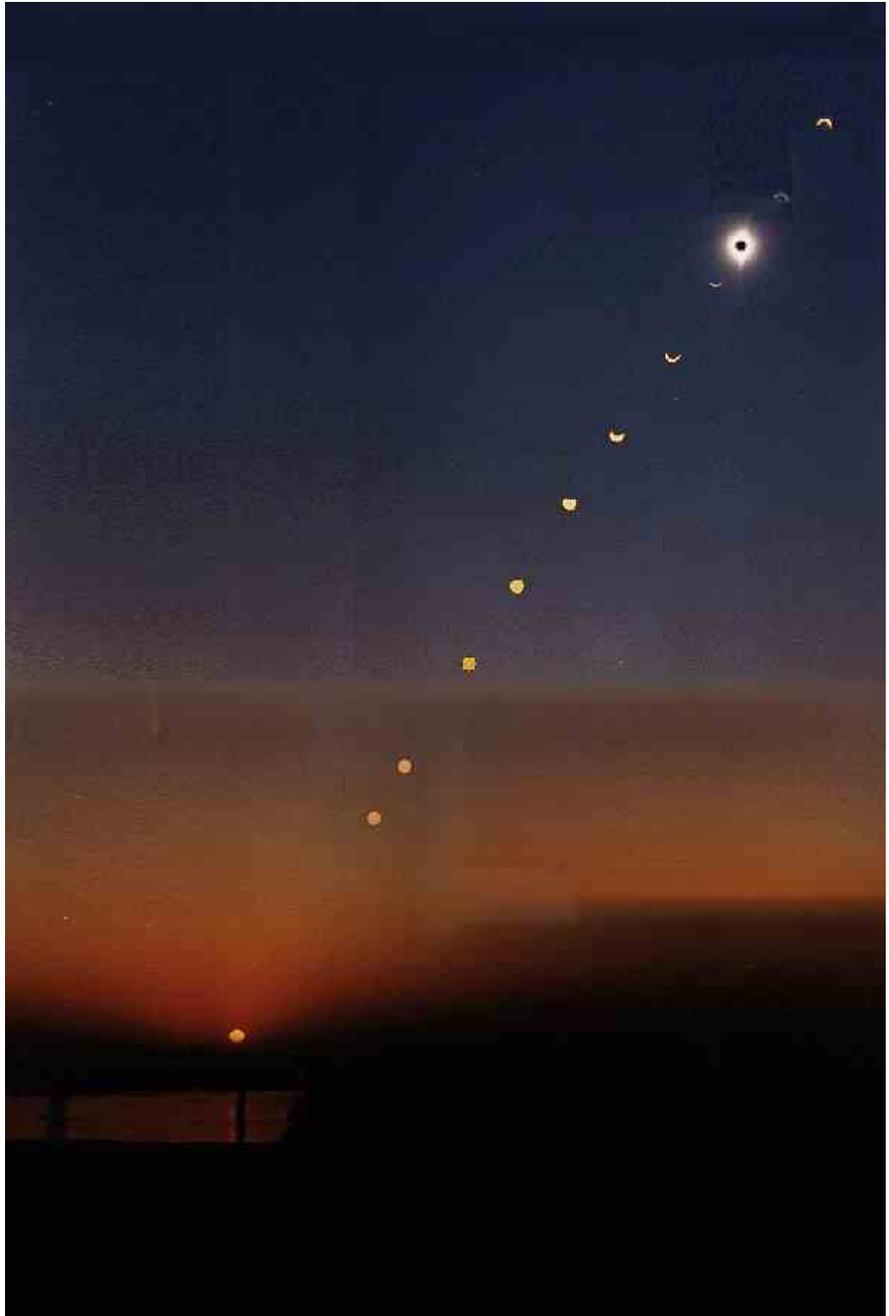
roads, we reached the village of *Neem ka Thana* by about 6 AM. Our bus drove a further 10 km from *Neem ka Thana* to the vast flat lands; the idea was that the best place to observe the spectacle needed to be flat and unhindered by any protrusions out of the earth, not even trees!

At sharp 7:35 AM, just as our physics friends had said, we were able to watch the moon's shadow starting to touch the edges of the sun. This was it, I thought! The earthlings in the meantime were beginning to get a little confused. By 8 AM, almost half of the sun was covered by the moon. "*Machaan*, look at that *da!* How

cool bugger!" The enthusiasm was starting to build up. By 8:15 AM, as almost three fourth's of the sun was covered, someone started shouting, "Go moon go! Go moon go!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing: we were actually cheering the moon to go cover up the sun! The excitement was starting to peak. The temperature had started to drop. October in Rajasthan has huge variations between day and night. We could feel the cooler winds starting to blow.

The other earthlings, the birds, the bees and all other life forms around us, were treating it like a regular dusk and twilight. They were returning home cooing and cawing. "Look at the crow! Look at the crow," shouted one other head in the BITSian crowd. A few stares and glares and a rude "Oh shut up! You watch your crow!" got him back on track to watch the sun. In the meantime, the chants of "Go moon go" were getting louder.

At 8.30 AM, the appointed time for the full blown spectacle was here. That was a moment of a lifetime. Absolute darkness, star studded sky, birds all silent. We witnessed the full cycle of a total solar eclipse – from the gradual covering of the sun to the diamond ring. When the first rays from the sun broke, the diamond ring in the sky appeared for real! The excitement was uncontrollable and we all clapped! Yes, we all clapped and cheered the sun and the moon for playing this hide-and-see game. There was a round of hugs and even chants of "Go BITS go!" filling up the air. The birds and the bees



were 'waking up', crows were cawing, the cocks were cooing; a new dawn had broken out in their worlds.

As the phenomenon continued, some of us were focussed on the second half of the event too. Of

the moon's shadow getting off the sun! We congratulated each other on being part of such a spectacle and drove back in the bus in the bus to Pilani. 13 years later, I still feel like thanking the organisers of that event. Thank you guys! That event was special!

# Imported scales

Aparajith Ramnath, 2001 EEE

The search for a gift, a musical instrument for a friend in US makes for an interesting adventure for Susheela.

Hey Sally,

Re: your last email, I hope the rain's eased up a little there. Not fun when you've a few weeks off and have to spend them indoors. Here, on the other hand, the sun's been blazing away as usual. (That used to be the title of a column by an ex-cricketer in the newspapers here: 'Blazing Away'. My dad would read aloud from it in the mornings, chuckling at its indiscriminate use of quotation marks ... but of course cricket means even less to you than it does to me.) Remember all that stuff we read about the *Orient* and the *Othing* of the Tropics and what not? I'm no *Orientalist* or *Other-er* of the Tropics, but I'll swear I've been spending most of my time sitting with a tumbler of lemon juice, the fan overhead whirring at full speed, staring out at the coconut trees, hot, green and still. It's only in the evenings, when the sea breeze sets in, that even the trees begin to perk up a little, swaying ever so gently and looking a softer shade of green.

In fact, I've been doing so little that my parents and that over-serious brother of mine have

begun to get irritated. So the other day, when I told them I had to buy something for a friend at university, they were more than thrilled to let me have the old Fiat with the driver (or 'Premier Padmini', to be exact. Those were the days when we had joint ventures, and foreign makes being manufactured locally under



licence, and what not. How fares the Fiat in Italy today? We must ask Fabio when term begins). Not that I couldn't have taken a bus or an auto-rickshaw, but it just made things easier. Anyway, off I went to the conservative heart of our southern metropolis, a locality

named after the peacock but where the only birds you see these days are crows – as in the rest of the city. It's a place that's so familiar to me, and yet I struggle to paint a picture of it for you. Suffice it to say that I was on a street densely packed with shops, pavement stalls, the odd temple, and crowds of shoppers – there are still crowds of them despite the competition from the new, kitschy malls sprouting up elsewhere in the city.

The shop was on the ground floor of a two- or three-storey building. I pushed the door open, and felt a familiar sense of relief as I realised there was air-conditioning. I had hardly taken two steps when a severe looking man dressed in white; cast a pointed glance at my feet. For a moment I was confused. But of course! I went back outside, a little annoyed that I hadn't expected it. On one side of the door was a pile of footwear. I shook my sandals off and went back in.

Wood was everywhere: wooden panels, wooden shelves, and wooden instruments. There were two connected rooms, one serving as a sort of ante-chamber, where the silver-haired inspector of feet was polishing things with a rag. To my right ran a long



windowpane, tinted to keep the sun out, against which were suspended gleaming wooden violins, *veenas* and flutes. Elsewhere rows of *mridangams* and *tamburas* rested against the wall.

'Vaango,' said a smooth, assured voice. Its owner sat on a comfortable swivel chair, tucked into an alcove, behind a sturdy desk. On the desk were various bills and a large calculator with the display tilted slightly upwards. The wall behind the chair was covered by garlanded portraits and a glass-fronted display with golden figurines against a backdrop of red felt cloth. A series of bulbs framed the display, lighting up one after another to create the effect of a single light orbiting the figurines.

'Tell me, Madam. What can I do for you?'

He was generously built, a *Terylene* shirt doing its best to envelop his frame. Large glasses covered his face, and his hair was plastered back with coconut oil

(how do I know? You can smell coconut oil from a mile away, especially if you've used it everyday for half your life).

'*Sruti-petti...*' I began.

'What type, Madam? Electronic, manual, with *taalam* or without *taalam* – we have all the varieties. Prices starting from round about thousand rupees to about five thousand.'

I felt a bit out of my depth already. Somehow or other, I had not had the customary *Carnatic* music classes as a young girl, and although I was no stranger to it in general terms, I sensed that I was about to be pinned down a bit on something I was quite vague on. An early declaration of my status as a novice seemed to me the best strategy.

'What do you suggest? You see, it's for a friend, not for me. I don't know very much about these things. But I'd like to look

at something quite basic to start with.'

'No problem, Madam. Lakshmi, show Madam the electronic variety *sruti-pettis*,' he said, addressing one of the sales assistants behind a long wooden counter – although this seemed a bit superfluous, considering that she had been listening attentively to our conversation. She began to scan the shelves behind her. I stood awkwardly, wondering if I should consider the conversation closed and move to the counter.

Desk Man, though, cleared his throat. He was in the mood for small talk.

'The person you are buying it for, beginner or...?'

'She's not learning formally at the moment. She was exposed to *Hindustani* music years ago, but wants to start learning *Carnatic*, I think.'

Something about the way I said it, or maybe the fact that you weren't there to do the buying yourself, suggested to him that the aspiring musician was not quite in the *Carnatic* heartland herself.

'Where is she based?' he asked.

'US,' I said (without the definite article, as one says it in Tamil). No matter how often this happens, I always feel a bit, I don't know, awkward. I guess I'm just about old enough to have grown up with a feeling that visiting abroad, let alone spending years there as a student, is a privilege, a rare

opportunity. So whenever someone asks me what university I'm at or where I am currently 'based' (though in this case only indirectly), I have to modulate my voice to reflect just the right tone: nonchalant, yet not boastful.

'Oh I see.' He said it in a tone that seemed dismissive and deferential at the same time. 'We have a lot of customers in US.'

'Really?'

'Oh yes.' US? I had to turn the corners of my lips down as they began to curl into a smile. He continued, 'They come here during the summer every year. Some of them come during the season. They attend all the concerts; buy CDs, instruments, and notation, everything from our shop. They get a better price here obviously.'

'Yes, I can imagine. Also can't be easy to find some of these things there.'

'Oh, it's available. But they have to buy it in action.'

I waited for him to explain.

'Many *Carnatic* instruments go for action. Some people offer too much – they don't know the correct value.'

Realisation dawned. I felt that '*action*' was indeed the appropriate word. After all, isn't that what it's all about? The auctioneer banging his gavel, looking up above the rim of his glasses; his eyes darting around the room, several hands and brochures going up and down, many breaths going in and out - the picture flashed vividly in my mind.

So those who didn't care for the action came here.

'Yes. We know the proper value of an instrument, don't we? We have been in the business for so many years.' There's a particularly *brahminical* 'we' that can be used to refer to oneself despite being a single person.

By now, the assistant had climbed down the ladder from the upper shelves and begun taking the boxes out of the boxes. I mean the *sruti* boxes out of the cardboard boxes. She showed them to me one by one.

'This one is thousand two hundred and fifty, basic model, but manual. If you want

choose from among several tempos.

'How much is this one?'

'Three thousand four hundred rupees.'

That was way beyond the budget you'd set, of course, and I knew you didn't want most of the jazzy features (you wanted only *Carnatic* features, didn't you?).

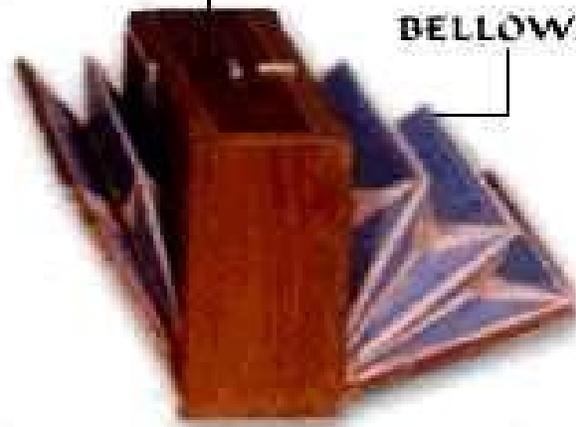
'How about a basic one, that is electronic?'

Desk Man looked up at the assistant. 'Show her the *Elkaysans* model.'

This one turned out to be the

SRUTI ADJUSTERS

BELLOWS



automatic, you can go for the electronic one. It's the latest model. Just switch on and use the plus and minus buttons – no need of anything else. It will show you the scale alphabetically also. *Talam* can also be added.'

I fiddled around with it for a while. Just the gradual scaling up of the base note reminded me of summer afternoons at my aunt's place where an old *vaadhyaar* used to come to teach my cousins. I switched on the beats – you could

simplest electronic *sruti-petti*, and so I chose it. The lady began to pack it quickly and efficiently, and gave me the warranty card to fill as she went about it.

'Where is this one going?' a voice asked. I turned to my left to see an elderly *maami* further along the counter, smiling at me. She was clutching one of the more advanced models I'd been shown.

'US,' I said, a little bored to have to say it again.

'Is it so? This one is going to Canada,' she said, pointing to hers. 'My sister's grand-daughter is learning. Do you sing?'

'No,' I said, smiling politely. 'It's for my friend.'

'I see. Who is the *guru*?'

'Oh no, she's not learning seriously or anything. She's just interested and wants to try.'

'That's very good. My grand niece learns from M.V. Vaidyanathan. He is based there nowadays. You must have heard of him. You know, sir,' she continued, turning to Desk Man, 'nowadays so many people are learning outside. They have everything, they organise *katcheris* regularly.'

'Oh yes. Our customers come here from so many countries, US, Canada, Europe. All first class and very talented.' He paused. 'But whatever it is, you can't get the training that you get here. Many of the parents bring their children during the school vacation and put them under some *vaadhyaar* here.'

'Yes, that's there.'

'But sometimes they come here to buy things, and not all of them really know what they're talking about. But we have *gyaanam* of most of the instruments, don't we? So we tell them what is what.'

Meanwhile, the assistant was done with her packing. I paid and collected the packet. A group of customers walked in,

asking for the *Gaanaamruta Bodhini* and *Gaanaamruta Varnamaalika* in Kannada. Desk Man looked over at them, and I had my cue. I nodded to him and the Canada lady, and turned towards the exit.

'If you need anything else, come straight to us, Madam, we will help you,' he called after me. I looked back and nodded. Outside, as I was putting on my sandals, I saw Silver Hair leaning against a pillar, holding a glass of tea and looking very serious.

So, Sally, when you become a famous singer, remember the story of how you got your first *sruti-petti*!

Lots of love,  
Susheela



# Tamilnadu Express

Nishant Pullabhatla

A beautiful woman travelling alone on a Tamil Nadu Express meets a handsome man in the same compartment. Will it be a fairy tale?

It felt eerie in the station even though it was Chennai central with 18 platforms and trains running in and out all the time. It was early January and very late at night, not an ideal travelling time for most. The occasional sound of slogging diesel engine or the piercing pipe of an electric engine disturbed the silence of the platform. There were some waiting for Tamil Nadu Express to arrive. Tonight TN Express was being stubborn, a technical hitch delaying its departure from Chennai central.



In the dim foggy night on platform 4, she was staring into nothingness. He looked bored, smoking cigarette after cigarette. She turned to look at him; he couldn't help but meet her eyes. He saw a very beautiful face, large eyes, and very fair skin with garlands of jasmynes on her front covering her ample bosom. He couldn't avoid looking at her exposed waist between her white blouse and sari but quickly pulled his eyes back to her face. He noticed a subtle smile. She knew she was beautiful.

"Tamil Nadu Express is now entering into Platform 4 and will depart in 20 minutes. We apologise for the delay." The train announcer parroted the same in Hindi and Tamil and the mike went dead with a rugged thud, as

if the announcer banged the mike down with utmost contempt.

First Class compartments of India are the last vestige of colonialism. They are so expensive for what they have to offer, that only government officials and people who couldn't get the air-conditioned car tickets travel in them. When he entered the coupe she was already there. He smiled and she returned a smug smile of conquest.

He saw a very beautiful face, large eyes, and very fair skin with garlands of jasmynes on her front covering her ample bosom. He couldn't avoid looking at her exposed waist between her white blouse and sari but quickly pulled his eyes back to her face.

"I am in C3," he stuttered explaining his presence as a coincidence and the fact that he did not really follow her. She smiled sweetly but didn't reply. Her gaze returned to the tracks next to the train.

"I am going back to the platform to get some coffee before the train moves, would you like to have something?"

"It's one am and you want coffee?"

"I am getting off in Vijayawada; it's just 5 hours, so I can't really sleep."

"A bottle of mineral water would be nice," she tried to open her purse but it wouldn't open. He quickly asked her to give him the money later and got off.



"He is a very handsome guy and a gentleman but he doesn't seem to have any control over his eyes." She smiled to herself.

She always enjoyed a bit of attention. Her husband hated it and went into bouts of jealousy whenever he saw something like this. He was a puny man, so he didn't pose a threat to the 'perpetrator'. He would bite his anger and take it out on her later.

Even the most innocuous thing upset her husband. It could be her dressing once, her smiles the next time, a look here, an expression there – about anything. Initially she tried to explain that it wasn't her fault to be so beautiful but he never came round to the fact that she never reciprocated an admirer's indulgence and remained a faithful wife for many years. They were separated in many spheres – mental, physical, and even priorities, desires, aspirations, ideas they were miles apart. They

were man and wife only as namesakes.

Years of loveless marriage, forced her to question her loyalty. First it was dinner and a conversation, flowers and declarations of undying love and very soon a full blown affair with a friend from college; life was getting better. She knew Karthik loved her and she loved spending time with him.

Sounds of the moving train, picking speed, changing tracks awakened her from her reverie. She wondered where the man was. She didn't have to think very long, he came in slightly panting and out of breath.

"Didn't get time for coffee, there was a queue but here is your bottle of water."

"Thank you, you are very kind. I am a very light sleeper; I can

wake you up in Vijayawada if you want to catch some sleep."

"No it's fine, I have to be awake."

"I am going all the way to Delhi so this train is my home for the next 36 hours. To thank you properly, I will stay awake with you till Vijayawada. Let's talk and get to know each other."

He looked a bit uncomfortable, with an expression of wary puzzlement.

"I don't bite; don't worry, so tell me your name."

"Karthik," he told her, with the confidence of a guy used to being asked his name by beautiful girls. There was a surprised flicker in her eyes, he noticed.

A deafening honk and the turbulent wind of a superfast train on the next track hit both of

them. He waited till it was gone before asking.

"You know any other Karthik?"

"My..." she stammered only for a split second to recover and say, "husband."

He looked pleasantly surprised. "But your name is Vidya Raman, how can your husband's name be Karthik?"

"How do you know my name? I didn't tell you," she was curious but apprehensive.

"I saw it on the reservation charts when I came back from the kiosk."

"Did I say my husband? I meant my friend," she smiled sweetly but he could sense the discomfort.

He appraised her silently without any eyeball movement for a second and then said, "These days everyone has a 'friend', and there is no need to be uncomfortable."

It was her turn to be taken aback. "Do you have a 'friend'?"

"No, I am a loner, I like it this way," he replied brusquely.

"No one likes to be alone. I know I don't. Karthik left me a year ago and there has been no one like him." She sighed heavily. Suddenly there was a glint in her eyes.

"Why do you like being alone? Is it because you haven't found anyone yet?"

"Why do you not like being alone? Why Karthik? You don't love your husband?"

"Don't answer a question with a question," she demurely smiled.

"But I will tell you. My husband doesn't love me as a person, he married me as a trophy wife, someone to show off and then he couldn't handle the attention I received, and we separated. Karthik was a childhood friend who I ran into in a temple. Our chemistry was instantaneous."

"Why did he leave you then?"

There was pain in her eyes. "He didn't leave me. He committed suicide because I wouldn't marry him."

"Oh I am sorry. If you love him, you could have divorced your husband."

"I have lost faith in the institution of marriage. I was worried that what is otherwise a beautiful relationship would be spoilt by marriage. Also his wife would never divorce him."

He wondered why she was telling all this to a stranger. He was not interested initially but now he felt curious. More curious as to how she could tell all this to a stranger than the content of what she was saying.

"Are you wondering why I am telling all this? To a stranger, someone I met on the platform?"

"On the platform?"

"Oh! I very well noticed you looking at me."

"I wasn't." He tried denying but gave it up instantly. "I thought you were looking at me. It's flattering to get the attention of such a beautiful person."

"So you think I am beautiful."

"I did think so until the train started. Now I think you are beautiful and are in pain. Lonely and can't stop talking, even with a stranger. There isn't any risk in this case as I will be gone in a few hours and you probably won't see me ever again."

"You didn't come across as a stranger and I wasn't looking at you. I was dreaming about a situation. I saw you in silhouette with a lit up cigarette and imagined an empty platform with just you and me. Before my imagination could mature you looked at me and I had to turn my gaze."

"If I hadn't looked what would you have imagined?"

"Curious? Must be hot under the collar?"

"I am not a monk," he declared.

"What are you then?"

He stood up and opened his bag from the upper berth and brought it down. He looked back at her; she was patiently waiting for an answer, not someone to give up.

"I am just a man trying to do a job."

"You never told me what you do."

"I help people. I don't ask too many questions. Sometimes I ask." He looked up at the howling air from the window and muttered under his breath, "Like now."

"What did you say?"

He did not reply. It was wiser to talk about her than about him. He was a loner and was never comfortable talking.

"So do you think all this was worth it? Jeopardising your marriage, a short fling with a lover who eventually took his own life?"

"Yes, it is worth it! My husband wanted a trophy wife, Karthik wanted his love forever, and the only person who got nothing in the scheme of things

was me. In a way it was worth it, as it came close to what I wanted in life- excitement, change, secrecy, and the loss of all that in a short span of time. I know I sound selfish but that's me."

"There is nothing wrong in being selfish. There would be consequences, yes, and you should be brave to face them."

"Yeah, I am facing the consequences. I suffer from loneliness everyday. I look for love everywhere and all I see is a world lacking genuine sensitivity to entertain another person's feelings and insecurity, wants and needs, needs and desires."

"It's not all that bad."

There was a flash in her eyes and she looked up at him sharply. "It is," she paused and then looked at him with a certain expectation in her eyes, "You think you can make it better?"

He was looking for an opening all this time, this was the one.

"Of course, I can, at this moment, am I not making it better? I am



listening to you with complete attention and you are not that lonely anymore, are you?" He moved his legs for his feet to touch hers. He could see she was getting excited; her breath was sharper, her look vague, her lips quivering and her ample bosom tightening.

"But this is just for now, isn't it?" Years of loneliness had taken their toll and turned her into a woman desperate and paranoid.

The gap between them was getting diminished and soon both their hands were inches away from each other on the table separating them.

"No, this is for as long as you live," there was sincerity in his voice and coldness in his eyes. He swiftly moved his left hand onto her right, clutching it tightly and in one smooth pull had both of them standing in a tight embrace.

She looked at him with wide open eyes, her cheeks red, and her lips opening to scream. He put his hands on her mouth and quietly pushed down to the floor. He pulled the knife back from her body, the area he chose, between her bosom and the left side of her waist. Her rib cage is clearly broken with the tip of the knife entering her heart. Death was instantaneous.

Vijayawada was just half an hour away. He quickly moved the body onto the bed, cleaned the areas he had touched, wiped the blood and the fingerprints on the knife and threw it out of the window.

As he got out in Vijayawada, he thought about her. She was a fine woman; her only fault was that she made an insanely jealous woman more jealous. Karthik's wife didn't forget her after Karthik's suicide.

But for him, it was just another assignment. All it took was a false name, a false reservation, and a little disguise to get a job well done.

# The bet

Anuradha Gupta, 1986 MMS

What does it take to make an unusual date? A sporting BITSian girl, a spunky BITSian boy and a bet looming large. Love isn't always required.

I trudged into Piloni battle weary in 1986; over 20 years have passed me by and the joy and light-heartedness BITS brought my life still soothes my soul! Etched in my memories are some moments, some tales of sunny days, some of cold, wintry evenings, yet warm with simplicity and good, clean fun.

That's enough reminiscing about dingy rooms and unpalatable mess grub and groaning over books and test series! Everything seems pleasant now, the roller coaster of nerves over academics and jobs and emotions and relationships seem like paintings in the splashy sunlight, the tears shed into fluffy pillows have faded and are replaced with dew drops; everything can be viewed through a kaleidoscope. In essence, reality has shifted. The perfect example being that travelling into the past would take us to a *chai* at Sky instead of struggling with *Camper's!* And so the mind recalls the one big instance of being pampered by chivalrous BITSian guys and not the sadness of an infatuation that did not come to fruition!

It was the proverbial 'midsummer night's dream'. I don't know whether my two illustrious batch mates will recall the evening. And

in my *Anu-nymous* style I must mask their names and seek protection behind the disclaimer, any reference to any living characters is well, actually it is intentional! I am a simple writer with limited liability; I need not be more dramatic than necessary.

As the story goes I was dating somebody. Everybody assumed it was very serious, the disparity in our basic nature or path in life notwithstanding. A simplistic assumption and we did fit the stereotype to some extent.

At the same time, unknown to myself, there was a batch mate of mine who must have in the passing expressed some sort of



liking for me. I could make it fancier than that but I'll never know. What I do know is his *wingies* pounced on him and told him I was sincere and spoken for and challenged him to take me out

on a date if he could. Who can

**Two is company but three is a crowd. Some people never figure out when to leave, leaving the "two" always in misery!**

resist a challenge?

However Rajiv, let's name him that, followed the most lateral, circuitous and romantic of approaches. He did decide to take on the challenge and win the bet. He did have a witness wingie along. He did pick a date. I wonder what happened behind the scenes on D-day. What did the wing talk about? A lot, a little, nothing? Trepidation? Nerves? Valour? Normal stuff? Part of the fun is in the mystery of the unknown.

Rajiv and Nari walked from their Bhawan to Meera, to the fortress on this pleasant evening and that is when I came into the picture. I got a call on the P.A. and as I wasn't expecting anybody I was startled. I went out expecting somebody from my gang or maybe to encounter 'not-so-steady-boyfriend' whom I had parted ways with amicably. We grew up and grew apart I guess.

So I peered into the dark and these two batch mates of mine



approached me. I was mildly surprised as they introduced themselves to me. Yes, I did know them. I also knew about them and they were really sweet and decent guys. But why were they here?

Rajiv nervously spilled the beans and to date, I must say, hats off to his lateral approach. Or direct approach, whatever you may call it.

"Anu, I want to ask you out on a date. My wingies believe that you will not come out with me since you are already dating somebody. Now, would you oblige and prove them wrong."

I cracked up. Soon we all were laughing, their hesitation replaced

with mirth, my curiosity metamorphosed into giggles.

I am a lot of things and a good sport is definitely one of them.

Rajiv honestly told me that there was a bet involved.

"Let's do it then! Let's go on a date."

We did have the proverbial *kabab mein haddi*, the witness to the event, but I got along with both of them famously. I had one of the most fun evenings in Pilani, the conversation just flowed, and the food tasted great, the evening was perfect. Our wavelengths matched completely.

I really do not recall what we chatted about on the way to C'not or back but I do recall the camaraderie, the warmth, the chivalry.

And yes, I recall that Rajiv was extremely decent, good looking, had a gorgeous voice and as we walked along the road lined with fragrant trees, Nari by our side, he sang, "You fill up my senses." And I must admit that after all these years, my eyes still light up when I hear the song and it still warms my soul.

## Random reminiscences

Ashok Kadian, 1971  
(Retd.) Colonel, Indian Army, Engineering Core

Ashok sits back reflecting on those bygone days at a nascent BITS Pilani, and takes all of us on this enjoyable journey down his memory lane.

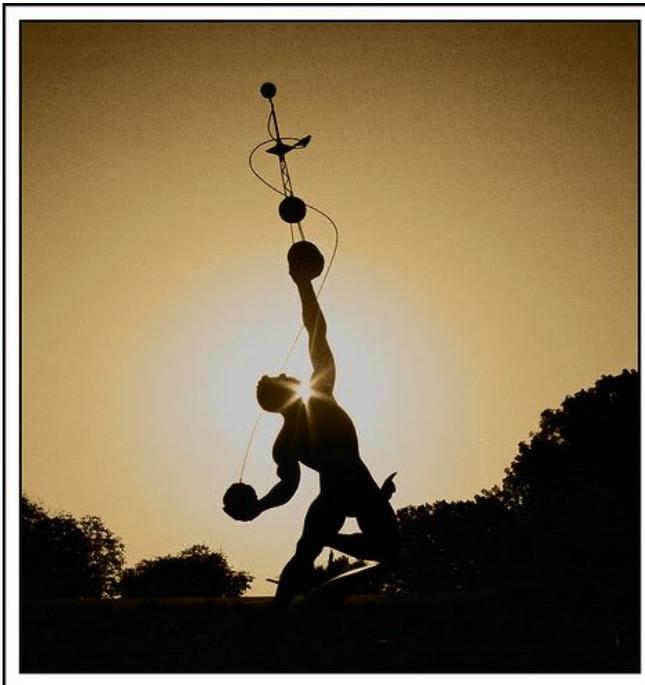
What is it about BITS Pilani that makes you want to go back and see that place again – and again? Sure, it is your alma mater, but there is something more than that.

Recollecting the days of the late 1960s and early 1970s Pilani was a centre of scientific study – but situated in an area untouched by science. This paradox, along with a few other things, created a sort of arcane atmosphere about Pilani.

The solid yellow colour buildings and their architecture gave Pilani a medieval touch. The names of the various hostels were also traditional ethnic. Yet the same buildings housed some American visiting professors from institutions like the MIT. Also a resident was a frail old German gentleman who taught European languages. Much of the lab equipment housed in those buildings was state of the art.

Coming to the hostels, the bedsteads provided were covered with solid wooden planks: Spartan, good for the back, easy to maintain. During ragging, freshers could find themselves journeying to Madras located under the bed or to Shimla

situated on top of the built-in open cupboard. The buildings of BITS had a solid, rugged feel about them: these were, in fact, solid and rugged. Seeing the hostels recently with iron grills



and bars was a sad testimony to the declining standards of safety and law and order.

Those days BITS was a haven for the vegetarian fraternity. The meals were strictly vegetarian and *kali* and *peeli dal* was made alternately. Later, egg-vegetarian food was started marking a sort of a breakthrough. Those with a strong non-vegetarian urge occasionally carried hampers containing chapattis and other items from the mess to the Nutan Market where non-vegetarian

delicacies like *titar* were available. The *aloo parathas* and curd on Saturday afternoons used to be a special treat as a precursor to a long afternoon siesta.

Those were the days of a venerable Director who had an uncanny resemblance to the urbane old Hindi film personality, Shri K N Singh. And, he was referred to by the same name in informal talk among the students. The girl's hostel, Meera Bhavan, was a veritable fortress with a solid high security wall. Any dalliance soon became a topic of debate, gossip and calls of 'Loharu Singh' during movies – on account of an alleged romantic episode at Loharu railway station involving a student whose name ended in 'Singh'. There were occasional problems of different kinds, but none which transgressed any important bounds.

Those were the days: carefree, enjoyable. There were no stresses of a job, of running one's own enterprise. The only significant pressures were peer pressures: how to find one's place in a mass of human beings of one's own age group, some jostling, others pushing to be in the 'top' bracket – a position of importance, of public adulation. Yes, indeed, those were the days.

# NYOTH

Pilani Team

Not Yet Over The Hill, a band created by 70's BITSians comes down to one Oasis and weave magic. As the comfortable beats of their music floats through the BITSian air, time stands still and three decades melt in music.



**BITS, Pilani Auditorium 1974:** An amateur constructed sound system barely carries the sounds of a guitar, a keyboard, the drums and a vocalist across the sparsely filled auditorium. Enthusiastic engineers-in-the-making take the stage and begin to play new numbers- Pink Floyd, the Who and the likes. In the audience are 'wingies' and friends, showing their support even if they don't understand the music completely. 'Rock' means nothing more than

an odd Beatles song to most of these people, and yet, they seem to enjoy the bands efforts. At the end of an hour, as the *Audi* empties slowly, snatches of conversation weave into the thick summer night as the crowd makes its way down the road, forking at Krishna *Bhawan*.

"They've gotten better in the last month!"

"It's because of that Castor-first *year-ite*, he really knows his stuff"...

"The sound effect box needs tweaking; we need to speak to the carpenter behind the workshop again..." "He's gotten so good at it. He should start taking a course- Workshop practice with Speaker Design!"

"We need to order some new tapes; the ones these guys have been using are so worn out"

"It's not surprising, I was at their practice session the other day, and they rewound the five second guitar solo twenty times before they could make out even ONE of the chords!"

"I'll speak to Varghese, his uncle knows some people in Delhi. We should be able to manage at least a few new tapes."

"I'd never heard The Who before, but I really like the sound."

"Well, today's song wasn't exactly perfect... I just filled in the missing sounds from memory. Come to my *sidey's* room tonight and we'll listen to the real song on his tape recorder."

"Oh, so the built up car stereo system is working well enough to call it a tape recorder now?"

"It always worked! <grin>... with just a few hiccups now and then..."

"And a few screeches!"

Cut to Oasis 2008:

**BITS, Pilani Auditorium:** It's 1:30AM and the auditorium is packed with hundreds of students, very awake and looking upon the stage with more than a little pessimism as what seems like a group of professors take the stage. The alumni band calling themselves **'NYOTH-Not Yet Over The Hill'** won an approving grin for their innovative name, but their music would have to prove itself before drawing any applause from these teenagers, well versed with head banging and guitar wailing. Their cynicism, however, disappears in a flash as the first strains of Uriah Heep's 'Stealin' blares across the auditorium's sound system. The tough-to-please group of teenagers are on their feet, in a second- hands are in the air, heads nodding and feet tapping. As the 'engineers-in-making' sing along in one voice, it's abundantly clear that the CEOs, professors, entrepreneurs on stage... the 'oldies' standing on stage managed to win the seal of approval, a thousand times over...

And as the night progresses, it's also clear that the bond between those on stage and those off it is deeper than the music. There is a

sense of 'oneness'. A music clubber of our own age volunteered to go on stage, matching voices on 'Roadhouse Blues', the 1970's and

down the generations. The audience demands an encore, and sing along to the magical voice of LS Ganesh, and in the bands own

words, 'We got high on LSG' (A live video can be watched at [http://in.youtube.com/watch?v=g8bFCYOT\\_I0](http://in.youtube.com/watch?v=g8bFCYOT_I0)) But sooner than anyone realizes, it's over. The band walks off stage to

overwhelming applause. The bar has been set too high, and it seems unlikely that the very expensive Prof Shows that were to follow could possibly hope to reach it. The members of the band are mobbed by the students, wanting to know them, wanting to talk to them, wanting to tell them that



the 2000's falling together in utter synchrony, music seamlessly melting barriers that time had desperately tried to hold up.

Fuelled by the energy of the youthful audience, the band belts out classic rock favourites like *Proud Mary* (Creedence Clearwater Revival), *Brain Damage* (Pink Floyd), *Down by the River* (Neil Young), and *Hey Jude* (The Beatles). For a grand finale, the band inducts the audience to a grand old tradition of their time, a song that goes by the name of *'Girly from the Westu Coastu'*. Sung with a heavy *southie* accent, the song apparently has been passed on

they had just been hit by the realisation that they weren't much different. The crowds spill into M-lawns, gushing over the music and humming the songs over coffee. It's four AM, and the lawns don't look like they are going to turn empty anytime soon. The members of the band are still in deep conversation with some students. Other students are sitting around, talking in a group- but their eyes still travel over to the direction of the band every so often. The air is buzzing with conversation and the occasional humming *'Hey Juude... Na na na, nananana...'* An hour of rock and

roll was all it took to bridge the generation gap.

NYOTH played together as a band at a reunion in 2005 and since then, the band has been very active, playing at various venues across the country. Aptly called 'Not Yet over the Hill', these BITSians keep the spirit of their music that took birth in their five years at Pilani alive. Sunil Nanda, (batch of 1975-80) who plays bass for the band, says that the band is an excuse for the members to get together and relive the old memories. "There is no better way than actually making some music while we catch up with old friends and shoot the breeze."

The composition of the band changes with every gig, and an interesting detail is that many members of the band never played together as students at Pilani. While some of them vaguely remember each other, some of them were complete strangers brought together by a dream whose threads were woven on the internet- exchanging chords, lyrics, and music. This doesn't matter to the band however, the BITSian connection goes a long way and it seems like they've have been playing together for ages.

The idea to perform at Oasis rose mainly from the enthusiasm shown by Sunil Nanda and his family. With Raju Varghese (batch of 1972) on bass, Sanjeev Punj (batch of 1974) on drums, Vijay Athreye (batch of 1975) on lead vocals, Sunil Nanda (batch of 1975) on bass, Rahul Chettri (batch of 1975) on guitar, Shalabh Ahuja (batch of 1976) on drums,

Pradeep Vishwanathan (batch of 1977) on guitar, L.S Ganesh (batch of 1972) on lead vocals and Anirudh Punj on drums, the band was ready to roll. Practice sessions were few in number, three to be exact. The band's 'groupies' from



the 1975 batch – Gautam Mazumdar, Vijay Poddar, and Ajay Kapur joined them and finally, the band drove off to Pilani, nostalgic and vaguely sentimental, knowing that the campus would always have a place for them. What they didn't imagine was the effect that they would have on the BITSians on campus.

The semester is now over, but the memories of this Oasis and NYOTH will stay with us for a long time to come. We still crave to hear stories of bygone era. A friend of mine, on hearing about a certain Vyas *Bhavan* third year-ite, who was responsible for the creation of ABC- Anil David Hussain Broadcasting Corporation, said matter-of-factly, "The ancients were so much cooler than we can ever hope to be". ABC's brainchild was figuring out that music could be broadcasted across the hostel by

plugging an amp output to Earth and Neutral and winding speaker lines the same way across plug points in each room. Can webcasting music over the LAN hope to match this for that unknowable cool factor?

Musical pursuits weren't as easy as they are now, with the technology lending a huge helping hand. Another band member, Vijay Athreye added, "We never had the luxury of the many distractions of today- internet, girlfriends or the like, so music took a higher priority in our extracurricular activities." Someone even said that the 'spirit to survive' that can be felt in Pilani's very air played a role in BITSian music. Even though it was difficult to come by tapes or music equipment in those days, people found creative alternatives. From using a makeshift harmonium keyboard to designing and building their own effect boxes- Fuzz units to *Wah-wah* pedals, the passion to make music drove it all. On many occasions, the music room was transformed into a mini-workshop, soldering iron et al, just to repair and tune certain instruments and contraptions. The BITSian musicians of today are certainly living in the lap of luxury.

BITS, Pilani and its students hope to see NYOTH back next Oasis, to feel once again that connection with an age gone by, to be overwhelmed once again by how the more things change, the more everything stays just the same. Nothing is different really, when the familiar chords are being struck on the guitar and the comforting beats of the drum hold time as you involuntarily begin to sing along...

# tRebel

Dubai Team

## tRebel: BPD's own music rebellion!

The idea was simple enough. Get together a group of like-minded individuals, with their like-mindedness being a passionate love for music, and get them to use this medium to infuse life and freshness into the college...and along the way raise a little hell as well!

Thus was born 'tRebel', BITS-Pilani, Dubai's very own music club headed by the third years who, recognising the lack of a coordinated pro-music effort at BPD, set it up as a structured club aimed at promoting the arts of

making and listening to music. And it did not take long for their creation to take the institution by storm. The registration programme that was held on the 4th of October saw a record turnout of 191 members including the college faculty!

The activities for the year 2008-09 comprised of two primary shows put up: one for Diwali, hosted and conducted on the 31st of October, 2008, and another for Halloween, conducted on the 6th of November, 2008. Seeing that the Diwali event was the first of its kind and also the debut of

tRebel on stage, there was a bit of apprehension and anticipation that went into the planning stages itself. The script for the play 'Ram Leela' was prepared only a day prior to the staging, and the rehearsal commenced an hour later. The goodies to be distributed were got together by Benjamin Nagarajan and co., the equipment borrowed from students, and the stage lights rented from the college. Although the paraphernalia that went with the event as such were quite primitive, the evening was not! The get-together happened outside the grocery, on the





elevated platform in front of the staircase. The turnout was also very surprising, with close to 200 showing up before the scheduled beginning. Overcoming the few glitches that do inevitably happen during an event of this scale was not much of an issue since the momentum gathered by the celebrative folks and the spirit of the tRebel members was too much. And it began. After some random jamming and singing, the play that was the cornerstone of the show began. With music from Anirudh Srikanth, Siddharth Singh and T.V. Siddharth, the cast comprising Advait Krishna, M.J. Manoj, Niaz Ahmed, Urvi Sharma and Piyush Singh had the audience in its grasp not by their prowess of drama, but by wholesomely coming to be the characters as they would have been if they were college students: the comedy was incessant, spoofy and, not to

forget, hilarious. The play was followed by lots of singing and screaming, interspersed with PJs and mockeries. At one point in between, Dr. Priti Bajpai and her daughter, Bhavika, showed up. Ms. Bhavika, you should know, is a very talented singer, as was seen by her rendition of 'Saiyan' (Khailash Kher). Ultimately, what made the evening special was that celebration, enjoyment and entertainment came without a reason and free of cost. What more do you need?

The second event, Halloween, was held a little after the day it was actually supposed to have been celebrated on, but that didn't matter. The preparations for this were actually more organised and coordinated than the Diwali night. Arrangements for free food and apple punch had been made, the themes for the costume party had been well advertised beforehand, the posters put up a

day ahead, and the equipment all borrowed, tested and set up well in advance. The allocated space for the night was on the floor above the canteen, and the chairs and tables were all replaced with booths and corresponding stations. Make-up artistes (Urvi Sharma and Tina Mary Titus) were in line along with a palmist, Aditya Anand. A section of the hall was set apart for the bands to perform. And what a night again! The work we put in seemed to show magnanimous results, with another stupendous turnout and a fairly jolly crowd at that! People showed up in an array of costumes, ranging from Edward Scissorhands to Two Face to fanatics of the Gothic cults. Puneet Sharma, Sindhuja Mahadevan, Muzzammil Khan, Shaurya Manga, Ashray Baruah and many others set the stage on fire with intense performances, followed by DJ ASB and DJ S2



(our very own!) belting out tracks one after another for the open dance floor. Needless to say, this would go down in our books as another gem to show for who we are at tRebel and what we do.

A newsletter is also in the making, and should find itself printed and distributed among the members of tRebel shortly. This is a semester venture and will contain random tidbits of information submitted by our various members.



# B'Quizzed

Dubai Team

## The brightest minds of UAE butt heads; who is going to be left B'Quizzed?

*"A lion a tiger's roar played backwards at half-speed led to which famous creation?"*

*"How do we more famously know the person 'Aliaune Damala Bouga Time Puru Nacka Lu Lu Lu Badara Akon Thiam'?"*

*"Which country's flag has an AK-47 on it?"*

hosted by BITS-Pilani, Dubai (BPD) on April 17. The event, which is the biggest of its kind in the UAE, saw the participation of 22 teams from 11 universities this year, with each team consisting of 3 members. The written eliminations consisted of 30 questions which the teams were expected to answer in under half an hour. Hence the field was whittled down to 6 teams who

with an extra incentive for their attention being the prospect of walking away with an X Box 360 Gaming Console as part of the Audience Lucky Draw.

The finalists battled it out on stage through 10 tough rounds which were ably compeered by quizmasters Shrey Sanger and Mallika Sanyal. While rounds like 'Deep Dive' and 'Take Your Pick'



These were just some of the questions that some of the brightest minds in the UAE had to answer to make it to the finals of 'B'Quizzed 2008', the third annual inter-collegiate quiz competition

qualified for the finals. These included two teams each from MAHE-Manipal and BPD and one team each from GMC and SP Jain. The finals were contested in front of a packed audience at the newly designed Graduation Hall,

were based on general knowledge, the 'Logica' round saw the participants putting their lateral thinking skills to the best use to come up with connections for seemingly random clues. In the 'Rewind' round the teams were



quizzed on their knowledge of current affairs from 2007. After 5 evenly contested rounds, Team 1 from BPD consisting of Santhi Mathai, S. Chandrashekhar and Piyush Singh began to build a huge lead over their counterparts and eventually went on to win the competition by an overwhelming score of 425. The second and third places were decided after an intense rapid-fire round with MAHE-Manipal and SP Jain battling for those two positions. Questions were also thrown to the audience at regular intervals, with prizes like Wild Wadi passes and XBOX shirts up for grabs.

The Director of BPD, Dr. (Prof.) M. Ramachandran was pleased with the efforts put in by the students for the organisation of this event and he said that quizzing was an excellent way for students to gain knowledge apart from their studies.

Prizes won by the winners included air-tickets from Air Arabia, Wild Wadi passes, vouchers from Virgin Megastores, Cross pens and dinner vouchers from Renaissance Hotel among others. The event was organised in co-operation with sponsors like the Kellet & Singleton Group, Air Arabia, Wild Wadi, Jashanmal, XBOX 360, Renaissance Hotel, San Marco Printing Press, Gulf Petrochemicals, Bikanerwala, Central Motors and Equipment, The Kreative Company and 106.2 Hum FM.

# The experience that is BITS-Pilani, Dubai

Dubai Team

## BPD opens up on what it is like to be a part of BITS and also be in Dubai!

*'We left home with a heavy heart,  
Friends and foes far away,  
With a mission in hand and dreams  
galore...  
In an endless fantasia towards the  
shore...  
Did my dreams meet their realm?  
Let's find out!'*

The bus halts with a jerk and we all open our sleep-laden eyes. In this ungodly hour (it's 6.30 AM, for God's sake), when half the world is still fast asleep, we make our way into the orange building standing against the dark sky. The corridors are still empty, except for the security guard in his blue uniform. We make our way to our classrooms and find a place to catch some more sleep. And then it begins.

This is a students' outlook of BITS-Pilani, Dubai – the institution as we see it. The classes, the activities, the craziness... all form a vibrant spectrum of college life.

The classrooms in

BPD are a haven for creativity and inspiration. The classroom bustles with activity as students engage themselves by sleeping, reading novels, listening to music, sleeping, creating 'classroom art', sleeping (oh, did I mention that again!). On the rare occasions when the classroom is nearly full (students trying to maintain 80% attendance) studies invariably manage to gain some level of prominence, although the students cannot be blamed for lack of trying!

Lunch time brings us to the BPD canteen. The canteen is a major hangout point for most students,

if not all. We observe a wide variety of dishes which signifies and shows us the diversity of Indian cuisine. There are *dosas* from the south, *dosas* from the north, *dosas* from the west balanced by *dosas* from the east; a little unexpected, isn't it?

The sport buffs hit the Sports Complex, to get their daily dose of badminton or table tennis. A very useful diversion when you are stuck at college not attending classes or falling asleep. You never know, you may just bump into future Olympic gold medallists here!



And all of this is amidst a sandstorm (how apt!) of multiple quizzes, innumerable tests and sporadic assignments that have ended up instilling the 'BITS spirit' in our psyche.

All students at BITS has chosen their genre of life, defined the nuances on their own terms. Some came here out of a whim and others, to become the cream of the society tomorrow. Some have

cloistered away from the buzz of the cultural and extra-curricular activities while others have bolstered their own lives by living, feeling and becoming the BITSian. Surely, gaining academic knowledge is the focus during the time you spend here, but there is more to it here.

Be it the hostel where shoving a half-toasted buttered sandwich down your throat at seven twenty

five in the morning is routine or be it spending a tensed Saturday evening at the library ( yeah, you got it right, 'The Sunday Tests'!), every BITSian here experiences the entire gamut of sentiments, which after all is what college life is all about. So to put the entire experience in a couple of words (as is customary here)...HAIL BITS!



# Workshop marathon in Goa Campus

Goa Team

An account of all the workshops conducted in the past semesters on a gamut of topics.

In the past semester, our campus saw a great number of workshops conducted on topics ranging from Aero Modelling to Snake Handling. Here's a brief account of all the action:

**BITS-ACM celebrated**

## "Software Freedom Day" on 26th September '08

Software Freedom Day was celebrated in BITS Pilani Goa Campus by BITS-ACM, CSI student chapter, SUG, LUG, ASCII (Computer Science Association) and Kernel Systems

Association). It was a two day festival featuring events like Open Showcase, Install Fest, Opensource Quiz etc. BITS-ACM sponsored guest lectures like Career Opportunities in Opensource Development by Ravi Aranke (Ex-MD Red Hat) and Web Development using



Open Source by Gurunandan Bhatt (Vice President, Synapse).

### Indo-Russian Workshop

The Indo Russian Workshop on Topical Problems in Solid Mechanics organised at BITS, Pilani - Goa from November 11 - 14, 2008 served as a platform for bilateral exchange of innovative ideas. The workshop featured key research going on in elite institutions in India (BITS, IITs, IISc, BARC, and DMRL) and Russia in the field of applied, theoretical and experimental mechanics. There were forty participants in all. A clear contrast could be drawn between the research communities of both the countries. While the Russian researchers rely mostly on mathematical and numerical models to study their problems, the Indian counterparts take the approach that is more experimental and less analytical. Coordinated by Prof. NK Gupta (IIT Delhi) and Prof. A. V. Manzhirov (Russian Academy of Science), the workshop concluded with the Indian and Russian scientists exchanging ideas for collaborative projects in the field of Mechanics.

### Intel Workshop

The Career Development Cell (CDC) of BITS Pilani - Goa organized a workshop by Intel. As part of Intel's *Blue Buddy* initiative, Mr. Suraj Jolly, an engineer working with the technical marketing team of Intel India visited our campus and conducted a workshop-cum-seminar covering various issues



relating to Silicon technology. His talk touched on several issues ranging from, complex programmable logic devices (CPLDs) and field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), to microprocessors, the evolution of different platforms, chipsets and multi-core technology. He highlighted the approaches behind efficient chip designing as well as the whole process of chip fabrication.

### Nettech Network Management and Ethical Hacking Workshop

This workshop was organized by BITS-ACM from 25th September 2008 to 17 October 2008. The workshop duration was 60 hours (20 days) and 130 student registrations. The top three students were offered fully paid summer internship at the Nettech centres across the country, Top 10 were given Certificate of Merit, and the rest were given Qualification Certificates.

### Robokriti

The Robokriti workshop conducted by the Mumbai based

Technophilia Solutions on the 8th and 9th of November, received a huge response from the BITSian crowd. About 230 students enrolled for this workshop. The students were taught the basics of robotics - wired, automated, computer controlled and speech controlled robots. The teams had built their own robots by the end of the workshop.

### Aerodynamics Workshop

The aeromodelling workshop was conducted by [Robosoft Technologies Ltd](#) based in Mumbai. The workshop was conducted by a group of professionals who were pioneers in the art of aeromodelling. The 13 participant teams were provided a kit to build its own powered glider, comprising of components made of balsam wood, a RC control set, lithium polymer batteries and brushless DC motors to power the glider. The teams were told basic essentials about the craft's maintenance and safety precautions. The workshop was success: even persons who had no previous experience on making



powered gliders successfully made a working model in a short span of two days.

### **ICER'08 ([www.icer.org](http://www.icer.org))**

International Conference of Environment Research is being held in BPGC from 18-20th December. It was organized by senior faculty of BITS-Pilani in association with the Journal of Environmental Research and Development. With an expected turnout of nearly 1000, the conference provided an ideal place for presenting and discussing new ideas related to Environment Research.

### **Snake Handling Workshop**

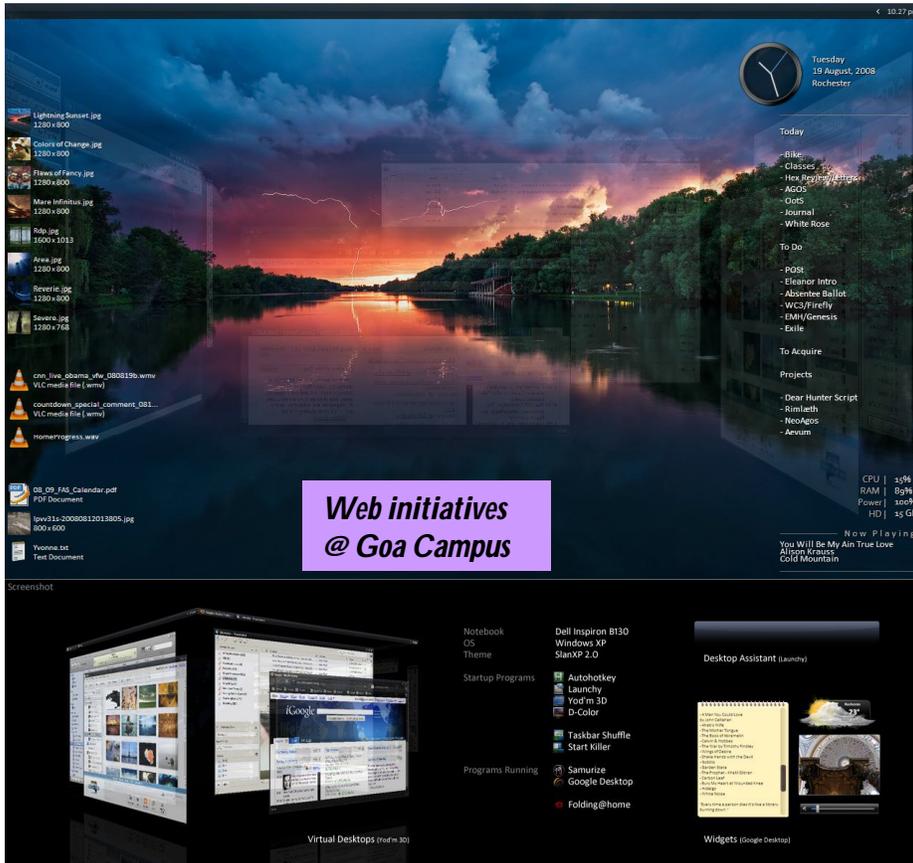
The Environment Protection and Awareness Club (EPAC) organized a snake-handling workshop on 8 November 2008. Mr. Amar Heblekar, range forest officer, 'Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary', and resident of our campus, conducted the workshop. There was a practical session where students could handle

snakes and learn more about rescuing snakes (and themselves!). As snakes are often spotted in our campus, even few security guards of our college attended the workshop to know more about snakes. In total 12 different types of snakes we displayed, the major attraction being the black python.

# Student initiatives at BITS-Pilani, Goa

Goa Team

The Goa team brings to us a catalogue of all student initiatives in recent semesters, thus illuminating the enterprise of the BITSian.



(CE Info systems, Indria Research, Muzibo) and 250+ students.

## Talk of Campus: [www.talkofcampus.com](http://www.talkofcampus.com)

The site mainly aims at providing a one-stop shop for all college students (and aspirants), while ensuring that the content is moderated and authenticated before being put up on the site. This is being achieved by having City-specific teams, along with College Moderators from each college who would help ensure only authentic data is posted about their college.

The site has a Notices section, where all notices put up in the college are posted, thus ensuring they are read on time and can be archived for later reference. News & Events, another major section, keeps students updated with the latest happenings in his own campus as well as in other campus of his interest (For ex nearby colleges).

Other features, like sharing and building of Projects, Blog & Forum for helping students communicate better, and a Trivia section for helping students with Competition Preparation (like

## Uinterns:

[www.uinterns.com](http://www.uinterns.com) is a web-based service by a group of six undergraduate students of Birla Institute of Technology & Science, Pilani - Goa Campus.

It serves as a liaison between companies and undergraduate students seeking

internships/academic project guidance, with the objective of creating a niche in this particular segment. It was publicized on entrepreneurship forums and student groups, distributed promotional material, marketed the venture to companies and successfully hosted 10 national/international companies



GRE, CAT etc) have also been added to the site.

### Grayscale

([www.thinkgrayscale.com](http://www.thinkgrayscale.com))

Grayscale, a partnership firm, mainly deals with the designing of websites and print media (brochures, posters, publicity material, logo designing etc). Officially started in December 2007, Grayscale was the brainchild of four youngsters driven by a common passion for designing. They became acquainted at the BITS-Pilani, Goa Campus through various projects for the campus like BITS360, Quark website, etc.



Starting as a designing club, a forum for sharing ideas and a platform for budding designers, the many intricacies and formalities involved in starting a new club in a three-year-old campus prompted Abhimanyu Vatsya, Abhinav Asthana, Padamanabhan T, and N. Snehith

to found Grayscale instead.

Through word of mouth, [www.dia.co.za](http://www.dia.co.za) their first project, was completed by the team before the launch of Grayscale. This proved to be a very important step as it provided them with a basic initial capital. [Letmeknow](http://Letmeknow) blog portal development became the first official project of Grayscale. In the next 6 months, Grayscale established itself as a capable designing company and has successfully completed projects such as [Inspiring-teachers.com](http://Inspiring-teachers.com), [BITS360](http://BITS360) for BITS-Pilani Campus, [Dentaplant.net](http://Dentaplant.net), brand building and website for [Greenleather](http://Greenleather) etc.



# Glimpses from the fresher and the senior

Goa Team

## View points and how they vary as we traverse through BITSian years...

### I Academics

#### The fresher:

The first day in college – A feeling of pride and maturity, promises to be sincere, hardworking and bring laurels to my college. During the very first lecture the fresher hangs on to every word the professor utters, takes down notes and asks seniors and endless stream of queries about academics, CGPA, tutorials etc. Back in the hostel, it was at first difficult to get accustomed to living so far away from home. There were long talks to parents and bouts of homesickness.

Soon the friend groups are formed, there is so much to talk about, so many places to explore on and off campus, there is friendly banter and animated gossip until late night. The standard reply to anxious phone calls from home turns to “I’m busy. Talk to you later.” Fun takes its toll and attendance to lectures drops. Dozing off during lectures leads to the logical conclusion that sleeping in the comforts and confines of ones own room sure beats sleeping in the lecture theatre. The resolutions and the academic pursuits are forgotten quickly by all but the most resolute.

After all revelry and fun, when life seems to be a cup of brimming joy, there’s a rough shake from the dreams and T1 stares at us in

the face. Scarcely knowing what to expect, midnight oil is burnt. There are feverish preparations and consultations with seniors on academics. The first test in campus is an important issue. By the time it is done the freshers are not so fresh anymore; the wear and tear along the path to becoming a battle hardened senior has begun.

#### The senior:

To see how we tread through our BITSian lives as far as attendance is concerned, you can look at fourth or third year class. If the strength is low and a test has been announced, two kinds of people can be seen outside: the senior who, was woken by a call from his friend, standing outside wondering how to get in, and the first yearite, waiting so that he may get the best seat for his class the next hour.

The lingo too dramatically changes, from “I actually bunked a class!” to “I actually attended a class!”

Test one – in typical BITSian lingo – “Lite lo, compre hai na.” Yep, that’s the attitude, or better still for the single degree students with hardly any tests left, “What’s

the fuss all about?” Instead of cursing endlessly on DC, a bad performance just evokes a shrug. After all, for how long can one fear the monster under the bed.

Timetables – Who is taking the labs? Are they ‘lite’ with marks and can I avoid Saturday afternoon and early morning labs? I wonder if there is any other consideration in the senior mind.

From the days when the letter GPAs were looked at with awe and fear, to the fourth year where it is a magical number, the CGPA is ever hanging above you like Damocles sword, defining you and threatening to shape your future with just three digits and a decimal.

In the fourth year, CG to some



means clearing placement interview cut-offs; to others it means spicing up an application to a foreign university, but when the apping is done and the companies have come and gone, It becomes what it really is: a number that can be left on its own to wander as

it pleases. The purpose has been served; there is peace, at last.

## II. Clubs

### The fresher:

The fresher is welcomed with induction notices from numerous clubs each with their own prestige and attraction. Folks trod into every club/department inductions without knowing anything about them. In spite of repeated warning from the experienced seniors about how it is best to go for inductions of a select few clubs, most cannot resist joining every club that came their way and bragging about it!

### The senior:

Clubs? Four years back, there were not any, and then they came into being one by one, remaining nascent for ages, and then regrouping and morphing before finally emerging from their cocoons and being well established centres of activity.

While the founding members, in their final semesters, feel the pain of leaving the clubs they created and watched grow, a large number is just concerned, and rightly so, about getting certificates which testify the long hours of work they put in. Induction notices are glanced at with a smile and a pulse of nostalgia.

## III. Elections

### The fresher:

Ah! How important the fresher feels! What a reversal of attitude: from ragging to friendly talks to earn support. Sessions of discussions ensue over whom to vote for. The parameters ranged from handsomeness/beauty to CGPA! After the results are out

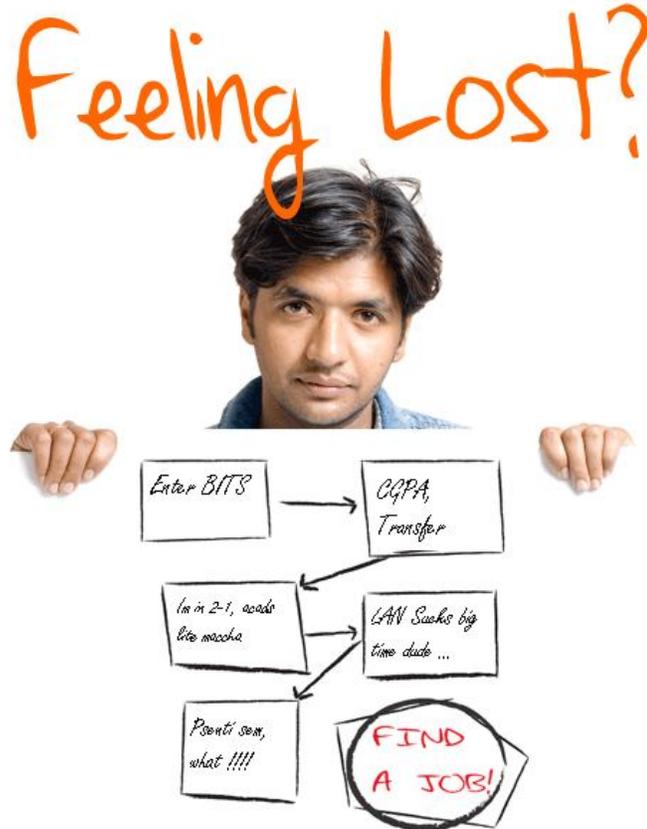
and after meaningful glances, triumphant cheers and 'I told you he'd win', the whole issue is forgotten and most do not remember what CSA stands for.

### The senior:

arrival of laptops. Until then the addiction is specific to seniors.

### The senior:

The LAN! The LAN is a drug, a drug injected into BITSians in slow doses over the ages until



Elections! The fourth yearite could not care less about who wins, someone promises more electives, and some other says a bigger Waves and Quark. Either way you say, "Nice, but it's all over for me now." Most could not care less.

## IV. LAN

### The fresher:

It is something about which seniors are passionate. Fine, granted it has a great collection of movies and e-books and games but why become so crazy about it. There is a need to wait for the

most except the few with exceptional self-control become slaves of habit; Creatures of the night living in a virtual world. How did the first few months pass by without a comp or LAN? These unanswered questions loom in the minds.

# The 40 wing commanders of Shank76

Arindam Mitra, 1976

## Jab we met...

About thirty-two years ago, in 1976, a set of gawky teenagers from all over the country, went to BITS Pilani to move a few steps further on their career paths. "Uncertain but confident" would perhaps describe these boys for whom "engineering" was a buzzword, "hostel" something adventurous and "career" something intangible in the distant horizon.

A subset of these boys – a dozen to be precise, happened to get thrown together in a hostel called Shankar Bhavan and formed a "wing" (A set of twelve rooms in BITS hostels) – the boys were known as *wingies*.

Brought together by whatever strange fates, an instant liking happened between these twelve. The liking transformed into a strong bonding and a friendship and lasted through decades. Through the next few years' rooms and wings changed but this wing stayed together until varying disciplines and careers sent everybody on separate paths.

And, all too soon, the years of college ended and all went on their chosen divergent ways – some to follow the trodden path, some to live a life of innovation.

Then followed twenty-seven years in which many hills were climbed, lives were shaped, and personas developed. Those twenty-seven years saw the building of professional and family lives, sharing dreams with wives and children, changing with

the changing times. Years that saw achievements and failures, movements and changes, ups and downs – hopefully more ups than downs. They were years of hard work and yet of running forward to stay rooted at the same place. Twenty-seven years after which the *wingies* – wherever they were, whatever they did, were leaders in their chosen fields.

Over the next twenty-seven years most of these boys, now pretending to be men, kept in touch, some regularly, and some infrequently as their travels and travails would permit. A few were not in touch – lost in the labyrinths of international business. All were in positions of high respect. But in all that, the bonding remained.

And now, in a unique occurrence, after almost three decades from the time they had last met as a group, the Shankar *wingies* got together for a day in Ahmedabad. And, it was almost a surprise gift for me!

From Canada to Manila, from Kolkata, Pune, Bangalore and Hyderabad they all converged at Ahmedabad.

The years just fell away as we met with hugs and laughter, crude cracks at each other and a general relief that nothing had really changed.

As for me, a few of my *wingies* had been regular visitors here, especially since the accident. Like

Ajay and Murali who had been standing by me throughout, especially Ajay who has been my pillar of support in these troubled years. But, some of my friends met me after about fifteen years though we had been in touch through phone and mail. And, there were two whom I met after twenty-seven years!

And so the wing came together – Ajay, Murali, Prashant, Arun, Ravikant, Sriram, Ravis – YS & GR-, Soumitro and me of course. Unfortunately, two were missing, Dhananjay who fell ill while boarding a flight from Pune to Ahmedabad and Ramakrishnan (RK) who we could not trace – he was out of contact, perhaps, in Singapore or Malaysia.

This was a unique group meeting – people who had taken their first tentative steps into the world of higher education together. Just think of the logistics and planning that was required for this group to come together from all over for one day in Ahmedabad!

Also the commitment of friends. When Dhananjay fell ill while boarding, Ajay and Prashant were with him. They immediately rushed to a hospital and stayed with him throughout the day and all the check ups. Thankfully, he was fine and after settling him home, and on his insistence, Ajay and Prashant took a cab at 1:00 AM to Bombay and caught an early morning flight to Ahmedabad! Hats off!



**Sitting Committee (L – R)** - Murali Ganapathy (Gaffy), Y S Ravi (Y S), Prashant Raje (PJ), K Sriram (Cas Bhaya), **Members of good standing (L – R)** - Soumitra Bhattacharya (Bhatta), Ajay Karkhanis (Ghati), Arun Sehgal (Sehgal), Arindam Mitra (Dom), K Ravi Kanth (xunt), G R Ravi (G R)

We of course, had two VIP guests – Mr Smirnoff in the afternoon and Mr J Walker in the evening that made sure we were a jolly group!

And the party began. It was all fun and laughter, memories and instant recall, reminiscences of the best days of our lives. It was all about incidents and events, Profs and wardens, pranks and jokes, and of course, first crushes and flames... There was virtually no talk of the present or future. Just a long fun filled flashback.

It was quite remarkable as many in the group were meeting each other for the first time after decades but their responses and conversations picked up from where they had left off so many years ago.

And the years fell away. All of a sudden you were back almost thirty years. It didn't matter who had done what, who had become what and who was going where. All that mattered was everybody was back, happy to be together, happy to be *wingies* again and safe and comfortable in the knowledge that all was as before.

The magical day passed too quickly. It was time to head back to normal lives and routines. So the *wingies* went their own ways once again, with renewed friendships and recharged visions – to pursue their dreams and the dreams of their children. And once again they carried with them a little piece of their own wing.

There was a difference. This time they decided to meet once a year.

When Simon & Garfunkel played together after many years at Central Park, they added a verse to "The Boxer". I think it says it all.

*"Now the years are old and baggy  
And rocking evenly,  
And I'm older than I once was,  
And younger than I've been – that's  
not unusual,  
Nor is it strange, that after changes,  
after changes,  
We're more or less the same, more or  
less the same"*

Well, thank God, some things haven't changed, and hopefully, never will.

# BITSAA-NZ Meet

Vish Sarma

## "In Lower Hutt , New Zealand, September 2008

"The Wellington, NZ chapter of BITSAA had its first meeting on the 20th of Sept 2008, in Lower Hutt. Hosted by prominent Wellington BITSian Naresh Puri and his wife Suman at their home, the evening had all the pre-requisites for a delightful BITSian social get-together: good food and wine, vigorously contested viewpoints on every conceivable topic under the sun, and of course, the inevitable nostalgic meanderings down memory lanes.

In all, there were 10 BITSians, including that rare phenomenon – a BITSian couple –ranging from graduates from traditional Engineering branches, Information Technology, and Pharmacy – making this a truly multi-disciplinary group. Additionally, the fact that the alumni present were from the 1960s through to the late1990 batches, made the sharing of BITS stories all the more interesting, spanning as it did anecdotes from forty or so years of life at the Institute. Relative prices of *rasmalaai* at Volga; the creative book-keeping of the *redi-wallahs*; the botanical origins of *bhang*; the evils of the unassigned system of the 1970s; the clock tower with no two faces showing the same time; the hospitality of Dean Nattu at recent alumni meets; *Cul- Fests* of years gone by..... Yes, it was nostalgia lane alright! And we were all happy for it.

Conversation was not restricted to BITS. True to deeply ingrained BITS (pseudo)-intellectual traditions, larger topics were also deliberated : the shape of the American economy ("pear"-shaped, was the consensus); the rank injustice of the Western world complaining about environmental pollution created

by finalists at the next Miss Universe contest.

There were many in that get-together who was meeting each other for the first time – but the spontaneity of the conversations clearly belied this fact. It seemed to me that a common BITSian heritage is enough to invigorate a



by the developing nations; the US presidential *tamasha* and the shenanigans of local politicians were all grist to the conversational mill. The only topic we did not discuss was world peace, leaving that weighty issue to be discussed

social event – an endorsement of the positive feelings we have for the time we spent in Pilani.

Yes, we should do it again!

# Knowledge is ignorance

Enakshi Chatterjee, 2000 EEE

## In our knowledge lies our ignorance.

The other day, I came across this phrase. Took me quite a few minutes to completely understand what it meant. Oxymoron and quite laconic, the phrase forced me to think again on what I had learnt, of knowledge removing ignorance.

Anything that we know and believe, also acts as an impediment to expanding our horizon of gullibility. How often have I heard the phrase, "not to my knowledge" - final and decisive in tone, questioning everything beyond it? Very few can actually realise that while they know, that what they know itself is subject to change. That frameworks, definitions, basic tenets are as much basic as shifting sand dunes.

There is no truth. (Oxymoronic even while I say it). Only a window of time, whose dimensions keep changing, the viewing angles keep rotating and moving, viewers keep taking turns to peep and opine....much like kaleidoscope. Those opinions become truths for that moment.

For every individual, at some point of time in our lives, we need to ask ourselves what our strengths and weaknesses are. And while we answer from what we know, we prove that in our knowledge lies our ignorance. If we have never achieved something, it does not mean it is not our strength, much like the giant monkey God, Hanuman. He needed Jambuban to tell him what he never knew he could do. That he could fly. Something that his knowledge told him he couldn't.

The same goes for other

aspects of our life too. What we believe, is subject to what we can imagine. What we can imagine is limited by our knowledge. You see, as human beings we are limited by our five senses. God just gave us 5 senses...and left the rest of the world beyond that realm of knowledge. To help us make do with what we had naturally, he gave us the ability to think. So human beings thought. What we couldn't see, we made the telescope and microscope. What we couldn't hear, we made sonar, telephone. That was it.



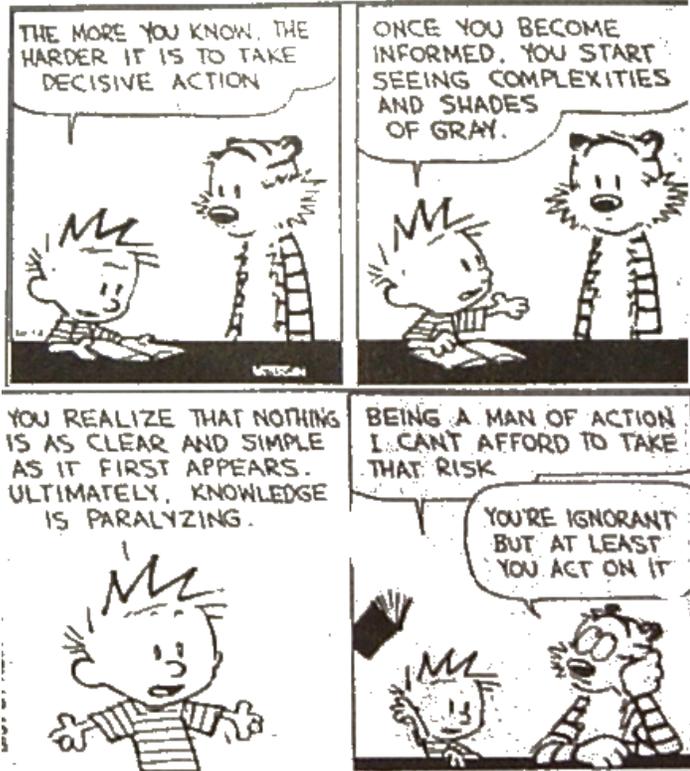
We are yet to overcome the challenge, where we can touch what we cannot see or hear. For example, can I touch someone sitting miles away? Can he feel my touch? Imagine how powerful that would be! All those video conferences miles away, could actually have people shaking hands. All those lovebirds separated by distance, could talk on the phone while holding hands. It reminds me of a tag line..."imagine the possibilities".

Right now, my knowledge says it's not possible. And that makes me ignorant of other possibilities. The same goes for smell. What I cannot smell, can some device do that? Smelling is something so intrinsic, that we feel unless we do it, it is not done. Again, our knowledge makes us ignorant.

The sense of taste, can that be substituted by an artificial tongue? Can you know the taste of the food before trying it? So many of us would have helped save all those dishes, whose tastes we disliked. Something that knew what I liked...personalized, recommended or disapproved food. Also encouraged me to try something new based on my mood...People died trying to taste cyanide and write down what it was like. They died before their pen touched paper. Those lives could have been saved through this device.

In our knowledge lies our ignorance. In its realization, we go a step further towards fulfilment.

**CALVIN AND HOBBS**



"Beyond", "Limitless"...the concept is baffling. When I was a kid, and even now, when I think that the universe is unlimited, I lose myself. I fail to imagine. I am stuck, fighting, grasping, and accepting the concept. You see, my knowledge makes me ignorant. Earth is round, with x square miles, states and nations have boundaries, you do this and not that...limitation is inbuilt in me from birth. And to think, that something beyond could go on till the end of nowhere stumps me.

Remember watching those extra-terrestrial movies? All aliens were humanoid in nature. They had eyes; fingers...looked similar to humans. Our knowledge made us ignorant of other possibilities. In all possibility, ETs or intelligent life-forms

could just be a Dot. If you could do everything in the smallest possible dimension, why wouldn't you? Aren't we saying we are advancing when we make things smaller and more powerful? The smallest screen now is the mobile screen- simple and powerful. That's what lasts.

Perhaps human beings have unlimited abilities, everyday we invent/discover something new ...what limits us is our knowledge- making us ignorant.

There was a gamut of thoughts swirling in my mind when I read the phrase. Some things need a little more thinking. The writer delivered an insight, quite hidden in the article he had posted.

# NOTICE

## ***Stay connected: we're a family!***

### ***Classnotes , Chapter Unions and Finding a Purpose***

- *Stay connected, stay in touch! Do keep sending classnotes to your batch representative. In addition, feel free to write to us at [dileepan@bitsaa.org](mailto:dileepan@bitsaa.org) with any new and exciting developments that would do us as BITS, alumni proud.*
- *Stay in touch with your local chapter.*
- *Do apprise us about the details of any batch or chapter reunion.*
- *BITS.Aid in a new avatar: A critical mass of BITSians working for the community can change the world.*

*Watch this space for new opportunities for adding purpose to your life; coming up, a major social initiative where every BITSian can be connected to a social cause or calling and with the legacy of our intellectual, financial, emotional, social and spiritual prowess, we can collectively make a difference to the world...*