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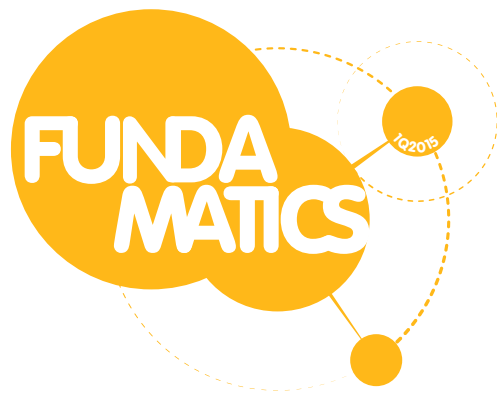
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**GLOBAL
BUSINESS
FORUM**





Quarterly magazine of
The IIT Bombay Alumni Association

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From the Beehive

Hello! Is There Anyone Out There??

Hey! You! Facebooking bang in the middle of a workday! Shut that tab and read this off screen for a bit. You might be a smart young IITBian climbing the corporate ladder armed with improbably complex Excel spreadsheets and dense PowerPoints; or maybe you have already broken through the glass ceiling to CEO/CTO rank and decided to open this mag on a business class flight to your next meeting. Whoever you are, don't skip this editorial.

Instead of pretending that all is toodlicious in Fundamatics land, I have decided to share the true picture with all of you. The reality is that most of the bees have fled the hive. The few that remain are going to sing *sayonara* soon. And while Word Press and Google Analytics assure me that the magazine is being read more than ever before, for us it is as if we are sending out issue after issue into the great big void.

Seriously, where are you all?

I wish I could pose this question with the right blend of curiosity and befuddlement, rather than like someone who has been driven to Prozac.

Comments in the E-zine and 'Letters to the Editor' dried up long ago. The Ad collection tanked soon after. Now, scoring a good article from 'request for submissions' is tantamount to winning in a treasure hunt.

I know getting my readers peeved with a quasi-querulous rant might not be the best strategy to engage them. But as I self-com-

bust with the anxiety of running an Association with ever expanding operations and a steadily eroding balance sheet, I need to burn your eyeballs with a naked truth.

Good content does not emerge magically out of the ether! Fundamatics was never meant to feature solicited pieces. Rather, it was started with the hope that over time it would come to represent YOUR voice, the thinking IITB alum/alumnae with a unique point of view.

Has the apple dropped from the tree and hit you on the head yet?

We are still ready to slog it out if you are. Many of you are avid bloggers, illustrators, photographers and what have you. Share it with us along with your comments and critique. Praise is passé and what we are really keen on is to hear your honest opinion.

So here are the themes for all the upcoming issues: Education and Skills, Energy, Environment/Water, Make-in-India, Information and Communication Technology, Healthcare, Infrastructure and Smart Cities; all structured around the Special Interest Groups of the Global Business Forum.

Be serious, sarcastic or facetious as your mood or muse demands. We promise not to compromise on quality, so in case you get featured you will know that what you produced was the very best of the best. Go ahead, surprise us; better still, delight us.

We miss you.

Queenbee

2015 – Welcome to the second half of this decade!

SANDEEP KISHORE



Image sourced from <https://unsplash.com/>

The middle of this decade is here. Much has been achieved in the first half and much more is expected from the second. While there are several key areas of focus which deserve attention and can create impact as we look into the next five years, the following five are the pivotal themes in my view. Each of them, on their own, has the mega potential to transform the world.

Urbanization and Smart Cities

It is expected that the world will have 7.7 billion people by 2020, an increase of 800 million during this decade. The world is becoming more urban with each passing day. Towards the end of the last decade, more peo-

ple were living in urban areas than rural. According to the UN, by mid-2009, 3.42 billion people were living in urban areas compared to 3.41 billion in rural. The UN estimates that over the next 15 years, 5+ billion people will be estimated to be living in urban areas (61% of the world's population then), and the growth of an additional 13 mega cities (10+ million people), from 28 in 2014 to 41 by 2030. That is almost adding one mega city every year for the next 15 years, and approximately 800+m people (16% of the urban population) will be living in these mega cities by 2030.

What does all of this mean? With 3 out of every 5 people living in urban areas and 1 out of every 10 living in a mega city over the next

15 years, rapid urbanization is a very complex challenge which, at the same time, provides significant opportunities. Cities and urban areas need to become smarter and adaptable – that is the only way they can provide sustainable economic, social and environmental conditions for people to live in and contribute effectively. Secure and smart buildings, transport systems, healthcare, energy, utilities, communication systems, government systems and policies, etc. are the building blocks of the future. The opportunities lie in building new smart cities from the ground-up and converting existing cities into smart cities – both need to happen to create the biggest impact region-/country-wise. The economic output of mega cities will far outweigh the next tier cities (those with populations of 1- five million people), and the key opportunity will be to drive innovation and implementation at scale to impact people’s lives positively and smartly for sustainable growth.

Population Health

10.5% of the global GDP is spent on healthcare – approximately USD 7.6 trillion in 2014. In spite of spending this colossal amount, the overall results are far from desirable with more than 75% spent on providing care for chronic diseases. With the overall growth in population and people living longer, there is a dire need to ensure that healthcare is aligned, both at an individual wellness and at an overall population health level, to deliver significantly improved care and to be accountable for results. As an industry, healthcare must learn to embrace results rather than just providing care.

2015 and the second half of this decade will be key to increase our focus in taking advantage of advancements made in computer technologies, life sciences healthcare, core research and new discoveries. We must become better in driving predictive and results-oriented care by combining big data,

healthcare analytics, m-health, new drugs, genome sequencing, etc. The world needs to be healthier and spend far less in achieving that care than what it spends today.

Power of Youth

Harnessing the power of youth will be extremely key to overall global development. According to the UN, the 1.8 billion young people (10-24 years) in the world today make up 25% of the global population. At 356

Cities and urban areas need to become smarter and adaptable – that is the only way they can provide sustainable economic, social and environmental conditions for people to live in and contribute effectively



million (28% of the population), India has the largest number of young people in the world. Euromonitor estimates that 89.8% of the global population younger than 30 years of age live in the emerging and developing countries.

The global power of youth could be channelized, and 2015 is the year that should take an aggressive goal towards this alignment. Young people are the single biggest asset for the world’s long-term sustainable development and it is the ‘here and now’ opportunity. Providing healthcare, education, skill development, training and positive livelihood opportunities must become their fundamental requirement. The opportunity to harness youth power by the emerging countries simply cannot be missed or misaligned. It is the topmost lever to bridge the inequality gap and to drive meaningful economic and social changes. It is also the responsibility of young people to take ownership and drive positive



and progressive change.

Connect the Rest of the World

Internet penetration globally is at 42%, with approximately 3.03 billion people connected. The penetration varies from 95+% for Nordic countries to sub-10% for several countries in Africa. The biggest opportunity to increase internet connectivity is in Asia and Africa. Combined, these two continents have 71% of the global population with only 32.8% internet penetration. This means that more than 3.43 billion people in these two continents still do not have access to the internet. That is more people living un-connected in these two massive continents than we have the total number of people on the internet worldwide!

We have a responsibility to connect the world: let people be online to share information, create content, etc. which will help them improve their lives. Let 2015 be the year when we have more than half of the world connected online, adding 600+ million people to the

Image sourced from <https://unsplash.com/>

global internet population this year, and drive special internet infrastructure investments into the Asian and African countries where it is most needed.

Mobility, IoT and Cyber Security

How does life change so significantly in a period of 7-8 years? People with smart phones cannot live without them any longer. With the introduction of the iPhone in 2007, smart phones became more prevalent and by 2015, more than 2 billion will be in use around the world. More than 50% of the people will use mobile connectivity to be online. Mobility is clearly mainstream. Businesses, governments, individuals, communities and societies will be investing significantly more to leverage and harness this power in the remainder of this decade, and it will become the bedrock for future development.

Internet of Things (IoT) is already beginning to impact our lives in a transformational manner. When everything around us is connected and collaborating on meaningful

information, taking rule-based decisions, driving significantly higher efficiencies, etc., the possibilities are limitless. Cisco estimates USD 19 trillion worth of opportunities over the next decade on account of increased connectivity driven by IoT. 212+ billion things are expected to be connected by 2020, an increase of 27 times during this current decade. No industry, however mature or old they may be, will be left untouched by IoT.

With increased connectivity comes

i.e. more people living unconnected in these two massive continents than we have the total number of people on the internet worldwide!



increased cyber risk. Online security is still in the emerging phase and dealing with traditional internet-based technologies. The rapid growth of mobility and IoT will create enormous challenges and will also provide significant opportunities for cybersecurity. Although these trends are irreversible, adoption and pace of transformational change can be negatively impacted in cases of massive cybersecurity breaches. Can 2015 be the year when the industry resolves to prevent the majority of the breaches, rather than reporting them after systems have been compromised?

The maximum impact on account of Mobility, IoT and Cybersecurity in 2015 and the remainder of this decade will be for the developed economies. They also have the highest dependencies on them for growth.

[This article originally appeared on Sandeep's blog www.sandeepkishore.com]



Sandeep Kishore
B TECH CIVIL E, '87, H 9

Sandeep Kishore is a global business leader, writer, blogger, poet, speaker and, above all else, a dreamer and doer. He is a corporate executive and a respected strategic thinker in the IT industry. He is an advocate of growth through applied innovation, transformation and market leadership. Sandeep is a regular speaker at global industry events, analyst forums and leading management schools. He is a frequent contributor to several leading industry publications. Sandeep, along with his wife Sushma, is the co-founder of Har Asha Foundation, a non-profit organization focused on skills development and vocational training programs. Sandeep is also a poet and 'Your Shadow Wants to Walk Alone' is Sandeep's first book of poetry. He lives in Silicon Valley, California.

At the Epicentre - A Diary of the Nepal Earthquake

DR ROOP JYOTI



Image sourced from <http://www.amerikaninsesi.com/medialphotogallery/2739517.html>

On April 25, 2015 a massive earthquake shook up Kathmandu, the densely populated capital of Nepal, and many other towns and villages in the hills. Repeated tremors, hundreds of them, some quite strong, followed, and they continued. Huge destruction took place with thousands losing their lives. Whole villages were demolished with no houses left standing. IIT Alumnus, Dr. Roop Jyoti was in the middle of all this. He sent several updates to fellow classmates who had sent emails expressing concern. We print extracts from his emails to give readers a sense what went on and how the future looks.

Day 1

25th April 2015

I was conducting a 10-day Exec course at Dharmashringa. It was day 1 and Metta session was just over. Everyone had lunch and were talking to each other. Then the earthquake struck. It was nothing like anyone of us had seen in our life time. The shaking was very strong and very long, went on and on. Some of the walls connecting the pillars supporting the pagoda collapsed making the structure vulnerable. Otherwise, no major damage to centre buildings. Speakers fell down and walls and ceiling plasters cracked and chipped off. No one was in a proper frame of mind for the course to continue. We had a



Image sourced from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2f/Earthquake_Nepal_2015_07.JPG

tough time sending students back home but we managed. I will have to call the students back so that they can listen to the remaining discourses.

Back in the city, learnt about the devastation that had been caused. My family and property are safe but there are repeated earthquakes with shifting epicentre, not just aftershocks. Electricity is cut off as a precaution but due to frequent prolonged load shedding at normal times we are somewhat prepared for that.

The tremors are still continuing every 2-3 hours, last strong one was 6.7! We are staying in the open as a precaution as advised. We hope this will end soon but don't know when.

You probably have more access to news than we have. We have no power and TV! The destruction is staggering. Apart from many old buildings, many monuments and temples have fallen down. Some villages near the epicentre have no buildings standing. Many people have lost their lives.

The short and long term consequences are yet to be seen and faced but India and China are sending help in a big way. That should

really help.

Hopefully, it will end by tomorrow?!
This is the situation here.

Day 2

26th April 2015

We are okay physically. Our buildings appear okay, too, but some damages may be there. Yet to be assessed properly. Much devastation in Katmandu & Nepal, many killed, many more injured. Main trouble is earthquakes still keep coming, quite strong ones too, apart from aftershocks. Much fear and panic among people. Consequences like proper place to stay, water, food yet to be faced. No electric supply as a precaution. Let us see how situation develops.

Day 3

Today is Day 3 of the earthquakes.

There were two tremors early morning today, intensity around 4.5 and the durations much shorter. So far, none after that. People are moving about and if it stays like this to-

night, normal activities may resume tomorrow.

Coming days are going to be very challenging, though. People, organizations and institutions are going to need much help in the short term and in the long term for the rebuilding and for restoring normal activities. Personal and economic losses have to be overcome. But I hope a new and stronger Nepal emerges from this.



Day 4

They are really scared. Some for good reason as their houses have suffered serious damages, others just out of plain fear.



Okay, here's today's update.

First, the electricity came back around 5 pm or so, I am on my computer and I don't have to communicate only through my mobile phone.

The earthquake here have caused severe destruction and disruption. Most people still continue to spend nights in the open, outside of their houses. (Even my brother's family wouldn't listen to me. They have been sleeping in their cars!) There have been so many aftershocks. They are really scared. Some for good reason as their houses have suffered serious damages, others just out of plain fear. Offices have not started to function.

Hardly anyone is reporting for work. We had a meeting at Jyoti Bhawan (our head office) this morning. Only a handful of people were there. No nurses reported for duty (we have a clinic and hospital too at Jyoti Bhawan). But we requested everyone to come to work tomorrow and to resume activities. They have to clean up and put their place of work back in order. Drawers are open, furniture, fixtures and equipment have shifted or been

overturned. Papers and other items are on the floor. I hope more people will turn up – although I can see that it is rather difficult to come to work when you are not able to enter your own house, leave aside sleep there at night.

Last night at 10 pm, I was writing that there had been no aftershocks for the whole day and so people would gain confidence. But, just then, a big tremor came! There were a few tremors at night also. So, this morning, people were back to being jittery. Today, there have been no tremors throughout the day. (Actually, I felt one jerk at 5 pm and another about an hour later, but most people didn't feel them). If the night passes without any big tremors, that will be really good. Let us see.

Nepal is facing a calamity of unknown proportions. This is a catastrophe which has and will affect all in Nepal, small and big. For some, it is both personal and physical loss but for many it is going to be a hard-to-surmount economic loss. This situation has the potential to shake up the basic foundation of the country, both social and economic, if not handled properly. I know that Nepal can spring back from this disaster but for that, much skillful handling is going to be needed. For now, I can only hope for the best.

Once normalcy returns, I am bound to get real busy. Maybe a short final update then.

Goodnight from Kathmandu and all the best wishes, too.



Day 5

Good morning! It's 4:30 am here.

Electricity had come back yesterday at 5 pm so I sat on my computer and wrote an update at around 11 pm before retiring. I checked just now and found that it did not get sent. Apparently, there was no internet connection from the provider. If it doesn't get sent in another 3 hrs, I will retype it on my mobile and send.



Image sourced from <http://www.amerikaninnesi.com/media/photogallery/2739517.htm>

Quickly though, it looks like there were no tremors through the night. That's a good indication. Hopefully people will return to their normal lives today.



A few days later (May 12th, 2015)

By now or very soon you would have heard of another strong earthquake here in Nepal. So, before you or anyone else start worrying, let me say that we are all fine, the family, all in my office and hospital and all the people I know. The buildings we are in, are fine too. Some more cracks in the walls or on the floors would be discovered tomorrow but that is expected, we won't be overly concerned – just something additional to be taken care of, when the repairs start!

Once again, the tremors came during daytime on a clear day. This itself would have saved many lives and casualties.

There have been so many tremors in the past weeks, that people had stopped giving them much importance, just saying, "oh, another one" and go on doing whatever they had been doing. They would check later and say, "this one was more than 5 or that was 4.3" and like that. The intensity had been declining but

in terms of frequency, one day there would be just one or none and the next day maybe four or five. Tremors had been accepted as normal, just like rain and storm. All this has become part of life here!

This one started slowly and when everyone thought it would or should stop, the earth kept on shaking and then some more. That made people start running out into the open. Some walked out calmly or even stayed put wherever they were but some were terrified and stricken with fear and started shouting or crying. I think it lasted a little over half a minute. I was discussing a few points on the ground floor at the entrance of my building. We were planning about the arrangements to be made for the final concluding part of Vipassana Course which I was conducting and which had remained unfinished when the big earthquake had come.

After the first tremor subsided, people remained in one place. All had gained the wisdom that aftershocks would come. And they came. First one about 10 minutes later and lasted long too, then after a while, maybe 15 minutes, another one and after a longer interval, another one but less strong. After waiting in the open for about two hours and after

several aftershocks, people decided it was okay to move around. They had made phone calls (the mobile networks worked this time also!) and had checked whereabouts of their family members and nearly everyone had found that their families were safe. All the people I was in contact with and also those whom I contacted later reported that their families were fine.

Of course, there are unfortunate ones, quite a few of them, I hear. Mostly in the hills or in the vulnerable parts of the country where the previous series of tremors had made

Personal and economic losses have to be overcome. But I hope a new and stronger Nepal emerges from this.



the houses weak or on the verge of collapsing. Landslides are also reported. I would guess that even in the Kathmandu Valley, many buildings might have collapsed or suffered serious damages but these would be the older weaker structures. We will come to know the extent of damages tomorrow or the day after.

The sad part now is that fear has returned in the minds of the people, just when things were beginning to get normal. There are going to be many, hundreds if not thousands, who will spend the night tonight in the open and maybe for some more days. Normalization of daily life and business will also get slowed down. But I hope that people will handle this earthquake better than the last one. After all, the last few weeks have been kind of training in "Living with Earthquakes"!

The unpredictability of earthquakes keep haunting people and this unknown factor creates fear. I hope there will not be more tremors today or tomorrow or if there are any, fewer and of declining intensity. I see that there have been 11 aftershocks and in the beginning the intensity was around 5 and it has now gone down to 4.2 and 4.3. (the first one,

the earthquake, was 7.4!)



Dr Roop Jyoti
B TECH, CHEM. E, '70, H-8

Dr Roop Jyoti holds a B Tech from IIT Bombay, an MBA, an MPA and a PhD from Harvard University. He is well recognized for his outstanding achievements as a successful entrepreneur and for his tremendous contributions to public service. He is also a teacher of Vipassana Meditation in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin as taught by S. N. Goenka. As the Coordinating Area Teacher for Nepal he oversees 8 meditation centers in Nepal. Additionally, as the Center Teacher for Dharmashringa, the largest and oldest among Nepal centers, he conducts Vipassana courses regularly.

Gunter Grass: 1927-2015

PROF. SUDHA SHASTRI

Nobel laureate (1999), and prolific and versatile writer Gunter Grass remains best-known for *The Tin Drum* (1959, English translation 1961). Critics and admirers have tended to compare what he continued to write with this early work, which was seen as having set a touchstone that his later writings did not always rise up to. When magical realism was being perceived as a Latin American representational style, Grass effortlessly made it natural to the description of Germany and the Second World War in this, his milestone novel.

While awarding him the Nobel Prize, the Swedish Academy also praised him for "the enormous task of reviewing contemporary history by recalling the disavowed and the forgotten: the victims, losers and lies that people wanted to forget because they had once believed in them" which he achieved in *The Tin Drum*, narrated by the protagonist Oskar.

Thus Salman Rushdie, one of his long-standing admirers, tweeted at Grass' obituary: "Drum for him, little Oskar".

Born in 1927 in Danzig to a Protestant father and a Catholic mother, Grass was raised as a Catholic. His first major work was the Danzig trilogy, the first of which was *The Tin Drum*. The second and third books in the trilogy were *Cat and Mouse* and *Dog Years*.

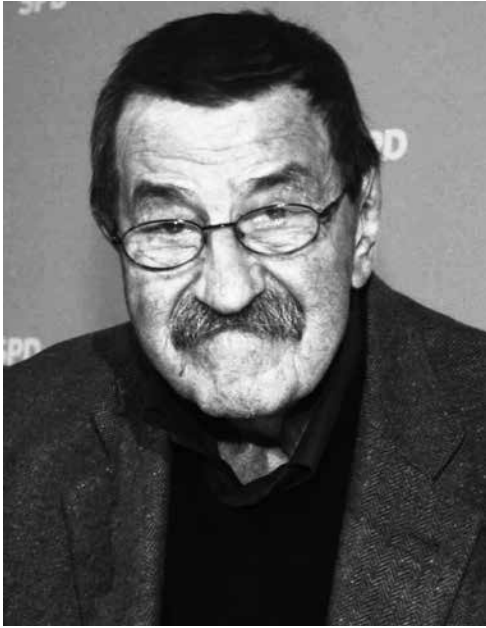
The Tin Drum established Grass' style unequivocally as characterized by magical realism, irony, and a concern for the marginal-

When magical realism was being perceived as a Latin American representational style, Grass effortlessly made it natural to the description of Germany and the Second World War.



ized. Grass' unrealistic/fantastic narration of episodes – perhaps paradoxically - functions as a powerful weapon of satire, and especially political satire. The protagonist of this novel, Oskar Matzerath, is portrayed as resolving not to grow beyond the height of a three-year old, thereby already challenging the limits of realistic representation; but more pertinently making a symbolic point about Germany's moral dwarfishness during the Nazi years.

Controversy dogged *The Tin Drum* meanwhile; it was proscribed for a while for its supposed immorality. It continued to engage the interest of artists and intellectuals, nevertheless. A film adaptation was made in 1979 which won the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival as well as the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. In 1977 came *The Flounder*; based on the folktale of "*The Fisherman and his Wife*", this also had a mixed reception. It seemed to denounce feminism, and was denounced in turn by feminists. Arguably his next successful work was *Crabwalk* (2002).



While also focusing on the Second World War, it portrayed the Germans as victims.

Further controversy was courted by his poem "*What Must Be*" which accused the Israeli government of plotting destruction against Iran. This not only invited a personal attack from the Israeli government but also a ban from visiting Israel in 2012. One inference that may be drawn with certitude about Grass is that he espoused the artist's freedom of expression. For instance, when the Berlin Academy of Arts refused to join a public reading from the work of the then banned writer Salman Rushdie, who was facing a death threat from Khomeini's fatwa, Grass resigned in protest.

A remarkable trait in his fiction is the reluctance to being unequivocal. His unreliable narrators tend to intensify the spirit of ambivalence in his work. Oskar is just such a narrator, trapped inside a lunatic asylum. Take the opening sentence of *The Tin Drum*: "Granted: I AM an inmate of a mental hospital; my keeper is watching me, he never lets me out of his sight; there's a peep-hole in

the door, and my keeper's eye is the shade of brown that can never see through a blue-eyed type like me".

Grass' last trilogy was perhaps the most provocative work he ever produced. It comprised his personal memoirs, the first of which, *Peeling the Onion*, was published in 2006. It caused no less than a furor, best understood by the changed perception of Grass from being the moral conscience of his nation, to having committed 'moral suicide'. The

His passing has deprived the world of fiction of a giant, who drove a wedge into the dogmas of singular worlds, unilateral truths and categorical assertions.



reason was starkly simple: Grass revealed in this book his involvement with the *Waffen-SS* as a young man, the military segment of the Nazis and involved in heinous atrocities. This self-exposure was to affect Grass dearly; his admirers were shocked and outraged that he had presumed to condemn political and social crimes in which he had himself been implicated. 'Hypocrisy' was the judgement meted out to him by the reading public.

While this admission must have cost Grass great in terms of personal self-worth, aside from public perception and courage taken to make it, the style that he chose to make this announcement in is a significant hallmark of Grass the writer. The work aptly rests on memory which is portrayed as fragile and undependable. Even while 'confessing' his inglorious past, he did not assert or declare so much as conjecture and ask, thereby making doubt integral to the understanding of his younger self. In a sense it could be argued that he was speaking on behalf of an entire generation, struggling to come to terms with its Nazi past.

In Grass' own words: "What I had accepted with stupid pride of youth I wanted to conceal after the war out of a recurrent sense of shame...But the burden remained, and no one could lighten it."

While this admission must mean different, perhaps diametrically opposed, things to different readers (there are many to still defend his past and forgive it on grounds of youth), what it categorically does is to encourage another possibly less simplistic look at *The Tin Drum*, especially to those who read it before Grass chose to reveal his teenage complicity in the holocaust.

Like Nabokov, or Heller, Grass had the ability to fuse humour and tragedy as farce in a singularly imaginative manner, thereby justifying the citation by the Nobel Committee which awarded him the prize for "frolicsome black fables [that] portray the forgotten face of history".

Just as the Nobel was his greatest but not his sole award – Grass also won the Georg Buchner Prize (1965), was elected honorary fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (1993) and was awarded the Hermann Kesten Prize (1995). Gunter Grass was not just a novelist: he was also a poet, playwright, artist and sculptor, besides being a political and social commentator. His passing has deprived the world of fiction of a giant, who drove a wedge into the dogmas of singular worlds, unilateral truths and categorical assertions.



Prof. Sudha Shastri

Sudha Shastri, Professor of English at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay, teaches and researches in the areas of narrative, postmodern fiction, Indian writing, and more recently film studies. She has been trained in the Khayali vocal tradition and is also a trained Odissi dancer.

Apna Nimbu Bazaar Becha

V. SUNDER

Sunder was a regular IIT-ian Joe, working in TBL/TUL/T-whatever, post his delayed graduation from IIT-B in Elec. The first life-changing experience occurred when Mots returned from the US, made him quit his coolie job, and whisked him away to Rishi Valley. He lasted just about two terms, but it transformed his already skewed world-view. His next stop was Sumavanam, a year of teaching and solitude, and then Blue Mountain School Ooty, which featured the second LCE in the form of Sonati, an exiled princess from Bodo-land. They married and settled in Geddai, a coffee-estate in the Nilgiris, where they assisted in running a make-shift break-away school. Soon after Badri was born, the school fell apart (SV has a certain talent for detonating schools - I'll hand him that). So they were again adrift, finally settling in Thekambattu, near enough to Salem (where SVs folk's had retired). Varun followed, and the two boys grew up on the land. So it went.

Jogesh Motwani

The title credit for this post goes to Pankaj, who has made a great film on much the same issues called *Apna Aloo Bazaar Becha*. The rant credits go to me and the insight credits to Sonati.

Yesterday, it came viscerally home to Sonati and me that the Economy Rules OK!

We have always sympathised with our

Farmers need every encouragement to grow food, not cash.



farmer neighbours about their being trapped in the brokers' clutches. One memory that stays is Govindraj and his young *machan* (brother-in-law), barely bigger than Badri Baba at that time, some 12 years ago: he was hawking tomatoes door-to-door at ₹3 a kg; the retail price in Karumandurai was ₹15; and he said that he was not going to get more than ₹1 a kg in Karumandurai. So he spent about three hours a day carrying his day's pickings around the villages for some six or seven weeks!

I remember Unnamalai from Gundiyapatu pleading with a broker to give her 5 paise per lemon more than he was willing to give: eventually she had to take the offer of ₹20 for 100 lemons.

Yesterday, I sold lemons for a rupee a piece, and I suspect I got a "good rate" because the broker was Jothi, my vegetable-wallah. Just last week I had heard him say that there was no way he could charge less than ₹5 a lemon because he was buying them for ₹4.

Till this year we have never sold lemons: we have pickled them, gifted plenty (once even carting a couple of hundred to Bombay to gift away: half my luggage), and generally made merry with *nimbu pani*, lemon cakes



and what-not. This year, too, we have gifted lots: it was a real pleasure to see the usually zombie-like Easparan's face beam when, just as he was diffidently asking me for a few lemons ("My wife told me to ask you"), Sonati emerged with a bagful!

And of course we have received gifts aplenty throughout our stay here of a variety of things. Pumpkins, coconuts, rice, what-have-you. In fact all these lemons are from trees grown from seed of lemons gifted to us by "Lemon" Annamalai.

But this year it became a problem of plenty. Brokers started accosting me with offers of 50 paise per lemon (just imagine, saar: ₹50 for 100). They would of course strip the trees if we let them and then we, who haven't bought a lemon for many years, may have been reduced to even that! A certain sense of entitlement also crept into those who received our lemons: "Anyway, if they are free, why not ask for more?"

The long and the short of it was that there were a bit too many to handle. So yesterday, when I was going shopping, I carried 100 lemons and asked Jothi if he wanted them for his shop. He enthusiastically took them and after having made out my vegetable bill, he finessed any attempt at bargaining (which in any case I never indulge in with him) by saying, "It's OK Anna, the lemons have paid your bill".

And it came home to me that I had sold our lemons at ₹1 apiece. Which was quite appalling.

(An aside: Amma in Salem says that the shop makes more out of her coconuts than she does; Aseem says that Penguin makes more out of his book than he does; Russell says that an agent would make more out of his paintings than he does; only he doesn't use an agent; and hence makes less money than he would otherwise. But I digress.)

And this is the trap that the farmer falls into. More so, if it is a cash crop. I mean, I can gift lemons away almost indefinitely, but

any takers for sugarcane? tapioca? The system ensures that the buyer calls the shots and the seller has no choice but not to grow tapioca for the market.

But that too is a phantom choice. If you grow *ragi* for a few years in fields surrounded by tapioca, you will find that all the neighbours' rats migrate to your *ragi* field. And to add insult to injury, when you do finally harvest whatever *ragi* the rats have spared, your neighbours will say, "Saar, your rats have come

The countryside is no longer a place to come home to; it is a place to leave. That needs to be turned around.



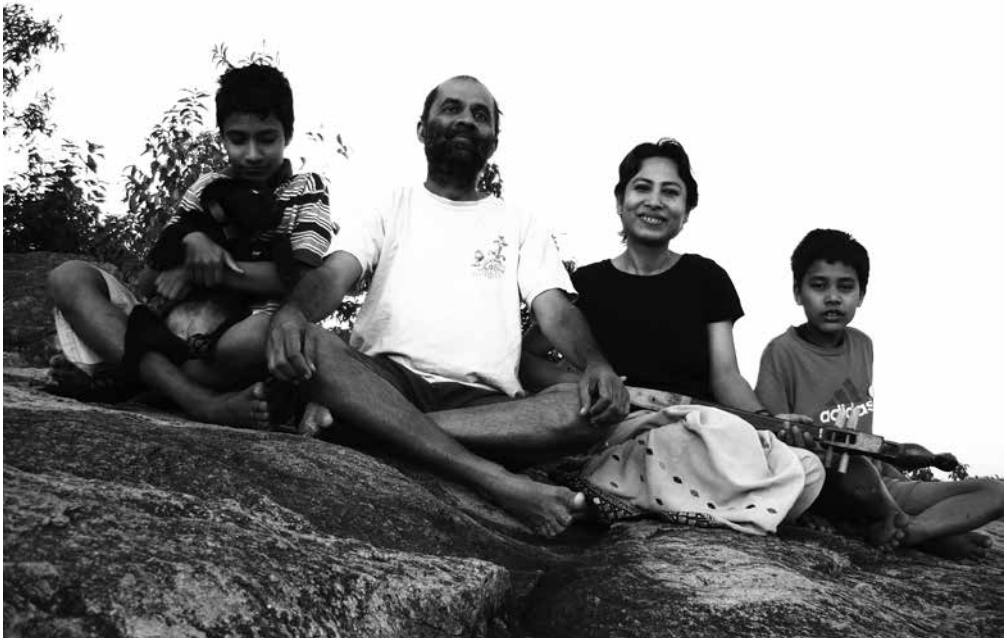
to our fields".

Been there, done that.

We have seen the landscape change in front of our eyes, literally. When we came here 14 years ago, 80% of the rain-fed fields we saw were food crops: *ragi*, *samai*, *kambu*, *nellu*. Now no one grows rain-fed food crops. Farmers have moved to the cultivation of tapioca to the exclusion of virtually everything else.

The upshot is that since the aim is to make money, all our neighbours' kids have turned to some form of brokering to add to their income. If you look at the statistics, India's pulse production is steadily declining. Not surprising at all. Anything which requires care throughout the year is given up for low-maintenance tapioca. The menfolk can then go earn money in Tiruppur, Coimbatore, Kerala (or of course for the gamblers, there is Red-Sanders smuggling in Andhra).

I can say that here in Thekambattu, at any rate, most of the younger generation have stopped thinking like farmers. And who can blame them? And it is likely that "No longer farmers in the mind" is the rule rather than the exception all over the country. And if we lose our farmers, who will feed us?



I will end this section with a quote from Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*:

*"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men
decay;*

*Princes and lords may flourish or may
fade;*

*A breath can make them as a breath has
made.*

*But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be sup-
plied."*

...and an invitation to drop in for some *nimbupaani*.

Apna Nimbu: Kahaan Pahunchega?

Since there has been a lot of back and forth about our lemons, on Facebook, on our blog and in e-mails to us, we thought we should clarify/consolidate, and carry on the conversation.

If a solution was required to our personal lemon problem, then e-commerce or organic marmalade would have provided one. Even so, we strongly feel that surely these lemons should be consumed locally, by our neighbours and others from nearby who need

lemons to pickle or juice or...

But the problem is not a personal one but rather a systemic one: which is that primary producers of all hues seem to be trapped by a broker mafia into becoming sweat shops for faraway customers who outsource their every requirement (and responsibility).

So perhaps I need to say, with Wendell Berry, "All you who eat; eat thoughtfully". Eating is a political act. Where you get your food, where it is cooked and who cooks it, and how you eat it: all of this contributes to the solution.

Farmers need every encouragement to grow food, not cash. As things stand, what Wendell Berry writes about 60's America is true for India now: If you can get into a profession; why, then you must not be a farmer. If you can move to the city, why then you must leave the country. If you can work the "miracle" of industrial progress, then you must do so, even if it means the theft of energy from posterity. (Posterity can't complain!)

The countryside is no longer a place to come home to; it is a place to leave. That needs to be turned around.

Loss of a lie: Moments from a quarter-life

ALANKAR JAIN

In eighth standard, I volunteered to revise one of the Anglo-Indian battles (either Plassey or one of the Mysore wars, I don't remember exactly which one) for the class. Using the blackboard, I described the various players and events of the battle in great detail, making up for my faltering English with infectious enthusiasm. Impressed, my class teacher asked me, "So what have you finally decided? Who do you want to be: a cardiologist, a historian or a scientist?". Those days I used to proudly proclaim that I wished to be a cardiologist, primarily because my doctor parents used to tell me that it was the hottest specialization in medicine. Excited by my teacher's praise, I went to my father and told him about it. It brought a proud smile on his face and he said, "Tell her you want to become an IITian".

Most of the initial thirteen years of my life had been spent in Kota city in Rajasthan, the epicenter of the coaching tsunami that engulfed the rotten senior secondary science education system in India. That is not to say that our schools teach commerce or arts any better, but the most significant impact of coaching classes, at least initially, was felt by the science stream. Kota pioneered the trend of training class tenth pass-outs for JEE, the Joint Entrance Examination for admission to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). A number of cities followed suit. Students from distant parts of the country started

Contrary to the popular belief today, they did teach fundamentals of science quite well. They made students solve dozens of problems daily and provided them with a rich inventory of tricks and techniques that made JEE tractable.



flocking to Kota, a city earlier famous for its delectable kachoris, cotton sarees and excellent building limestone. Soon, these classes became the lifeline of the city's new economy. Numerous science graduates (including many ex-IITians) became instructors in these coaching classes and earned fat salaries, renting out rooms to students became "a thing" in every other neighbourhood, numerous hostels were built, and auto wallas, mess-owners, street-food vendors -- almost anyone and everyone you can think of -- raked in a lot of moolah. With such a huge influx of students, the bigger and more reputed coaching classes started conducting entrance tests for themselves and believe it or not, new coaching classes opened up to prepare students for these considerably difficult tests.

These institutions cracked the code of the extremely competitive and difficult JEE and soon became like wish-granting factories for

students willing to work hard; a large majority of whom consistently put in roughly ten to twelve hours a day. Contrary to the popular belief today, they did teach fundamentals of science quite well. They made students solve dozens of problems daily and provided them with a rich inventory of tricks and techniques that made JEE tractable. At their peak, coaching classes in Kota accounted for a quarter of the JEE selections. Obviously, their model had no space for experimental science or scientific curiosity or individuality.

They merely filled the void created by our low quality schools to the extent that schools were forced to play second fiddle to them. A number of faux schools came up that placed no restrictions on student attendance. Students visited these schools only to take exams and maybe to practice for lab experiments in their twelfth. Many students, miles away from their homes, away from the protective gaze of their parents, away from their much-needed guidance and supervision in the formative years, couldn't handle the newfound independence and drifted away towards cyber cafes in the city, gaming and watching movies for hours at length, ultimately failing to achieve the goal that had brought them to the city. Many "repeated" or "dropped" a year, i.e. spent a year after twelfth solely preparing for the JEE, because they didn't take or fare well in previous year's JEE. Expectedly, the most unfortunate casualty of this system were these students' precious teenage years, that led to a lot of them feeling "burnt out" which later became a big reason for their poor performance in IITs.

I've spent four years of my life studying in coaching classes: classes ninth and tenth for National Talent Search Examination (NTSE) and classes eleventh and twelfth for the JEE. When I look back today, I feel I didn't lose much during the first two years because there was more to my life apart from coaching classes. I went to school and studied English

and Hindi and wrote poems, painted, and participated in debates and extempores. The last two years were a depressing time, despite living in my home with my parents. Any activity apart from attending the coaching class and self-study used to drown me in a sea of guilt. Thus, no more reading newspapers, no more watching TV for long hours, no more afternoon naps (sports anyway were never a part of my life). Getting up from and sitting down on my study chair was the maximum amount of movement my body went through and as a result, the flab on my belly thickened manifold. At my worst, I weighed close to a quintal. Things moved pretty fast in the coaching class, so falling sick was never an option. And if I did, which I did numerous times (especially in twelfth), catching up became a task in itself, partly because of my own flawed studying techniques. And yet, things were easier in eleventh because I managed to stay on top of things and among the toppers in my class. Things became darker in twelfth. Course content suddenly increased and so did competition and I found it increasingly hard to cope up. With every drop in my rank, my confidence dwindled. My allergies decided to wreak havoc on me during the same period and I went in a downward spiral of low scores, enormous amount of backlog, substantially reduced enthusiasm to study and lax attitude. Eventually I did manage to pass the JEE with a rank that was decentish, but nowhere close to what I expected of myself and others expected of me. In fact, after the results, one of my insensitive batchmates who had cracked the exam asked me, "Repeat karne ki to nahin soch raha na?" (whether I was planning to repeat), a question for which I still despise him. Having gone through these years, I could very clearly understand why one of our previous IITian tenants had scribbled this on his cupboard before vacating his room: "I spent the worst years of my life in this room. It's your turn now."

There were a few of these toiling, burnt out IITians in my family too. One of them, my maternal cousin, had cleared the JEE in his first attempt but "dropped" a year and got himself enrolled in a leading coaching class in Kota in order to improve his AIR (All India Rank). It must have been impossible for my parents to stay insulated from this crazy atmosphere. So, when my father told me that he would want me to "become an IITian", I wasn't surprised. I am sure my brother too hadn't been surprised. Both of us went through the same grind and eventually did manage to "become" IITians.

This myopia was characteristic to other parents of my parents' generation. Most of them took these life-defining career decisions without giving much thought to their wards' skills and interests. A lot of them wanted to send their kids to the IITs for bright future prospects that "Brand IIT" had come to symbolize. A father whom I met in IIT certainly falls into that category. He had come for the admission of his son and was already worried about his son's placement. "Bhaiya iska meta mein hua hai, suna hai ki meta mein package achha nahin milta, galti to nahin kar dee?" He wasn't sure if he had made the right decision by opting for metallurgy (meta) department as he had heard that "salary packages" are comparatively lower in meta. Then, there were parents who believed they were sending their children to the best possible colleges in the country. Moreover, it was a pursuit of pride. "Brand IIT" brought with itself an undeniable sense of reputation for students, their parents, their uncles, their aunties, their teachers, their neighbours, their friends: basically everyone they had ever been related to. Students, like me, would eventually pay the price for their parents' decisions.

II

I have an absurd habit of googling my colleagues and contemporaries whom I perceive

better than myself. The goal is to analyze their academic and professional trajectory with the hope of finding some flaw or area where they lag in order to discredit them in my mind. This worthless exercise in self-indulgence massages my ego and provides me a momentary sense of relief, except when it backfires. Last year, I wanted to discredit a colleague roughly as old as me who joined my company a couple of weeks later than I did. Unlike me, he was in the prestigious program for entrants, the

And here I was, without a single publication, not in the prestigious program, with only two things to boast of: my IITian tag and my CPI, both of which didn't mean a lot after I had landed my job



only one in my office last year. The program entailed better salary and somewhat better work with more freedom. He specialized in arguably the hottest field in computer science and seemed to have a far better handle on the future. More than sufficient reasons to get jealous. I googled him and the only "flaw" I could find out was his mediocre undergraduate college as compared to "my" IIT. On other occasions, this might have been enough to soothe me, but not this time, because this person, after his undergraduate degree, had completed a master's degree by research from one of the IITs, had a number of quality publications and was all set to join the laboratory of his choice next year for PhD. And he was, at most, a year older. And here I was, without a single publication, not in the prestigious program, with only two things to boast of: my IITian tag and my CPI, both of which didn't mean a lot after I had landed my job. That day, I could only see a past and a present filled with failures and enormous amount of



Image credit: Frits Ablefeldt <http://openinnovation.cc/photo/269/Knowledge-and-books-Color-illustration.html>

mediocrity. My imaginary future shimmering with uniqueness and success that had always enraptured me ceased to exist that disorienting moment and I found myself caught in a flurry of existential questions: What did I really achieve so far? What does my IITian tag actually mean? What is it that I want to do with my life? And the most painful of them all -- if my life had been so freaking ordinary so far, why should I hope for an extraordinary future? I remember weeping at the loss of the lie that was the edifice of my life.

I wasn't facing these questions for the first time in my life. Many of these are in fact characteristic to 20-somethings of my generation. Yet, I had observed that some of these questions were unique to my batchmates in IIT Bombay and hence seem more systemic than mere outliers. The last time I had suffered such a strong bout of existential void was roughly a year ago during campus placements.

I spent a lot of time in self-introspection

during my second last semester at IIT and yet, I was so unclear about what kind of job I wanted immediately out of college that I ended up applying for and preparing (extremely half-heartedly) for every company I was eligible for. I also wasted some days preparing for and taking the Common Admission Test to the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) despite having no particular interest in getting an MBA straight out of college. By that time I had already secured deferred admission to the Indian School of Business through their Young Leaders Program (YLP). My "diverse" profile got me shortlisted for some 9 companies on day-1. These companies were from varied sectors: consulting, finance, FMCG, analytics and "core" electrical engineering. All of these were prestigious companies that paid well. My utter lack of focus made Dec 1, 2013 one of the most nightmarish experiences of my life, but one that taught me something about myself. From 8 in the morning till midnight,

I had given 13 job interviews. In my extreme desperation to get a job, I had pleaded and begged. I felt too ashamed to pick my parents' and brother's calls as the towering expectations they had from me and I had from myself had been shattered. And yet, the one emotion I felt when I returned to my hostel by around 2 in the night was that of relief, for the ordeal was finally over. I was starving as I had eaten only a handful of biscuits the entire day. So, I went to our wonderful underground night canteen and ate a lot of extremely delicious and unhygienic food. It slowly began to sink in that I had failed to secure a job on the first day. Failed. The one question that troubled me the most that night was: What is it that I want to do? What am I going to do now? This lack of clarity must have been abundantly clear in my embarrassingly manufactured replies to interviewers' most favorite questions: Why our industry? Why our company? Morning did bear better news as I woke up to find I had received an offer from the last interview of the day. There's an interesting story about how I managed to give that 20-minute interview at around last midnight. I was busy running from one room to another, one floor to another to give interviews for the companies that had shortlisted me and the Taiwanese company that eventually took me had already finished interviewing all its candidates. One of my closest friends who was a constant companion during slot-2 of the day requested the company to wait for me for 15 minutes while I was being grilled by another company. The Taiwanese gentleman pointed towards his watch and told my friend: "15 minutes. Okay?". The interview that I was in meanwhile didn't go well and I rushed for the final interview of the day and reached, sweat-drenched, to find a couple of interviewers sitting idle, waiting for me. Interestingly, I had applied for this company rather casually as I preferred many other firms over it. So, when they say that placements are random, they

aren't entirely wrong.

III

Sometimes I feel I should have heeded the advice of my sweetly rotund class ninth Biology teacher: "If you wish to become an IAS Officer, why go to an IIT? I think you should do a B.A. as it would be more relevant to your preparation for UPSC exams." In case you didn't notice, within a year, my future goals had shifted from becoming a cardiologist to an IAS officer and yet it had already sunk

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in that I had to be an IITian first. I recently looked up the 2009 cut-off scores for the prestigious colleges of Delhi University such as St. Stephen's and SRCC and found out that I would have got into one of those places, had I applied, for my scores in board exams were quite good. Of course, I didn't even know what "applying" to a college really meant back then. Heck, I didn't even know that I was going to a "college" after 12th because my mental picture of college was only shaped by Karan Johar's films and I was sure I wasn't going to any of those places. I only knew that I was giving JEE to go to a place called IIT.

The reason why I feel that is partly because I really enjoyed the HSS courses I took in the institute. They ranged from creative writing to sociology and each one of them engaged me immensely providing me with that thing called the joy of learning. I looked forward to attending classes, took initiative to find out more on what was being taught,

interacted with the professors on a personal level and attended relevant seminars and lectures outside of curriculum (not just for the sandwiches and biscuits in the high tea that followed). Learning seemed fun and almost effortless and surprisingly, exams were fun too. I never felt that magic doing the compulsory core courses in my department. They seemed work. Now, that could also have been because of our mental association of compulsory and voluntary with work and play respectively, and maybe because engineering courses tend to be more technically involved and demanding. But I did experience a toned down version of Csikszentmihalyian flow whenever I took an HSS course.

And then when I look at St. Stephen's alumni, I feel I should be among them some day, in that illustrious ensemble of economists, historians, writers, journalists and politicians. It would be heretical and foolish to claim IIT alumni are in any way inferior, or even compare the two for that matter. I guess it's to do with the fact that I associate myself more with the aforementioned professions. I feel that deep down, the questions of development, economics, history, society, culture are closer to my heart as compared to questions of technology. That is not to say that I don't enjoy working on problems of research in engineering. In fact, that's what I have been doing for a living ever since I left college and it has been fairly interesting, despite the roller-coaster that life immediately after IIT can be. But whenever I ask myself the question "Is this what I would want to continue doing in my life and be known for when I die?", and I ask myself that question a bit too frequently, I feel disconcerted and a little helpless. If and when I make a career switch, I will be joining the massive club of defector IITians who are unfairly despised for their choice to divorce their majors for a dizzyingly varied career trajectories, not that it is going to prevent me in any way from making my decision. It's "my

choice" after all.

The opposing thought in my head about the choice of undergrad is that I'm probably far better off now than I would have been had I gone to any of those places. It's more than just the fact that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Whether we like it or not, quantitative skills have become increasingly valuable in today's world and it's not going to change any time soon. Further, a switch from engineering to other disciplines seems far more plausible. I haven't heard of people going the other way round. Finally, the unparalleled network that you inherit by virtue of being an IITian could be a reason enough to toil for JEE. Let me take a moment to explain the immense power of this network for my own sake, as it has taken me some time to fully appreciate it. I was an enthusiastic literary arts secretary of my hostel in my second year. Apart from widespread acclaim and an award, I have bagged multiple job offers from seniors who were impressed with my work during that period, and I am sure, that's just the tip of the iceberg. It's a classic example of seemingly insignificant things leading to disproportionately significant things in life.

But I can't help but feel that won't it be better if we inherited this network by virtue of being in a university offering a wider range of courses (not just technology)? Won't it make more sense for us to spend the crucial 4-5 years of life studying what interests us, something on which we could build further rather than starting afresh after graduation? Won't it be better if the institute played a more active role in shaping our lives over and above its current role as a mere facilitator and as a crucible for smart students with diverse backgrounds? Last year, while interviewing the Director for an article for Insight, I asked him about institute's opinion on most undergrads taking up careers not even remotely related to their core fields of study. He replied that institute was fine as long as students continued to contribute to the

society in a meaningful way. Although, it's an admirably liberal and pragmatic position to take, it's also a bit complacent one as it glosses over the issues we face. We can't be okay with so many of our students studying stuff they don't care about.

When I say that the institute should do more for us, I basically raise the contentious question what should a college education do for us? There are no easy answers. However, I feel, our education should provide us some di-

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rection for our future, and despite everything, that didn't really happen for me.

Today, as I eagerly await that elusive direction, I see myself as an older, more mature and less energetic version of the clueless 18-year old who entered IIT, confidently staring at a horizon full of possibilities -- not because being IITian is my achievement, but because despite my qualms with my education, it has put me in an enviable position where I can afford to take big risks without the fear of failure. I feel much lighter today with the loss of the burden of my lies and my expectations. Sky's the limit as I continue to chart my trajectory and make sense of the life to come, a life that seems to begin now, after IIT.

insight

the third eye

This article was originally published by Insight in the month of May. Insight is the official student media body of IIT Bombay. It is currently the only active official media body in the institute run voluntarily by students.



Alankar Jain

B TECH (DD) EE, '14, H 8

Alankar Jain recently graduated with a Dual Degree from the Department of Electrical Engineering. He's been involved in various activities during his time in the institute, and has been an Insight Board member, Institute Secretary for Academic Affairs and an ISMP mentor. Here, he talks in detail about his journey from JEE preparation and through his college years, various internal battles fought by students before and after entering the institute, and questions what a college education should do for us. He can be contacted at alankarjain91@gmail.com

PKH4

BUNKUMBEE



I am Bankim Biswas and today's edition of my bunkum and wishwash is not just about the usual nonsense involving "then" and "now" scenarios. This time there is the 'tadka' of mishmashing it with a film review. The title may sound like an advanced chess move, but it is all about the movie PK which was downloaded from er...some "friendly" sites and watched on a Dell laptop with over-used earphones and without munching any popcorn. The review could have been kinder, had it been seen in a multiplex and had your's truly got carried away by the laughter and applause from other cine-goers.

Then, movies were like H_2SO_4 . They conformed to a formula. Two brothers. Lost in a mela, reunited after 20 years (i.e. after 15 reels) in the middle of a *dishum-dishum* with the baddies while a tell-tale locket materializes into view. Predictable comedy, predictable tear jerks, predictable trees and the running around, and of course, the overly predictable happy ending. Some of them had good songs, but some still played "Gaadi bularabi hai, seeti baja rabi hai", so why is one complaining about the current "Love is a bhaste of time" type of songs ... er ... so called songs? Movies then started with flashy titles like 'STARRING : DHARMENDRA' and aimed for what was called a silver jubilee hit. Now they start with a list of "media partners" and "digital partners" and list all the cabs and florists who helped make the film. They now end with a list of starcast

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and tell us who played what. Something akin to telling us who Sita is after reciting the Ramayana. Shoestring budgets then did not allow for travel beyond the snow in Gulmarg, while the current offerings take you to exotic locales in Belgium for a kissing scene that could have been enacted in Ujjain. After all, a kiss looks ethereal and surreal, exotic and erotic with a backdrop of a medieval gothic structure than it does in front of a Banarsi Babu'spaan shop. Even the shots of a Jaisalmer desert look better in a digitally-rendered format than they do with the Eastman color technology of the 1970s.

To distinguish one movie from the other, one had to employ heroes, each of whom came with his own idiosyncrasy. Dev Anand ambled into the screen walking straight in a left-to-right direction while delivering a dialogue in a right-to-left direction without a comma or a full stop. Dharmendra, handsome as a Jat, always spoke his trademark Jat-ese.

"*Kutté! Kaminey! Main tera khoon pee jaoonga!*" Then, there was a shotgun that ironically barked out "*Khamosh!*" every now and then. Keshu Mukherjee always drank while Johnny Walker didn't. Iftakhar was called "*Inspector Saab*" in his real life, we're told. When you can't create a movie with wacky plots and exotic shooting locales, change the heroes and heroines and deliver "*Yeh shaadi nahin hogi*" via different stars in their own unique idiosyncratic styles.

Have you noticed Aamir Khan's evolution? Or rather, his reverse evolution? Started off as a colourful suited-booted-hatted sentry in Mangal Pandey. Shed some clothing i.e. hat, shoes and shirt in Lagaan. Moved to bare chest and wore just tattoos in Ghajini. To culminate finally in PK in starkers mode.



In short, you had the same story, same dialogues, same locales, and you just juggled the stars depending on their box-office-ness. Now technology allows you to experiment and improvise a whole lot. Wacky themes, offbeat music, special effects and outrageous themes. Now movies are scripted according to an actor's abilities and these too have to keep evolving. Have you noticed Aamir Khan's evolution? Or rather, his reverse evolution? Started off as a colourful suited-booted-hatted sentry in Mangal Pandey. Shed some clothing i.e. hat, shoes and shirt in Lagaan. Moved to bare chest and wore just tattoos in Ghajini. To culminate finally in PK in starkers mode.

This piece also doubles as a review of the current hit PK, so let's recite the story first.

Aamir Khan is a naked alien who lands in ... yes, the digitally-enhanced Jaisalmer desert which looks sandier and drier than its Eastman color counterparts of the 1970s. He's got a remote device that will help him go back when he wants. But filmmaker Raju Hirani wants him to go back after about 3 hours, after milking you of a ticket and interval time goodies and parking fees. So the remote is stolen in the first few minutes to delay Aamir's departure by a few hours. Aamir has popping ears and big bulging eyes and a goofy expression that makes him look more like an IITian than an alien. The jury is still out on whether there is a difference between the two, but that's a subject matter for another piece. How does Goofy start wearing clothes? This is not an X-rated movie. How does he start speaking? This is not a silent movie.

Conveniently, clothes are picked up from "oscillating cars" whose owners indulge in carnal pleasures while leaving the clothes hanging on open windows for a convenient pick-up. Trousers also have wallets which allow our hero to buy carrots to stay alive. To speak, Aamir has to learn the language. Being an alien, he has the ability to hold hands and imbibe the language in a USB device data transfer fashion. After all, you have to cut a long movie short and allot an ability to the alien in order to do so. After failed attempts to hold hands with homophobic men and maybe heterophobic women, his friend Sanjay Dutt takes him to a house of ill-repute where a "*Phooljadiya*" allows a 6-hour hand-holding session. Outcome of this exchange is a Bhojpuri speaking Aamir. Bhojpuri is comedy friendly. It also helps the movie run in the 20 crore strong UP and Bihar territory. So finally, Aamir is able to tell us that he is looking for his remote-wa. Sanju Baba rightly surmises that all thieves flock to Delhi. So a remote-wa searching Aamir goes to Delhi and asks all and sundry about his remote-wa. Most ask him, "*Tu peeke hai kya?*" If only Raju Hirani

knew about IITB, the question would have got rephrased to "Tu H4 se hai kya?" Anyway, we now have PK of the movie who came close to being labelled an H4-ite. When folks tell PK that only God knows where his remote is, he goes in search of God. Makes the rounds of all temples, churches, mosques and gurudwaras over a longish song. Finally, he lands in the plush precincts of a *Tapasvi Maharaj*, where he spies his remote masquerading as God's gift to *Tapasvi*.

To retrieve this contraption from *Tapasvi*, PK finds a collaborator in *Jagat Janani* (Anushka Sharma), named as such by *Tapasvi* when she was an infant. Obviously *Jagat Janani*, now a TV anchor named Jaggu, wants to get back at *Tapasvi* for naming her as such. In any case, she also thinks all godmen are fake and knows that *Tapasvi* is one, so she sets PK on televised encounters with *Tapasvi* who fumbles with answers to simple questions we asked in 7th standard essays. If God exists, why does he allow so much suffering? If God is within all of us, why do we go to far off temples and come back frost bitten? *Tapasvi* also fails at identifying people's religion. He does not deduce that a turban-wearing bearded man is not a Sikh, it's merely a disguise. Clearly, he hasn't seen any PAF event and does not know about costumes, though he himself dons one. In short, PK accuses *Tapasvi* of dialling a "wrong number" to God. Someone else is answering his calls to God and taking his "*firki*".

By now, Bhojpuri is turned on full blast to enthral and regale. We now have a condom-wa under discussion and of course, the "*matbal*" meant to be *matlab*. Boman Irani is a delight as always. Finally, in a climactic scene, PK vanquishes *Tapasvi* in a debate and reclaims his remote. He manages to reunite Jaggu with Sarfaraz (Sushant Rajput), who had kissed her in Belgium in the first reel, but got separated by a misunderstanding of the type that also occurred between Dharmendra and Hema

Malini in the 1970s.

PK is not a laughing riot like Hirani's Munnabhai and 3 Idiots, but funny in a non-funny way. To make his movie Bajrang-Dal-proof, Hirani also throws in a couple of scenes where he shows ulemas and pastors to be frauds, but it looks like the forced fit-in scene that it is. Make no mistake, Hirani is clearly bashing saffron and vandals have already been ignited. The overall message of secularism is clear, but not sublime. Does not

PK is not a laughing riot like Hirani's Munnabhai and 3 Idiots, but funny in a non-funny way.



rise above the Amar-Akbar-Anthony brand that was peddled decades ago. Did Raju Hirani dial a wrong number with PK? Not quite, going by the gross numbers on the charts. In any case, as has been said before, you have to leave your IQ behind at home when you go to watch a movie now a days. Loads of fun with good cinematography, good sound, good digital imagery and good entertainment. Don't expect anything else.

Field Trip to Bandhavgarh National Park

SHIRISH WAGHULDE

As our jeep climbed up from the Badi Goofa, a herd of *chital*, grazing around, scampered across the road. But this time it was not due to the mere disturbance caused by a tourist vehicle. Once across the road, every one of them was gazing intently towards a particular area; some of them started giving the bark-like alarm call and stamping the ground with their front foot. Our presence didn't seem to matter at all. A lone male, who had not crossed the road, and who appeared to be the leader of the herd, also started to stamp the ground and giving the alarm call. A sure indication of a predator in the vicinity.

Our guide then noticed some movement on the hillock. And sure enough, we spotted a *chital* lying down with a leopard on top of it, holding the *chital* by the throat. The *chital* was still struggling, kicking around every now and then and trying to throw off the big cat. The leopard must have felled it just a few moments ago. After a struggle, which lasted nearly 4–5 minutes, the *chital* lay still and the leopard let go of its throat and sat erect. All was quiet. The alarm calls had stopped and the other *chitals* went about their business of grazing. All through, the leopard always managed to stay on the side away from the kicking feet of the *chital*. Tired from the hunt, it rested a while near the kill and then walked away some 8–10 m or so and sat on a rock, affording us a great view. Though we were

watching it for more than 15 minutes, we just didn't seem to get enough of the leopard. But it was getting near closing time of the park and we had to leave.

This once-in-a-lifetime sighting was a fantastic bonus during our field trip to the *Bandhavgarh National Park*.

The Bandhavgarh National Park derives its name from the Bandhavgarh fort situated inside the park. *Bandhavgarh* means brother's fort – the fort is supposed to have been a gift by Rama to his brother Laxman while they were returning from Lanka. The fort and the surrounding forests belonged to the erstwhile Maharaja of Rewa. Being their private game reserve, the *maharajas* ensured adequate protection to the forests and its denizens. The abundance of game can be gauged from the stone plaque in the forest which marks the place where the *maharaja* had killed his hundredth tiger! After independence the Government of India took over the forests. The park covers an area of nearly 1160 sq. km. and has been declared a Tiger Reserve under Project Tiger.

Bandhavgarh is situated in the Vindhya Hills of the Shahdol district of Madhya Pradesh. Tourists are allowed to enter the park only from Tala, a village on the north-eastern boundary of the park. Katni, 92 km from Tala on the Jabalpur–Banaras line, is the convenient railhead, though Umariya, 32 km from Tala on the Katni–Bilaspur line, is the



nearest station. Private buses and jeep taxis are available from both Katni and Umaria to reach Tala. Boarding and lodging facilities to suit every budget are available in Tala.

Visitors are allowed inside the park for two hours after sunrise and two hours before sunset. Private jeeps for moving inside the park can be engaged in Tala. Movement on foot inside the park is prohibited. Alternately, one can book the elephants of the forest department. Taking a guide along is also mandatory. The forest personnel scout the park and keep a track of the movement of tigers which is communicated over the wireless network and so the chances of sighting a tiger are quite high.

The park contains hilly regions, undulating forests as well as grasslands thus providing a rich habitat for a variety of flora and fauna. The good forest cover and the predominant sandstone rock soak in rainwater and then release it slowly so that there are as many as four perennial streams in the park and, even at the peak of summer, water can be found in most of the small ponds and waterholes.

The area is rich in mammals as well as birds. During our trips inside the park, we could easily sight herds of *chital* and *sambar*, packs of black-faced *langur*, and sounders of wild boar. We also spotted jackals and foxes and a couple of barking deer and *nilgai*. Drop-pings of the sloth bear and hyenas in many areas of the park indicated their presence but we were not lucky enough to see either. Com-

And sure enough, we spotted a chital lying down with a leopard on top of it, holding the chital by the throat.



mon peafowl, red jungle fowl, blossom-headed parakeet, red-vented bulbul, white-breasted kingfisher, golden-backed woodpecker, green pigeon, jungle babbler, white-backed vulture, Indian roller, and green bee-eater were some of the commonly seen birds. Notable were the crested serpent eagle, stork-billed kingfisher, yellow-fronted pied woodpecker, adjutant stork, and the Malabar pied hornbill.

On the second morning of our stay in the park, a tigress with two cubs was reported to have been sighted in the Chakradhara grassland, just a few kilometers from the main gate and we headed that way. The tigers were in the grasses and we could not see them from the road. 7–8 jeeps had already converged at that point and we had to await our turn for getting onto an elephant and go into the grasses to take a close look at the big cats. They were so well camouflaged that an untrained eye would easily overlook their presence there. The elephants moved as close as 8–10 m from the tigers. The tigress was resting and the cubs generally playing around. It was an exciting and exhilarating sight. We were told that the cubs were 8–9 months old. They seemed oblivious to the elephants and their riders.

But as word spread, more and more tourists landed up and the tigress decided that it was time to move. The elephants followed them till they crossed the road and moved on towards the hills. Some 8–10 jeeps were waiting on the road to watch them, leaving very little room for the tigers to pass and the cubs seemed a bit alarmed and hesitant to cross the road.

Though the probability of sighting a tiger in Bandhavgarh is quite high, it's always a matter of chance—a minute here or there

The tigress was resting and the cubs generally playing around



makes a lot of difference—and our sighting of the leopard and that of another tigress and her two cubs drove home the point very strongly.

A misunderstanding with the jeep driver actually helped us spot the other tigress with two cubs at Ghodademon. The tigress with her cubs was sighted in the morning in that area. In the evening, we asked our driver to take us to the same area. But somehow he thought that we wanted to go in the opposite direction and took us towards Mehman Pond. On realising the error, we retraced our path and moved towards Ghodademon. It was getting late and we crossed jeeps which were returning from Ghodademon disappointed that the tigers did not come out in the open. We carried on all the same and just as we reached Ghodademon, the tigress decided to make an appearance and moved out of the bushes and crossed over an exposed hillock to disappear into a depression below. We were also lucky to see her two cubs moving around some distance away. The cubs seemed more like fully grown tigers and we were told that they were nearly two years old and might leave their mother's side soon. If we had directly come there without taking the detour, we might have left with the other jeeps and missed the

tigress and her cubs.

Stretching our luck further, we moved down the road to see if we could sight the tigress again. To our great joy, as we turned a bend, we saw the tigress climbing up from the depression. She came up and casually sat on a rock about 10 m from the road giving us an unobstructed view. There she sat preening herself, ignoring us completely. She did not even bother to turn her head as our driver opened and shut the door of the jeep making quite some noise. But then a *sambar* gave out an alarm call and instantly the tigress turned her head in that direction. Most probably she wasn't in search of a prey and apart from generally scanning the area, she did not stir and went back to her preening. We watched her for nearly 15 minutes and then had to reluctantly leave to make it to the main gate in time.

We trekked up the fort one day. The climb begins from Shesh Shaiya – a stone idol of Vishnu reclining on the serpent Shesh. Due to the heat, the going was slow and it took us nearly an hour to reach the temple at the top of the fort. All along the way to the top of the fort are stone idols of Vishnu in his various incarnations. There are a number of caves with inscriptions and pictures which are said to belong to the Mauryan period. The temple is quite picturesque and is devoted to Ram, Laxman, and Sita.

Besides the lake near the temple, there are two small lakes on the fort. These attract a lot of wildlife including tigers. The *Raja ka Machaa* is a stone seat on one of the outcrops of the fort and one can get a beautiful view of the forests below from this point. The guide claimed that from that point, during winter, tigers can be seen moving around in the forests below. We saw tiger pug marks and droppings on the fort as well. The fort also has a good bird life and we saw half a dozen *Malabar Pied hornbills* on a single tree. On the cliffs of the fort we could spot a couple of nests of the *long-billed vultures* with juveniles in it. We



spent the day on the fort and climbed down in time for the evening jeep ride.

This ride too had its share of confusion, but turned out to be the most eventful one when we saw the leopard on the kill. From the fort we drove to BadiGoofa but there the driver turned around and started moving in the direction of Sehra. While on the way to Sehra, some of us got the feeling that it wasn't such a good idea and that we should go back towards BadiGoofa and beyond and we compelled the driver to turn back. That hunch turned out to be very fruitful and we reached BadiGoofa just in time to watch the leopard throttle the *chital*.

We had our share of disappointments too when our jeep broke down in the middle of the forest. On the road were tiger pugmarks which seemed quite recent and while the jeep was being repaired, we heard the alarm call of a *sambar* followed by the roar of a tiger which seemed not too far away. By the time we got the jeep started, it was getting dark and we had to rush back to make it to the main gate before the deadline.

We spent a morning at the Bamera Dam in the Panpatha Sanctuary, about 12 km from Tala. A nature trail is being set up in the area and birdwatching along the trail was quite rewarding; notable sighting being that of the *stork-billed kingfisher*. Besides spotting a herd

of *chital*, we saw droppings of leopard, bear, and hyena. A long swim in the cool waters of the reservoir was a great pleasure in the scorching heat.



Shirish Waghulde

B TECH '81, M TECH '84, PH
D '96, MEMS, H-7

Shirish, an avid nature lover with a passion for the wilderness. He has been the CEO of IITBAA and an adjunct faculty at IIT Bombay. Known as 'Mahim baba' to a few and a gadfly to many. Shirish's avowed intention of "doing nothing" is belied by his ever questioning mind and roving feet that always carry him to trails rarely traveled.

Nation wants to know

Psephology. Also referred to as Fekology, and for a good reason. For months, a psephologist will talk about trends and swings, about Jats and Sikhs, about vote shares and caste factors and they will tell you who will win which election with what margin. And for a few months after the elections, more often than not, they will tell you why they got the numbers wrong. In rare cases, they get to boast about getting it right. One thing consistent about all Psephologists is that they are high on aesthetics and creativity. They create pretty charts and graphics coloured saffron and green. The animated charts speak to us eloquently. So much so, that we get totally engrossed and do not care if the predictions are going to go wrong again. Modi is going to win anyway, so why should we bother if his defeat is imagined by pretty images quoting an OBC voter or a past prehistoric trend. When Shabrukh Khan sings " Chaand Taare Tor Laoon", we don't believe him, right? We just enjoy the song. So also with this new age entertainment industry called Psephology. Watch, listen and enjoy without taking anything seriously. You can never go wrong watching someone else go wrong.

Meet Jai Mrug. He's an IITB alum, specialises in data analytics and more importantly, he's a Psephologist. You would have seen and heard him on the Times Now channel's election coverage debates. Yes, in debates "moderated" by an extreme Arnab Goswami

of the "nation wants to know" fame. Jai's singular distinction is that he is perhaps the only person who has not been interrupted by Arnab who is loud enough to be heard in your neighbours' house when their TV is on the blink. Because Jai gets his numbers quite right and narrates them with the help of something called the Spectrum graph. Speaks mellifluously and knowledgeably. Looks cute, fair and chubby. Smiles even if his numbers go a bit wrong. In this piece, Jai expounds on the perils of Psephology and shares tricks on making reasonably accurate predictions, never mind the fact that you like them going wrong. We must confess that this insightful piece was procured after a lot of coaxing, cajoling and arm twisting. What worked finally is the threat that we would lock him up with Arnab Goswami if he didn't turn in his piece.

Read on to find out what the nation wants to know...

Noseybee



Psephology - Nuances that Pertain to the Indian Demography

JAI MRUG

It all started in the year 1997. A leading Psephologist of India featured on the cover story of a now defunct magazine called Sunday. That triggered off the Mr. Curious in me and I thought Psephology was a journey worth exploring.

To most Indians the success or failure of Psephology would be judged simply by whether you got the final outcome right or wrong. In a multi-party democracy and a first-past-the-post system like ours, there are several factors that can modify the final outcome and these define how uniquely psephology should operate in India.

In part this is about getting the sample right. Your sample needs to be random stratified, with sample sizes and outcomes prepared by those who have their feet on the ground.

In another part this is about getting the forecasting model right, many call this the conversion model or also the smoothening model.

The success of psephological agencies has swung like a pendulum, often erring completely and often being frighteningly close to the real outcome. There are two elections in particular that are interesting to note in this regard. In the 2004 elections practically every agency got it wrong. Almost all predicted an NDA win and the final outcome was UPA going ahead of NDA in terms of both votes and seats.

2014 was a contrast. Most polling agencies

To most Indians the success or failure of Psephology would be judged simply by whether you got the final outcome right or wrong.



were conservative about the performance of BJP. One agency however stuck its neck out, saying that BJP alone would win 291 seats. It turned out that the agency was the closest with BJP winning 284 seats. Most others gave NDA, inclusive of BJP, a forecast close to 272.

To understand how Psephology plays out in the Indian scenario, it is important to understand the differences between the two elections and how the mandates were defined.

Two factors contributed extensively to the NDA debacle of 2004. One was the phenomenon of the IOU (Index of Opposition Unity), the other was the phenomenon of a splintered polity in the first-past-the-post system. An example of how IOU could benefit a party/alliance is how the former UPA managed to rope in many smaller allies who helped UPA make it a one-vs-one contest and that led to a greater seat share for UPA in that election.

Several states bear testimony to this performance of UPA. Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu in particular. Here the UPA alliance polarized almost all the non NDA vote in its favour. These four states gave a massive lead to the UPA, 36 in Andhra

Pradesh, 29 in Bihar, 13 in Jharkhand, and all 39 in Tamil Nadu. More than half the tally of UPA came from these states in 2004. In these very states in 1999, NDA had won 103 seats.

A united alliance or a group of parties has the ability to swing last minute votes in its favour and as the marginal vote across seats gets added, it crosses a threshold where the vote share of the opponent ceases to matter. This is precisely what happened in the year 2004. In the states mentioned above, the vote share of

The success of psephological agencies has swung like a pendulum, often erring completely and often being frighteningly close to the real outcome.



BJP/NDA ceased to matter and the opposition had a cake walk. The IOU and last-minute swings have a great potential to upset the apple cart, and this is precisely what happened.

Another phenomenon that is worth noting is a quirk of fate of the first-past-the-post phenomenon which rewards in excess the performer and penalises in excess the under performer in a splintered polity. The vote to seat ratio can be used as a very effective indicator to understand how the vote distribution impacts the seat share of various parties in such a scenario. One of the most important indicators of this distribution is the vote to seat ratio of each of the parties.

Uttar Pradesh is a classic example of what can happen when a party fails to cross a particular threshold in terms of its vote share. In the mid and late nineties, BJP benefitted the most from the first-past-the-post system, winning a higher seat share for relatively lesser number of votes, thus the parties vote to seat ratio was relatively lower. Gradually towards 2004, the parties vote share decreased, but the first-past-the-post system heavily penalised

the party, reducing it to a marginal player.

In 1998 BJP won one seat for every 3,65,000 votes it polled. This was its lowest vote to seat ratio meaning that it was its most effective conversion, with the party winning 52 of the 80 seats at stake. On the other hand, SP won one seat for every 6,61,000 votes it polled. BSP won one seat for every 30,50,661 votes it polled. In 1999, BJP won one seat for every 5,17,000 votes while SP played catch up winning one seat for every 5,03,000 votes and BSP won one seat for every 8,57,000 votes. This led to a more level playing field with no party posting a single digit seat tally and each posting a respectable performance. In 2004 the situation completely reversed. BJP won one seat for every 11,81,000 votes while SP won one seat for every 4,06,000 votes and BSP won one seat for every 6,91,000 votes. In 2004 the first-past-the-post system penalised BJP heavily and the party won just 10 seats in the state in this election.

Psephologically one of the biggest challenges is to be able to find out confidently how the vote share differential of each of the parties is spread across the state, and develop an ability to convert that differential into seats. The 2014 election saw BJP swing the state of Uttar Pradesh massively winning 71 out of 80 seats. Again it was a very favourable vote to seat conversion that gave the party the massive mandate.

A third factor that is becoming increasingly clear in Indian politics is the gubernatorial nature of elections in the country, where the winner takes almost all the marginal vote and leaves the opposition with bare nothings. Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in 2004 and 2014, and Gujarat in 2014 displayed the gubernatorial trend, where in a two-party contest the loser polled close to a zero or a single digit tally.

Psephologists must clearly understand how to translate a vote share into a decisive seat share, especially understand how a



Image credit: Frits Ablefeldt <http://openinnovation.cc/photo/269/Knowledge-and-books-Color-illustration.html>

threshold vote share in a two-party system gives a one-way mandate to the winning party. It is important to understand the social spread of the mandate as much as the political spread. Only such an understanding will help comprehend landslides,

The mandate in the February 2015 Delhi elections where AAP took all is an indicator of how effectively the social spread of a party can impact its political fortunes, and produce a one-way result.

An understanding of the new aspirations of a fast-urbanising India, the differing political landscape of every state, along with the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system can help develop a nuanced model that may help forecast outcomes of elections in India.



Jai Mrug
B TECH, MECH. E, '96, M
MGMT '01, H I

Jai Mrug specializes in number crunching, and is passionate about Indian Railways and Elections. He is the in-house Psephologist at Times Now, and recently founded an analytic company Bombay 76 Analytics (b76 analytics), which is being incubated at SINE, IIT Bombay. In the space of Inventory Analytics, he has carried out Implementations of SAP Supply Chain packages.

"I saw" – The Reality of the Dazzling City Mumbai!

SONIKA MALLOTH

*I saw her tender hands through the noises
as her mom cuddled her; her innocent eyes
conjured a smile up many stressed faces.
I saw the blissful heart, with no worries
protected and safe from insane flurries
at the same time...*

*I saw her blistered hands, as she scrounged
around for a little food, shelter, affection.
Scornful looks always haunted and challenged.
I saw the contended heart; orphaned by poverty
this kid faced all odds with utmost maturity.
I saw his money flow for baneful rum and weed.
He crushed a father's dream in that night pub.
His pointless life had no intentions to succeed.
I saw the lustful heart, a wealthy spoiled brat
unaware of reality of life, a selfish autocrat
at the same time...*

*I saw him stumble as his shaky legs bore the load
the father crushed himself for his child's dream
quenching his thirst with sweat he sorely moved
I saw the annoyed heart, this ignorant mortal
cursed himself, only love opens no wealthy portal.
I saw her glossy pink lips curve at the edge
she silently blushed going down the memory lane
recalling the day she met him on that bridge
I saw the loving heart, when he profoundly kissed
the princess of his life, forever loved and cared
at the same time...*

*I saw her fake ecstasy, as she earned each penny.
The sheer pleasure in divine meeting of two souls
never reached her; it was just a matter of money.*



*I saw the empty heart, her sense of reasoning died
when she was six, ripped, torn apart but never cried.
I saw him walk briskly analyzing profit and loss-
a straight face with permanent frown did slavery
for high salary and had no time for anyone except his boss.
I saw the ambitious heart, always hungry for more.
Will he ever realize he is running for the wrong door
at the same time...*

*I saw him wash with uttermost sincerity and passion.
He smiled as he received two pounds for each pile
generously shared without worrying about starvation.
I saw the contented heart, thanked each of the gods
for all he could get as they blessed from the clouds.
I saw him alone, strolling along the deserted park,
all his riches protected his body but not his soul
which silently wept as he felt lost in the dark.
I saw the forlorn heart, after ninety years of battle-
sick and tired of snatching wealth, had none to prattle
at the same time...*

*I saw him forage near each and every garbage patch;
he valiantly fought all evil – dogs, crows, cows, bulls
shivering in ragged clothes, cold under a tree branch.
I saw the brave heart, with no grief or self-pity*

*for he was free to choose his journey and destiny.
I saw life, as it is, through the dazzling mirror
through the towers, through the slums, rich and poor
good and evil, right and wrong, go hand in hand here.
I saw terror attacks, blackened ocean – blue sky
raving rains – furious floods, I saw the city Mumbai.*



Sonika Malloth
B TECH, CSE, '13, H 10

Sonika is an avid drummer who has studied till grade 3 of Trinity College of Music, London. After having written several poems and getting one published in a book titled 'Inspired by Tagore' published by British Council, she calls herself an amateur poetess. When not at work, she can be usually found song-writing or cheering the local rock and heavy metal bands and wishing that, someday, she would listen to Linkin Park, Tool and Iron Maiden live. She is a founding team member of LT Research where she works presently.

Srikant Rao and Ravindra Kini: Affordable Business Solutions

What's Common to Software and Shampoo Sachet?

©

MOLOY K BANNERJEE, SIDDHARTH BANNERJEE AND

P RANGANATH SASTRY

While most of India's computer-related economic success has come via international business opportunities, this story of entrepreneurship is about having struck gold right here in India. Entrepreneurs don't just seize the opportunities they see; they also create them by understanding needs. In February 2004, Srikant Rao and his partner Ravindra Kini did something of this kind when they established a unique business model, specifically targeting the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector's business analytics and computing needs: an unusual market in an industry obsessed with big contracts from large international business enterprises.

This shift from established client bases was a result of 'blue sky thinking' at the end of lengthy careers spent tending their own and others' firms. But their biggest source of inspiration has been C.K. Prahalad's ideation of 'Bottom of the Pyramid' (BOP) and 'sachetization'—terms referring to clients who make up the lowest rung of the economic ladder and hence can only afford to procure products or pay for services in small doses (terms popularized by the sales of sachets of shampoo).

By choosing to service SMEs—organizations that are the least affluent—Srikant and Kini have taken a risk few others would be willing to entertain. Yet their success is testament to the fact that entrepreneurship is more about the spread and nurturing of ideas rather

than merely chasing big money.

We meet Srikant and Kini at our offices in the north Bangalore commercial hub of Koramangala. Right on the dot, the first thing that strikes you when you meet the duo is their shared sense of exuberance. As the two take us through their story, we begin to realize the enormous power of simplicity that they have built into their business model. They adopted and incorporated the principles of BOP and sachetization with ease into their business model and created a seemingly new approach to taking the IT business to a resource-poor segment of consumer population.

The passion with which they have built the business is evident in the passion with which they expound their principles. What comes out is their clarity of thought, their patience and dedication as they steered the company through the turbulent initial years. They complement each other well and so their business partnership as well as their personal camaraderie has been a successful one. Without a doubt, they are a team to watch in the coming years.

But before we delve into how exactly Srikant and Kini managed to develop and expand this unique business model, it's important to understand what brought them to this juncture in life. Growing up, they both remember that even though there was always a strong emphasis on academics, their parents permitted them a degree of freedom that



many Indian parents are not known to do. For example, they were often encouraged to participate in sports and other extra-curricular activities. This was often frowned upon in a society that focussed on academic achievement, seen as a direct link to job security. But this socialization benefited them; they grew up with well-rounded personalities and developed crucial inter-personal and social skills that have stood them in good stead throughout their professional careers.

Kini, one of two identical twins, was born in Mangalore, one of southern India's famous textile towns. His early education was at Kendriya Vidyalaya and he completed his graduation from MES College, both in Bangalore. Kini attributes his ability to multi-task and get things done to his all-round development while at Kendriya Vidyalaya and also to his early exposure to a professional environment as he accompanied his father to work. Every summer vacation from the ninth class onwards, Kini participated in an internship at his father's office (a small scale pharmaceutical manufacturing unit in Bangalore).

He claims that this early training gave him

a sound foundation in the fundamentals of business management and related operations. On completing his bachelor's degree in commerce, Kini decided to join his father and supplement the family income. Simultaneously, he pursued a course in cost accounting since he was keen on continuing his education.

In contrast, Srikant's father was an officer in State Bank of India. This meant frequent transfers from city to city and a new home every few years. Srikant attended schools in different parts of the country—Coimbatore, Chennai, Virudhanagar, Bellary and Bangalore—and remembers very vividly that even though academics were always a priority, his parents would encourage him to pick up swimming, soccer, debating and other such extra-curricular hobbies. After a year at National College, Basavanagudi in Bangalore, Srikant got a degree in mechanical engineering from IIT Bombay. Two years later, he armed himself with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from IIM Calcutta.

Throughout their corporate careers, both Srikant and Kini have been involved with start-ups and have actively pursued opportuni-

ties to set up operations across various sectors and businesses. In these roles, they gained invaluable first-hand experience of how Indian manufacturing industries function. They also learnt how to address the challenges of growth and uncertainty by innovating in business processes at every stage. All this would eventually prove to be extremely critical in their entrepreneurial roles.

More importantly, as Srikant notes, they learnt that ‘the culture in start-up organizations needs to be different; essentially, people need to be encouraged to think and act on their own’. Kini goes on to say, ‘In the context of Indian culture, there is always a tendency to seek approval for everything we do. We tend to look up to some authority figure who we respect to guide us. Nobody says, “Look, this is my idea, I will do it my way, and I know I can do it.” That would be construed as rebellious.’ This aspect of taking ownership and shouldering responsibility is something both of them learnt in their careers in start-up enterprises.

Srikant’s first job, in 1986, was with a TVS Group company—Sundaram Clayton’s railway products division at Hosur. He was among the first management trainees that the company had recruited. Interestingly, the division’s only customer was the Indian Railways. This particular business unit was just three years old at that time and had a start-up feel about it. Srikant chose to begin in the projects division, as he felt that he would get to actually apply his knowledge, both of engineering and management, and also get greater exposure to a number of different functions. To his pleasure, he found that the work was not routine and there were new challenges every day. Most importantly, this business unit provided tangible outcomes, making his professional experience there all the more satisfying.

During his first two years at Sundaram Clayton, Srikant gained extensive experience in various aspects of project management, particularly in managing labour, sales, liaising

with vendors, exposure to legal entities in finance, and so on. His biggest takeaway were the lessons in efficiency and elegance in the way that the Indian Railways had developed the ideal systems for planning and implementation, despite its enormous size.

Kini, on the other hand, started his career at the age of twenty-one, as accounts assistant at Karnataka Oilseeds Federation, a quasi state government enterprise, which was also, at that time, a start-up. Established along the

After fruitful careers spent tending their own and others’ firms, Srikant Rao (left) and Ravindra Kini (right) decided to take a risk



lines of the Anand Milk Co-operatives model, it was designed to create an integrated system of production, procurement, processing of oilseeds, and marketing of edible oil and its by-products.

But soon he realized that professional growth in a semi-governmental organization would be slow and restricted, and depended on the number of years of service rather than entrepreneurial promise. The next challenge that the young Kini took on was an assignment as finance manager with another quasi start-up—the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT). Under Dr Sam Pitroda, one of India’s leaders in innovation, C-DoT was vested with full authority and total flexibility to develop state-of-the-art telecommunication technology to meet Indian telecom needs. In this capacity, Kini guided the team which set up processes for computerized accounting, Provident Fund accounting, project accounting, etc.

At the same time, in 1988, a relatively young Srikant, barely twenty-five years of age, was picked to head the materials management function of the railway products

division of Sundaram Clayton. It was a major advancement as most others at this level in the company hierarchy were in their late thirties and forties and already had over twenty years of experience under their belts. What's more, India was then in the grip of inflation and money was tight for all, but Srikant's job was to 'keep seven production lines going, as simple as that!' Three years later, in 1991, Srikant was put in charge of sales for Karnataka and Kerala regions for TVS Electronics, overseeing

They set up a unique business model specifically targeting the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector's business analytics and computing needs.



both direct sales to enterprise customers and through dealers to retail customers.

On sales tours, Srikant discovered something fascinating. He found that his dealers had established their own informal computer components re-sale channels. Most of the PCs at the time were assembled by neighbourhood computer assemblers who sourced components from the grey market. However, peripherals (like printers and UPS, for instance) were invariably sourced from an established company. Since the buyer would want both as a package, the PC assembler would go around to the dealers, negotiate the best rate for a printer and sell it along with the PC as a total package.

When Srikant noticed this, he thought, 'Why not formalize this as a business model?' So he invited the 200-odd assemblers for a dinner along with his dealers and discussed formalizing the rules of engagement—like stocking norms, payment terms, commissions, etc. In six months, Srikant had converted the selling process into a two-tier distribution structure and saw the volume of sales grow

exponentially, beating even New Delhi, then the nation's top market for PCs. Srikant's innovation in this instance was to go out into the field himself (often riding in the back of an autorickshaw), seek out the business opportunity and create a market where none existed before, instead of waiting for orders from the corporate head office.

Interestingly, after working this long for Indian businesses, Kini and Srikant, independent of each other, made strategic moves to multinational brands. They both sensed that ICT would make a huge impact in India. Kini joined an Australian start-up, Index Computing, which was the software branch of ANZ Bank. He headed the finance department which would eventually become ANZ IT. In this role, Kini gained extensive experience in managing the challenges of exponential growth in terms of headcount and projects, all in an environment that was new to him. His stint with multinational corporations (MNCs) began here, as did the need to work at odd hours due to poor connectivity, a completely new experience. In fact, telecommunication facilities were so poor then that even landline long-distance facilities, never mind mobile phones or e-mail, were scarce and overly expensive.

Around the same time, Srikant too decided that it was time he got exposure to global brands and moved to Microland—a networking company which was in talks with Compaq to be their first distributor in India. The organizational culture here was unique in that the mindset was to 'question the traditional 20-30 per cent growth rate of tech companies and ask why we can't expand at 400 per cent year on year'. The only way to accomplish this, according to Srikant, was 'to think more like a businessman, rather than a sales executive'.

Once this mode of thought was activated, he began to realize that in meetings with clients on future projections, often 'people didn't know what they were talking about, and you

knew more than others what will happen in two to three years' time'. This foresight, along with a constantly evolving organizational structure and an open working culture at Microland helped inculcate long-term entrepreneurial traits in Srikant. The fast-paced and ever-changing organizational structure meant that in effect, two years of work experience could be compressed into a three-month timeframe.

Another important facet of his executive role in this small business was to benefit from the mentorship of Pradeep Kar and B.A. Raghu. According to Srikant, both these 'extraordinary managers' taught him the simple secret of planning and doing. In his words, 'there is only one way to find out if your plan is right or wrong—by doing'. His experiences illustrate the enormous impact leaders can have in building in-company entrepreneurship. But a recurring problem when taking these risks is that senior, conservative people in the organizational hierarchy are often not on board.

This is where Srikant learned 'how to fight and take on the politics of an organization'. He identified a senior manager (B.A. Raghu) who was his benefactor and got an assurance from him that if anyone was to impede his work, Raghu would sort it out. Srikant remembers that 'having these tremendous role models' who had confidence in him 'really helped [in shaping] me'. Overall, his memory of his stint at Microland is one of working with a 'greatgroup' that was 'enriching yet fun'.

In the early 1990s, global giant AT&T had just entered the Indian market and was hiring Indian sales managers for the computer business unit of NCR Corporation (which had recently been acquired by AT&T). Srikant was keen to actually work in a multinational company, to gain from exposure to international practices in business. So when a role came up in sales and marketing for AT&T/

NCR's start-up computer business in India, he gladly accepted it. He reflects on the role of serendipity or good luck as a contributing factor in the success of an entrepreneur.

For instance, in 1992, he got a call asking him whether he had a valid passport. And since he did, and the other prospective manager didn't, he was taken on a business trip to Singapore (his first time abroad). Around this time, an old acquaintance Shanthi Kumar (from Computer land) joined AT&T in the

In March 2005, they had three customers. By 2009, they counted over seventy-five small- and medium-sized businesses among their clients.



same business unit as Srikant, and was posted in Hong Kong. Actually, when Srikant had left Microland, he had sent a courtesy e-mail stating his move to AT&T. Luckily, the business plan he conceived for the India business landed on Shanthi Kumar's desk and this set the wheels in motion in a direction that Srikant had never imagined.

Kumar requested that Srikant come to Hong Kong and help him put together the business plan for the Asia-Pacific region. An original travel plan to Hong Kong of one week eventually stretched to five weeks, including a trip to the US, where Srikant had an opportunity to interact with the NCR manufacturing head, Mark Hurd (who has since been the CEO of HP), and propose some really radical ideas such as setting up a factory in Taiwan and managing distribution from there.

The trip was a success and Srikant moved to Hong Kong to embark on yet another start-up—this one resulting in a business worth \$80 million, spread across eleven countries over a span of two years. But by 1996, Srikant recognized that his core competency was

India-centric and had the foresight to see India growing as an emerging market. So he decided to return to India to work with NCR, which had by then been divested by AT&T.

At this time, Kini too moved from ANZ IT to NCR India as the business pricing and planning manager. He saw the position as a great opportunity since the NCR India office was just being set up, giving him a chance to institute the India operations from scratch. The move also proved to be a turning point for his entrepreneurial ambitions because this was where he met Srikant for the first time. Kini was handling pricing and planning for all the business divisions and Srikant was the head of the computers division, and the duo—one a sales manager and the other a finance professional—teamed up in a successful partnership that eventually became the basis for their entrepreneurial venture a decade later.

The seeds of their entrepreneurial ambitions were sown early on. For example, one of the software products NCR owned was a transaction server called Top End. NCR sold this particular business to BEA Systems, which owned a competing transaction server called Tuxedo. Between them, BEA Systems and NCR had cornered 80 per cent of the global market share. BEA Systems, at that time, with global revenues of \$125 million, did not have any distributors in India. Srikant saw a business opportunity here. He submitted a proposal to BEA to become their distributor in India. They liked the idea and Srikant thought that he now had a business of his own.

But things didn't exactly work out that way. BEA wanted him to be their country manager (rather than an independent contractor) in India and predictably Srikant protested as, by this point, he wanted to go out on his own. He remembers them saying, 'It will be like your own business. All we'll do is to pay your salary for three months and after that you are on your own. We will not carry you beyond that.' It looked like a fair deal, a sort

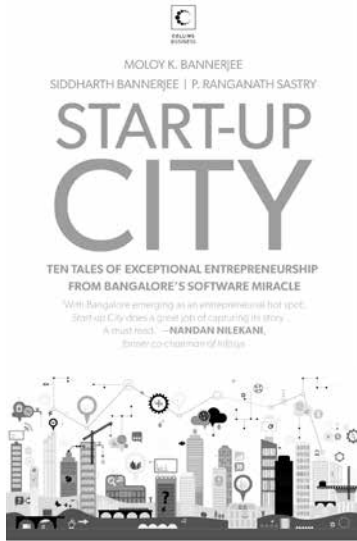
of semientrepreneurship offer. He agreed and eventually ended up staying with BEA for six years in that role. Business grew for BEA, both in India and outside, and it went on to become a billion-dollar company. But the urge to be his own boss never really left Srikant.

Kini, meanwhile, declined an offer to move to Sydney while at NCR, and took up an assignment as CFO of a software company in Bangalore. Unfortunately, their plans to go public did not go as planned due to bad market conditions and the unforeseen effects of the 9/11 attacks in the US. With the IT industry not doing so well, Kini did not see an enduring role for himself as a CFO and opted out to take on the role of a full-scale entrepreneur.

It was around this time, during one of their casual conversations, that Kini bounced around the idea of starting up an enterprise with Srikant. Having been friends for over a decade, their families had grown close over time, and the two often chatted about combining their prospects. Srikant remembers vividly that they both came to the realization, almost simultaneously, during a school-related event in which their children were participating, that only if they quit their jobs would they have the drive to see what they could accomplish together. So after a detailed discussion of ideas, they decided to collaborate and formalize their business partnership.

This is where their story gets interesting. Instead of going forward with any business decisions right away, Srikant and Kini decided to do something very unusual. They went on a vacation with their families to the Himalayas! First, they went to Delhi, hired a cab and took off on a tour of the picturesque Himachal Pradesh by road, and then, on an impulse, they extended their holiday and went to Nepal.

When they arrived back in Bangalore after nearly two months, they were well rested and in a clearer state of mind. So now when they



contemplated their business prospects, they reached a conclusion: ‘We did not want to be another company in IT or ITES.’

Srikant notes that they agreed on ‘no BPO, call centre or software development. That was certain and very clear. Between the two of us’, he elaborates, ‘we had hands-on experience in all business functions. We had started businesses for others; we had run businesses; we had worked for Indian and multinational companies; we had good exposure to business practices in India as well as overseas. But what should we do?’

Business consulting was a strong option as their business exposure seemed to point in that direction. But if they wanted to operate in the consulting domain, which market should they target? Srikant felt it was ‘definitely not the overseas market, as there were too many players there already, and moreover, the big and well established ones always have an edge.’

So they took a long and hard look at the Indian market. They realized that in this domestic market, the large organizations tended to prioritize branded companies at the

expense of smaller companies to do business with. This gave them a clever idea; maybe they should exclusively target SMEs—an enormous yet neglected market with a tremendous upside by way of business potential. Also, this was in tune with their passion to be the change agents impacting Indian SMEs.

As part of their research, Srikant and Kini decided to explore the terrain further and so they drove around southern India—Chennai, Pondicherry, Coimbatore, Peenya, Mysore and Hosur—and met whoever they felt could be of help to them. With the clear objective of understanding the Indian SME segment, they heeded various inputs given by people in virtually all small- and medium-sized sectors, across industries, as well as across states.

They also found that, contrary to what the media was projecting regarding the slow death of SMEs in India, almost every small business owner was in fact talking about making greater investments. So in reality, they were part of a growing market that would only welcome technological help to develop further.

On their tours, they also had the privilege to meet some ‘senior gurus’ in the field, as Srikant likes to refer to them. Most notable among these teachers are Prof. Sadagopan, Prof. Deepak Phatak and Prof. Ashok Jhunjunwala. Speaking to these leaders revealed that the IT industry’s biggest focus while trying to address the needs of small- and medium-sized businesses was ‘affordable computing’. Issues of cost and connectivity were topmost on the minds of IT vendors. This posed questions such as: how to bring the cost of PCs from Rs 30,000 (\$750) down to less than Rs 10,000 (\$250)? Or else, how to secure a reliable and affordable broadband connection?

With costs of technology being increasingly lowered, Internet access becoming easier and business prospects growing, Kini and Srikant decided that their new venture would be focussed on tailoring a business package

specifically to be utilized by SMEs. It was certainly an advantage that nobody else was really looking at the SME market. Srikant and Kini reasoned that here lay a virgin market with great untapped potential. The trick to turning it into a business opportunity lay in combining low-cost computing and telecommunication with niche business consulting solutions that help stabilize the decision-making cycle.

But to be fair, there was a measure of scepticism as well. Among the sceptics were many SME owners who bluntly voiced their concerns: ‘You two have worked for multinational companies until now. What if somebody offers you a fancy salary? If you take up such an offer, wouldn’t that leave us in the lurch?’ Kini recalls. ‘One of the earliest things that we had to do was to convince our prospects that we are here to stay, and are not going to run away.’

But their biggest revelation came when they had the privilege of meeting and interacting with C.K. Prahalad in 2005. The professor from Coimbatore had popularized the BOP and sachetization concepts. From him they learnt that there are tremendous benefits to companies who choose to serve these markets in ways responsive to their needs. Things just clicked for Srikant and Kini at this point, aided no doubt, by their keeping an open mind and disregarding the various criticisms cast on Prof. Prahalad, calling him an out-of-touch academic.

Generally speaking, the dominant assumption is that the less affluent are not brand-conscious. But on the contrary, they are very brand-conscious and also extremely value-conscious out of sheer necessity to save every last paisa or penny. Also, contrary to the popular view, BOP consumers are busy connecting and networking with others. They are rapidly exploiting the benefits of mobile information networks, and again, due to necessity, accept advanced technology readily.

But in order to convert the BOP into

a consumer market, one has to create the capacity to consume. This is based on three simple principles—affordability, accessibility and availability. Sachetization, or the bundling of goods and services into small, cheap and readily available packages, is the answer to creating the capacity to consume. So in short, the idea that SMEs would not pay for quality was a myth. In fact, their scepticism was a result of their experiences with a few dodgy IT vendors who had sold them hardware and software and then not provided the necessary postsales support and back-up.

So the conversation with Prahalad helped Srikant and Kini focus their thinking on the SME sector in India. The concept of BOP fitted neatly into the needs of this segment. Here they clearly saw the need for IT, telecommunication, business software and business consulting, all put together in an affordable package—the very sachetization that the professor recommended.

The secret was to achieve large-scale operations without sacrificing quality. Essentially, if Srikant and Kini could price their services in a way that the client saw their value deepen over a period of time, then they would have a workable business model. Affordable Business Solutions (ABS) was born—replete with the logo indicating a triangle representing the pyramid.

Next, they began looking at the most widespread applications of sachetization and found that these were generally in government-financed welfare projects and with NGOs, for example, in e-learning, education, health care for rural market, etc. However, their intuition told them that a recipient who pays for services will value them more and in turn not create a dependency syndrome where he expects things for free always. Having done their homework diligently, ABS saw three areas where they could provide value to customers in the SME segment—IT, education and business consulting.

IT was the easiest of the lot. The IT giants had no interest in addressing this segment by themselves, focussing only on the large enterprise market. Either they did not understand the SME segment at all or they did not want to address it from the point of view of value added to their businesses. ABS's challenge was to get major businesses to buy in, but they knew that the traditional route would probably not work.

So they went to IT vendors like Microsoft and IBM and said to them, 'Look, you are not looking at these SME markets for some reason. If someone does approach you, he has to buy your software with licences for each user. On top of that, he has to pay for the hardware, networking and maintenance contract and even has to pay implementation partners to help him set up his IT operation and run it. The very thought of spending so much upfront will deter him from proceeding further with you. But he does need IT support. So he goes to the grey market, buys hardware at much lower prices, gets pirated software and gets his IT set-up operational on his own, albeit not very efficiently. Does he like doing all this, does he like using pirated software? The answer is always going to be a 'no'. The vast majority of people we have spoken with don't want to deal with this mess. But they have no choice as your prices are simply not affordable.'

So ABS proposed an alternative model to them, explained here in a highly simplistic way. Suppose the branded software along with the networking and hardware products costs \$20,000 (Rs 10,00,000) plus \$5,000 (Rs 2,00,000) per year for maintenance and upkeep (after the first year). Over a five-year period, the cost totals \$40,000 (Rs 20,00,000). Divided into sixty monthly segments, that comes to \$667 month (Rs 33,333). This is where sachetization comes in. ABS asks the customer to pay them \$700 (Rs 35,000) per month instead and in return gives a package of services, which

will include hardware, software and maintenance; essentially everything to improve his productivity in business. The small business owner only pays a small amount on a monthly basis for a service that he is getting, not a product, and as long as he sees value in it, he continues to pay for the services. For him, there is no large upfront payment; he does not have to pay for each individual service and he does not have to maintain the equipment.

For their part, ABS proposed hosting all the software on their servers, from which the SME owner can access their applications through the Internet. Obviously they have built in enough security into all the transactions, and moreover, the pricing structure is utility based. Their thinking is aptly summarized by Srikant: 'As long as I have a satisfied customer, I will continue getting the money.'

ABS has a leasing arrangement with its suppliers, IBM, for example, for the equipment towards which they make monthly payments. So, despite possessing capital equipment, ABS is only paying monthly and does not incur heavy cash outflow upfront. The software vendor, Microsoft, for instance, assigns ABS as service providers' licence to rent out the software to any number of customers. This is not allowed under a normal licence. In fact, ABS has to send a monthly statement detailing how many customers they are leasing to, and based on that, they pay a licence fee.

Overall, Srikant explains, 'What could have been an initial investment of hundred thousand rupees for the SME owner has now become a few thousand rupees per month. The vendors are happy because they get more over a five-year period and the customers are happy because they get all the IT-based services they need at a monthly fee and there is no long term risk for them.'

This application of the principles of BOP and sachetization to IT is now called SAAS by the industry, an abbreviation for 'software as a service'. By default, ABS are the pioneers of

SAAS,

and Srikant and Kini are often invited to address seminars on this innovative concept. A direct example of this model in action is a small company called WildCraft. With eighteen stores spread over India and a factory in Bangalore, they desperately needed an affordable solution to their distributed accounting and inventory control processes. The costs

of carrying too much inventory was cutting into the money needed for their own

Also critically important, as they put it, 'is how quickly you can translate an idea into a business plan and how quickly you move from the strategizing and planning stage to the action stage without stopping to cross every t and dot every i.'



growth. By opting for the services offered by ABS, Wildcraft has been able to manage their inventory and finances and embark on an exponential growth path with absolutely no capital expenditure.

Speaking of services, Srikant and Kini bring up the two other areas of ABS's expertise—education and business consulting. In the education domain, ABS has created a curriculum consisting of a number of small modules in many functional areas. These constitute a formal skill upgrading application for people learning on the job, and depending on their need, these modules are used for educating personnel in English or the local language such as Tamil, Kannada, Telegu, etc. The courses are also offered in remote areas and at convenient timings (evenings and weekends) so that their accessibility is maximized. At this stage, ABS has very consciously avoided e-learning because they feel it is not

very effective.

In their business consulting suite, ABS offers services across functional areas for an extended period—a sort of 'virtual manager'—until almost all functions can be covered internally. This is usually an eighteen-month period up to a point where a company becomes self-operative. This total offering—IT services, education and business consulting—has now been termed as 'business transformation'.

Srikant and Kini's amazing journey and experiences make their thoughts on entrepreneurship and the qualities required to succeed in business extremely valuable. Srikant often uses visualization to describe the process of imagining their entrepreneurial journey. Visualizing here means speculating on what will happen down the line in two/three/five years from now; what are market expectations; changes in the environment; which sectors will shape up to have an impact, and so on. Also critically important, as they put it, 'is how quickly you can translate an idea into a business plan and how quickly you move from the strategizing and planning stage to the action stage without stopping to cross every t and dot every i.' The difference becomes apparent when we glance at their individual careers, where their roles have always been less structured—in start-ups, there were no set rules. The markets were new and they had to invent their own rules. They were clear in their concepts, but these had to be put into a new perspective in order to succeed.

We couldn't help wonder if his education at an IIM contributed to Srikant's becoming an entrepreneur. Not directly, he explains. Back then, it was not covered in the curriculum and nobody thought of entrepreneurship as a career path. The objective was to get a job in a premier Indian bluechip company and move up the hierarchy. The success stories of leadership that were discussed were about leaders and executives in large companies, not

entrepreneurs.

One didn't really have role models.

Which brings us to the type of 'associates' hired at ABS; Srikant and Kini do not like to call them employees. ABS does not specifically look for people with fancy academic qualifications and prefers to hire personnel with some functional experience in an SME. They have experimented successfully with women who had taken a break in their careers for whatever reason. Srikant and Kini offered them part-time employment and flexible work hours.

In HR terms, the bonding among the employees is strong. Several of the personnel are from small towns, are fired up to prove their worth, are generally more ambitious and interact well with the SME customer base. Srikant has a very interesting story about how he gained his first customer. "This was in August 2004. Seetharamiah, one of the first people we met after conceptualizing ABS, is a doyen of the automotive components industry in Chennai. "Who are your other customers?" he asked us. "No one; you would be our first customer" was our honest answer. "Fine. You are on," he said, "because you will ensure that the project will not fail!"

In the period between June 2004 when they began and March 2005, they had three customers. In the following year, they got twenty customers and the year after that, fifty customers. By 2009, they counted over seventy-five small- and medium-sized businesses among their clients—cutting across multiple industry verticals: auto-component, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), electronics manufacturing, agro-business, chemical companies, retail stores and pharmaceutical businesses.

In fact, Srikant states, 'We don't have any sales representatives. Our customers refer us to others. In Mysore, for example, we started off with two customers; now we have ten. We have a presence in practically every vertical. If each customer refers us to three prospects at

CEO level, we are sure to sign on at least one. So a 100 per cent growth year on year is pretty much guaranteed!'

Kini testifies that his priority is to expand, but within their means. He is also not keen to borrow or raise equity—only to utilize internally generated funds so as to mitigate risk. Another key issue is to keep attrition under control. For him, 'Retention of people is always a challenge. We have a leadership programme in which we mentor our fast-track associates and offer them more opportunities to develop themselves. We have told them that in three years, they should no longer be on anybody's payroll but should be running independent businesses; perhaps as our franchisee or as their own affordable business.'

In fact, ABS is now going to university and college campuses and telling students about the concepts that made their business successful. During these visits, they urge students 'to take this up, not as a career, but as entrepreneurs'. This is the model that ABS is now propagating. Srikant estimates, "The way ABS can grow is to have centres in each of the 480 SME clusters in India—across industry and across geography. If each cluster can have fifty to hundred customers, that's our growth path."

Based on their unique business model, ABS has evolved an exceptionally innovative concept that they call 'reverse franchising', which they intend to launch in the near future. In this scheme, the small-scale entrepreneur is fully equipped by ABS to start a business in terms of covering all upfront expenses related to office space, salaries, marketing costs, equipment, training, and so on. The entrepreneur makes no initial investment what so ever and is fully supported for three years by being given a nominal salary during this period. Once the risk is mitigated and the business is running well, the entrepreneurs have to start paying a royalty to ABS. With the software and hardware support provided by ABS, the

entrepreneur avoids having to deal with every single vendor and can focus instead on the task of running and growing the business.

But who would make an ideal combination for an entrepreneurial team? The ABS model has some very definite answers. The ideal team would consist of three specializations—one from a commercial background, one from finance and one from manufacturing. It is beneficial if they get along well with each other, especially if they have little or no prior experience. As for individuals, the duo identify three critical traits for success—enthusiasm, willingness to work hard and an innovative approach to work and life.

Beyond this, Srikant and Kini identify three questions all potential entrepreneurs must ask themselves prior to starting a business. ‘First, ask yourself why you want to be an entrepreneur; is it a fad; is it because you are frustrated in your job, or you don’t like your boss? What is your motive? Be very clear about this. If you say that it is to make money, that’s fine, but remember that money is a means to an end. What is the end that you are seeking? Second, what is your lifestyle now? Critically examine this—what are your needs and what are the things you can do without? Set aside enough resources to see yourself through two or three years. Negotiate all this with your spouse, your children, and with the immediate family because you will constantly need their support. Most important, negotiate this with yourself and freeze on this, otherwise you may mess up your life. Third, really understand what your customer wants. Remember, you are addressing a customer’s need. Ask yourself, ‘Do I have something which the customer is willing to pay for?’ and offer that. Stick to your core competencies, and make sure that they differentiate you from others.’

For example, Srikant’s core competencies include managing relationships, as is evident from his successful dealings and negotiations with organizations like IBM and Microsoft,

among others. Kini’s core competence is managing projects. He is able to visualize very well, yet at the same time, he can go into minute details and micro-plan what needs to be done, by whom and when. In short, he has learnt to prioritize his tasks, manages his time well and knows exactly what he can and cannot delegate.

At the end of the day, Srikant and Kini’s story is about two successful Indian entrepreneurs who took the risk, stuck to their values and fielded the challenges courageously. Their story could have been very different but for their innate self-confidence, certainty of purpose and perseverance. While many others in their positions would have chosen to remain secure in senior posts at an MNC, Srikant and Kini decided to partner with each other and strike out in uncharted territory.

Prior to doing so, they both accumulated valuable business expertise in various capacities and brought this knowledge and experience to the table while founding ABS. And by choosing to serve a market that comprises the least wealthy of India’s business population, ABS is not just promoting a business, it is genuinely addressing a need that many have passed by. India’s many small businesses and medium-scale industry sectors underscore this point. The enterprising duo prove once again that it is ideas that make a business great, not the amount of money there is to be made.

This piece has been extracted from 'Startup City: Ten Tales of Exceptional Entrepreneurship Bangalore's Software Miracle' by Mology Kumar Bannerjee, Siddharth Bannerjee and P. Ranganath Sastry. The book was published by Collins Business, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, India, in 2014. It is available for purchase on Amazon.in as a Hardcover and Kindle edition.



P Ranganath Sastry

P Ranganath Sastry has an engineering degree from BMS College, Bangalore University and a postgraduation in management studies from Pune University. His career began at Hindustan Aeronautics in Nashik, spanning management systems and quality assurance. He then spent five years as a faculty member at the HAL Management Academy in Bangalore teaching operations management and information technology. For the past twenty-five years, Ranganath has contributed much to software development and general management in companies based in Vadodara and Bangalore. His current interests include the study of Vedic philosophy, mentoring of students, lecturing on management systems at management institutes, and exploring the impact of technology on urban and rural life.



Moloy Kumar Bannerjee

Moloy Kumar Bannerjee is a graduate of Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, batch of 1968. He started his career in production planning and management information systems with the Tata Motors group in Mumbai, where he worked for nine years. He then moved to Bangalore and briefly taught operations management and systems design at the IIM there. Over the past thirty-odd years, Moloy has managed several companies (in India and abroad) within the software and product development space. He has a keen interest in philosophy and history and has lectured on and published papers about India's samkhya and yoga philosophy traditions.



Siddharth Bannerjee

Siddharth Bannerjee is a social entrepreneur who wears many hats, including as an international relations expert, public policy analyst and social research practitioner. He has published academic texts, commented on TV/radio and blogged on the subjects of civil society leadership, economic development and global governance reform. Professionally, Siddharth has worked as Director of Research at the Association for Canadian Studies and spent a year as a McGill University–Jeanne Sauvé Foundation Fellow for emerging young leaders, both in Montreal, Canada. He holds an MSc degree from the London School of Economics and is passionate about the non-profit sector, sports, social media, ICT and graphic novels.

Real Life Starts Only When You Leave

ANU MOULEE

“Words do not express thoughts very well. They always become a little different immediately after they are expressed, a little distorted, a little foolish.”

It seemed a perfectly good idea to be at the 25th reunion of a batch I sort of belong to so I went. That and the prospect of meeting folk I hadn't met in a long time. From the flurry of emails that made the rounds before the event, I had a vague feeling that I was expected to do something - anything - for the event. In the spirit of this I went to Hostel 10 a few days before the meet. Because you know, that is very helpful.

Alumni are so much the big cheese now that they have a secretary dedicated to us. The poor child at Hostel 10 was nervous about doing a good job. How to reassure without letting her know that the dramas of being a secy are not even a blink and miss moment in the movie of your life?

The day of the reunion. Either I am shallow or aesthetic or both, but my first thought is: will we ever have a clothing memento that is not a white polyester T-shirt emblazoned with something banal? I blame the Americans for the sartorial low that is the tee. Wouldn't that group photo have been vastly improved by designing a proper shirt - remind me again, why does IIT have an IDC if not for this?!

The important bit. I mingled with the crowd and was genuinely happy to meet up with folks known and unknown.

The dramas of taking group photos! They happened, proof now exists that a reunion happened; we can all crowd around it and not recognise people who are now 25 years older. After this, the PowerPoint Presentation on Important Topics aka how much are you going to cough up for the old Mater is a relief.

There were a couple of nifty tunes played along the way, though the gentleman singing gave me a cold stare as if to say “I very much doubt you know the words, forget the music”.

I was prepared to bunk bed at H10, but some high living is called for now that we are old and rich so we are at the Guest House. It is still shabby genteel. The geese are still around. So are the *moskis*. It feels good.

There are a few families around and some remarkably patient children. All the teenagers looking like Whatever!

Then there is a felicitation of some sort and in a sudden change, everyone has gone all classical in matters sartorial and pretty soon an “uttraiya” is being draped around us.

Joseph Campbell once wrote that the general social atmosphere of India is that of a co-ed boarding school with segregated sexes and depleted finances. This was back in the 50s but it was probably true of IIT in the 80s too. There is probably a book waiting to be written about all that IIT undergrad URST (unresolved sexual tension), but I am not holding out for it. Neither am I writing it. That URST probably still persists because you know,

Let's drink expensive alcohol in plastic glasses in our rooms now that 25 years have passed since we graduated.

someecards
user card



instead of moving towards co-ed boarding, we have a new girls hostel with high walls. Which requires a thorough Freudian analysis.

This I think is exacerbated by IIT being unapologetically undergraduate. There are noises now and then about “our PG alumni” and attempts to be part of the wider research community, but it is seemingly hard to shake off this overwhelming culture of male adolescence. It’s arguably part of the charm of the place, but you are very skeptical of it as an adult.

Proving this male adolescence atmosphere, by the time dinner happens groups have already been drinking a fair bit. Since I wasn’t invited, I assume I am not part of the cool/in/dissolute groups! Or just that I am female. And an ex-PG.

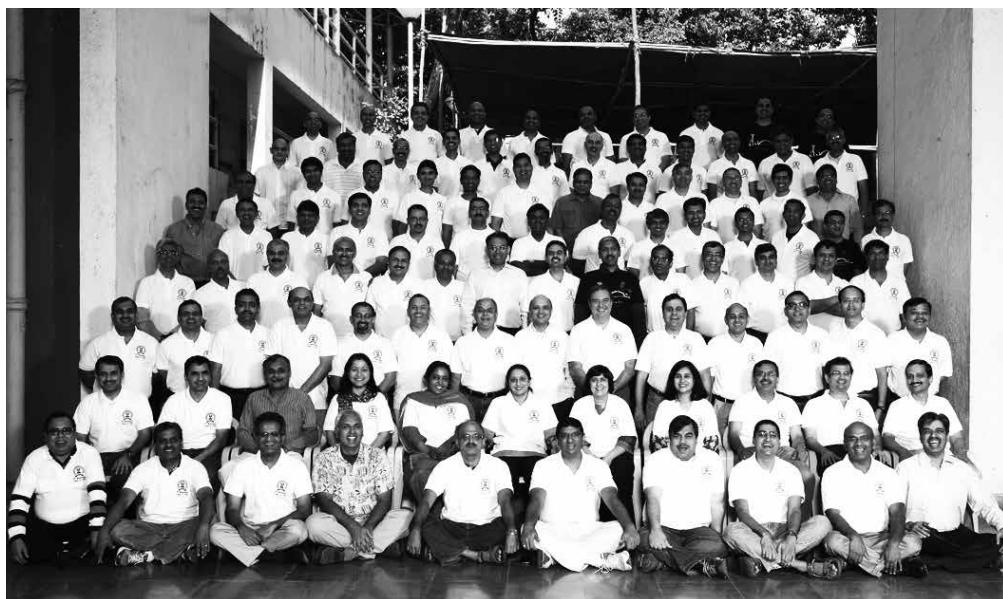
In any other adult gathering, drinks would be served with dinner. But here, in a nod to student days, it is a surreptitious activity. It’s a sign of the times that though there are no drinks and no after dinner speeches, we do get a stand-up comic. Let me keep my trenchant

critic notes on that to myself.

The long night walk reminds me that there is nothing quite like the relatively quiet, cool roads of IIT.

The next day is Alumni Day and there is an entirely different feel to it. The folk who descend on campus are varied; the campus itself appears used to this yearly invasion. It’s a small peek into Indian aspirations, particularly since the first batch that graduated is celebrating 50 years of being out in the world. Before the speeches and the awards, we squeeze in a Department meet and one has to shake off that student feeling and remember to be proper and professional and adult.

The awards.....I am not one for awards. Just being at a ceremony feels silly, too often it feels like teacher’s pet has been awarded a shiny gold star. But this time around I don’t mind it that much; everyone is gracious and modest in their speeches and really can one carp at a moment of triumph? It is better to leave insolent cynicism to the young....though I am at this very moment also wondering



where I can employ the title Insolent Cynicism!

But I do feel a lot mellower about things. The 87ers are a motley lot – you can sense the jostling of varied emotions in the crowd 25 years on. I meet a few folk who are resolutely the opposite of a Dante lost in dark woods midway through life. While this lost in the woods is a fatally attractive state when one is one’s 20s, now I appreciate tranquility and lack of pretension.

Someone hands me an IIT magazine and a few folk yell you must write for this. I am directed to the “H-10 page” which it turns out is a whole lot of “how we met cute on the IIT campus”. I feel a stab of irritation but much later I think if I do write a piece, it will be about the girls I knew in H10. Everything about that time is different – IIT friendships are neither the fierce adolescent friendships of college that dissipate quickly nor are they like the friendships I made as a working adult. I lived with these girls; I know them as I know myself even if I don’t meet them as much any longer.

There is a new initiative in the hostels

for mess workers – the handing out of cash gifts for various milestones achieved. Anupa and I are to hand them out, it’s also good to meet other ex H10ers who are around for the occasion. I spent so many years in H10 that I know most of the workers; I have met a few families. It’s a little embarrassing when the young ones dive to touch my feet. The smug mess worker back then is still smug with the little successes of her life. Which are many. The daughter of a mess worker who died is a pretty new bride resplendent in jewels. I mention her mother, her shoulders shake, her eyes fill with tears, it takes me a long time to console her. I suddenly feel a little emotional.

Two weeks before the reunion my grandmother died. In 1987 she came for my graduation, neat as a pin in a new sari bought for the occasion, careful not to display pride in her granddaughter. In the courtyard of the hostel there were scented blooms everywhere and she sat there one evening enjoying that little patch of cultivated wilderness. Now the courtyard lies bare, patches of scrub the only indication of life. A new building is to come up here. As it should. When I walk out from the hostel, I



am happy to have made it to the reunion but equally I am happy to leave. Once it seemed impossible to leave IIT, even going home for the weekend was a chore. It turns out that real life starts only when you leave.

December, 2012



Anu Moulee
M SC, CHEM E, '87, H 10

Anu is an ex-IITian (MSc in 1987 and PhD in 1993)

who earned her journalistic stripes by writing a controversial article on Pagal Gymkhana antics in one of IIT Bombay's cyclostyled rags of 1985 and subsequently editing Pragati. Despite this - or perhaps because of it - she did not pursue writing, choosing instead to do what all good middle class girls do. A PhD in Polymer Chemistry and a corporate job with Unilever followed. Somewhere in between she qualified as a patent attorney and then promptly decamped to Sydney, Australia for the sun and surf. When the days were cold and rainy - and there were a lot of such days - she worked for a patent firm. She took a career break at the end of 2013 to travel and spend time with family. Of late she has been working on freelance projects. She also runs a blog on the history of Indian clothing - a bit of a labour of love - which can be found on tumblr (<http://vintageindianclothing.tumblr.com/>). If she ever had to wear a T-shirt, it would have the slogan "H 10 Forever!"

I am a Mute Witness to the Passage of Age and Time

DIPAK HIMATSINGKA

*I am a mute witness to the passage of age and time
 Witness to the changing colours and hues of life
 I have seen the thumping strides of the victorious
 Now reduced to seeking help to even take a step.
 I have seen those eyes that shine with power, which once
 stunned onlookers
 Now shed tears of helplessness and fear.
 I have seen those hands of steel, which broke boulders
 with just a twitch
 Now tremble like the leaves of an aspen tree in a storm.
 Those lips and the voices I have heard, which echoed the
 lightning in the sky
 Now dulled to silence forever and shut
 With all in his lap, the youth, the strength and wealth
 bestowed on one by the maker.
 Even then I have been witness to a man so lifeless, so dull.
 Do not, my friends, feel proud and vain on date
 As I have also witnessed helplessness with the passage of
 time and fate*

*My friends heed my advice and seek solace
In helping those in need, if you can
For I have seen so many inflict pain
Which doesn't help but goes in vain.*



Dipak Himatsingka
B TECH, CHEM E, '67, H 6

Dipak Himatsingka is currently the Chairman of Miura Infrastructure (Pvt.) Ltd., Miura Trading & Finvest (Pvt.) Ltd, and Miura Engineering Services. His career has spanned several challenging corporate assignments as well as research and development initiatives in the area of PVC processing. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the IIT Bombay in 2012 for his notable contributions to the institute. A founding member of the Bombay Chapter of the Alumni Association, Dipak was also elected as the first Chairman of the Chapter.

Fresh Life Choose

Ok! We start with an apology. We are sorry at our corny attempt to rhyme the title with Fresh Lime Juice. We will not fake typos, we will not claim speech impairment due to a cold. But let us also claim that there is a reason behind the title. (aren't we all reasonable at Fundamatics?) The only thing common to every single student and alumnus of IITB is that they all come in fresh. At different times, they've been called freshy, fresher and freshman. And another body of homo-sapiens referred to as "seniors" are known to act fresh with these freshies, some going far enough to try and devour them like a glass of fresh lime juice.

Acting fresh is an art that has morphed over the years. Started off as a moderately permissible-to the point of being almost legit-act. Is now a strict no-no, punishable offence. Strictly by accident and most certainly not by design, this issue of Fundamatics features quite a few "then" and "now" scenarios. The ragging rage in the 70s and 80s has been covered elaborately in H4's Madhouse book and we reproduce a few stories (juicier than fresh lime juice) here with permission from the authors. We also feature two "selfie" stories. The first one is by current day Sahil Vaidya Thakkar who would definitely have escaped ragging in the 70s/80s due to his superior knowledge of some "coloured" films and their stars. The other selfie story is by Devang Thakkar who along with his friends land into

a soup of their own making.

For those who are still despairing at our outrageous title, let us tell you that we are running personal accounts of a fresh life we all choose.

EZbee



Hey Freshy!

Excerpted from Madhouse

Among the many myths that prevailed about IIT, the biggest were about the intensity of ragging a fresher was subjected to. This induced a lot of anxiety in parents, and it took a lot of convincing to tell them that far from being fierce, ragging in IIT was actually fun. To start with, there was no physical ragging. Every freshy was told in no uncertain terms that he did not have to submit to physical ragging, and that if it ever got out of hand, he should report it to the hostel council immediately. It helped that there were some antiragging crusaders like Gautam Barua (currently Director, IIT Guwahati) and Abhiram Ranade (currently Head of Dept, CSE, IITBombay) who kept an eye on things and did not allow anything to get out of hand.

The way I see it, ragging was actually an aid to acclimation and assimilation. It helped build bonds among hostel inmates in the fastest possible manner. It also served to detoxify a fresher of ideas of his own greatness. Understandably, a new entrant into IIT came with the preconceived notion that he was God's gift to mankind. After all, he had surely excelled in school, he was one of just two thousand chosen from among 150,000 applicants, and during the party his proud father would have thrown to celebrate his son's entry into IIT, many guests would have convinced Mr. Fresh that he was the answer to India's technological problems, if not the entire world's. Someone had to tell him that he was at best mediocre in

this pool of the most brilliant minds from all over the country. Cutting down an arrogant proud being by a few notches and instilling confidence and survival instincts into a shy introverted one were the purported objectives of ragging exercises. Barring a few deviations, ragging usually did meet with its self-declared objectives. This form of ragging was, in a way, legitimized by events like freshies night and Pagal Gymkhana.

It would be no exaggeration to say that ragging changed many lives forever for better or worse, mainly better. The most visible change was that names were altered forever. Many nicknames, originally designed to last the length of an IIT sojourn, have stuck permanently. Kenneth Stuart Robertson's name was found to be too pseudo and was changed first to Pandurang Dagduram Gaitondeson and it went through some natural transformations from Gaitonde to settle finally at G. Any email G signs as Kenneth today is instantly met with a puzzled response of "who is Kenneth?"

Then there's a totally unknown Jayant Sheth, which is the real name of a very well known Ghatkopar. On his arrival at IIT his heavily Gujju accented English induced the question "hey freshy! Are you from vernacular?" His reply, "no Sir! I am from Ghatkopar" explains his name.

Ragging was of both a personal and of a general nature, and was usually conducted in

our small dingy rooms measuring a pathetic six feet by eight feet. There was a two foot deep niche on one side that held a writing table and another two foot deep niche near the door in which was a cupboard. The cupboard hung on the wall with a two foot space at the top with the ostensible purpose of storing suitcases but was the home of pigeons who roosted there. A two foot space at the bottom of the cupboard was designed to store footwear but was home to some educational read-

The way I see it, ragging was actually an aid to acclimation and assimilation. It helped build bonds among hostel inmates in the fastest possible manner.



ing and viewing material. The upstairs pigeon home was called Kashmir and the downstairs shoe space was called Kanyakumari. An erring freshy was often made to travel to Kashmir from where he derived a bird's eye view of the proceedings and when the punishment was stronger, he got a rat's eye view from Kanyakumari.

When the seniors saw the new crop of freshies every year, they asked each other, "So this is the cream of the crop? These are the best minds of the country? We can beat them with half our brains tied behind our backs – can't we?" "It was a subtext of ragging, seniors proving to themselves that they were smarter.

Some nuggets encountered by all and remembered by some were as follows:

~ This was generally used on anyone who came from an elite school, fancied himself as witty and was a potential member of the "pseud" gang.

"Hey freshy! Are you good with riddles?" "Yes Sir! I am." "So tell us, what is black and

white and red all over?"

"Sir! That is very easy. It is a newspaper," he replies with a triumphant smile. "You think we'd ask you kindergarten riddles? Anyway, how is a newspaper red all over?" Slow-on-the-uptake freshy smiles triumphantly again. "Sir! Newspaper is read all over. Read as in R-E-A-D" "You son of a , I said red, R-E-D. Why do you assume I said R-E-A-D?" "Come on Sir! How can anything be black and white and also red?" "If I tell you, will you stop speaking in English for a whole day and if anyone asks you your name, you will say your name is Dick?" Freshy reluctantly agrees. So he is told, "It's a blushing zebra, you idiot."

~ This one was reserved for those who claimed good all-India ranks and fancied themselves good at science.

"Hey freshy! Do you know what 'g' is?" "Yes Sir! It is acceleration due to gravity and is 9.8 meters per second squared." "No one asked you the value of g. In fact, I am asking you how you would measure g with an electron microscope." "It is not possible Sir. How can a microscope measure gravity?" "Bastard! How did a like you get admitted to IIT? Want to know how it is done?" "Yes Sir! I still think it can't be done." "I'll tell you. You take an electron microscope to the terrace of a building and throw it down while measuring the time of fall with a stop watch." "Oh OK. That is funny Sir. But we will need to know the height of the building in order to calculate g." "Oboy. What a smartass. Just get a U tube manometer and measure the height of the building." "Sir. How can you measure the height with a U-tube manometer?" "Freshy, you are dumb and I don't know how you cracked the JEE (Joint Entrance Exam). Just tie a string to the manometer, lower it from the terrace and when it lands on the ground, cut the string and measure its length."

Understandably, these exchanges did deflate a few oversized egos.

It was 1982 when I met a very scared freshy, Dhananjay Patankar. I was surprised by his terror, because he had arrived at IITB from the Bhosala Military School. The worst ragging in IITB should have been like Montessori lessons for him. But the fact was, this Dhanajay, who, by the way, had a military school-defying cherubic face, was really very scared.

Within a few days, however, this cherubic Dhananjay was walking around looking way too cheerful for a UG (Undergraduate) freshy. As I had expected, he was now relishing the ragging. As a senior PG (Post Graduate) who seemed to have some rapport with the UGs, I soon gained Dhananjay's confidence. I asked him about his initial reaction to ragging. He laughed happily and told me, "I thought that all this talk about taking my ass was for real - just like at my earlier school!"

- *Abhay Patil, '81-'83*

It is just as well that some H4 residents were temporary, and not really H4ites at all.

In the summer of 82, all the laggards in IIT were doing a summer course. They would tell their parents at home that they were doing an extra course during the summer vacation instead of holidaying like their less serious friends. Parents would be impressed and boast to other parents about the prodigy that their son was. Technically, these folks were right. They were doing an extra course. It was only a technicality that it was a repeat course. There were guys in all hostels but were few in number and everyone there knew their fellow summer-ians. Some hostels also played host to students from other IITs who came to Mumbai to do practical training courses. There was a Surd from IIT Kharagpur who came to IIT B to do such a course and stayed at H4. Technically he was a Surd only in technicality because he had cut his hair short and was known as a cut-surd like others of his ilk. The fact that he stayed in H4 was also a

technicality since he spent more time absconding from H4 than not. He had to abscond because he was a glib talker who effortlessly took small loans of ten rupees from various guys and defaulted majorly in paying back. For instance, he would come knocking on your door and ask if you had ten rupees to spare for a few minutes. His cab was waiting outside and he had to pay up ten quickly and he would later go to his room in far off NWSF (North Wing Second Floor) and get the money

Cutting down an arrogant proud being by a few notches and instilling confidence and survival instincts into a shy introverted one were the purported objectives of ragging exercises.



and pay back. At least that's what he told his unsuspecting prey. Those who believed him paid and waited endlessly for the Surd to travel to and from NWSF, only to find later that the Surd was nowhere in H4. That was because he would shift to H5 and do his number there and disappear to some other hostel. Eventually, when circumstances forced him to return to H4, he would pay back a part of the money to a few of the guys and create a false impression that his huge consignment of money that his dad had sent him and which was lying locked in the bank was now clearing up since the error in transfer code was resolved.

One day, Surd, with a woman, came to H4 in a cab. He went to his room with the woman while the cab waited. Within five minutes, surd and woman came back and drove away. Late at night, Surd returned in the same cab and went to his room. After waiting for more than twenty minutes, the cabbie raised a ruckus and finally, the security guard took him to G Sec Shenoy's room and woke him up. The cabbie

said the surd had hired the cab at Colaba, driven to H4 with the woman, driven back to Colaba where he dropped her off, and then returned to IIT. The total fare was Rs. 180 and the Surd had bolted. He was nowhere to be found.

The next day, one of the taxi unions called IIT and told the authorities that they would stop plying cabs within IIT unless someone paid up. After two days, the surd turned up, unfazed by whatever he had precipitated

The most visible change was that names were altered forever. Many nicknames, originally designed to last the length of an IIT sojourn, have stuck permanently.



earlier. Warden Ram Mohan Rao and Shenoy had a meeting with him in the warden's office. Surd was very cool. According to him, he picked up a girl in Colaba and brought her to H4 but the girl didn't like the room without an air-conditioner. So he agreed to drop her back in Colaba and when he returned to IIT, he realized he had no money. So he decided to give the cabbie the slip. He reached this point when Shenoy exploded. "Look here Mr. Singh! I talked to the cab driver at length. You have not given him a slip of any sort. If you had, we would have paid him and taken the money from you later." Anyway, Surd told the warden that he could take whatever action he wanted. He said that the Police Commissioner Rajadhyaksha's son was his friend and that he would get out of trouble even if the warden put him into it. Warden spent a harrowing week trying to locate someone with a connection to the Commissioner so that he could pre-empt Surd's manoeuvres. Finally, warden realized that the Commissioner was Ribeiro and not Rajadhyaksha. By this time, the surd had fled Mumbai.

And, more importantly, had left H4 for good.

Freshies were very young, and so freshy facial hair was sparse at best. This was a good area for adding insult to injury. Senior asks freshy, "do you like Hitler?" And the freshy does some quick thinking and answers "yes", trying some reverse logic. The senior then gives freshy a scathing lecture on the most despicable man in the history of the world and further informs him, "you are going to pay for this for a long time." Freshy is taken to the bathroom to shave off the sides of his moustache to leave behind the famous Nazi look. He is told, "you will go to classes and labs looking like this for the whole month". Now the senior turns to the second freshy who has been lurking, attempting to remain unseen. "And you, do you like Hitler?" The shaken freshy blurts out "no" with a sinking feeling that this answer is not going to help either.

Sure enough – he is asked to shave off the middle of the moustache leaving the sides intact.

So for the next few weeks, these two could not decide whether it was less humiliating going to classes together or separately.

Walking into a classroom of over a hundred freshies generally offered this hilarious sight. Some guys with half their moustache shaved off, say the left half. Some with their right half shaved off. And of course, there was a set of Hitler and anti-Hitler moustaches too. Sometimes there were attempts at shaving in an S shape, but

given that freshies had just started sprouting facial hair and were not yet adept at shaving, this look was mostly unsuccessful.

From this crazy mix of funny faces, it was easy to identify which hostel a freshy belonged to. Each hostel's seniors sent freshies to classrooms with their hostel's particular shave pattern, which was decided by the seniors' popular vote. In 1977, H6 guys had their left

sides shaved off while H4 guys were Hitlers or anti-Hitlers. And to their horror, two bearded freshies, Christopher Fernandes and Edgar Dias were made to shave off half of each other's beards.

– *Ashvin (Ghoda) Sanghvi, '76-'81*

Among these freshy victims falling left and right, there was one Chopra. Someone thought the most appropriate assignment for that smartie was to send him to the Ladies' Hostel to beg, borrow or steal an undergarment from them. Chopra laid on considerable drama, but, he did turn up with an item.

Days and weeks went by, everyone moved on to other freshies and other pranks. One day, one of the girls said to me, "you should stop it now, and let the poor guy be." I looked at her quizzically. "What do you mean?" I asked. "Every day this poor kid is at our hostel, with a new story on how you are making his life hell." "What poor kid?" I asked her. And she said, "Chopra, who else? Did you guys not send him for an undergarment?" "Yes," I said sheepishly, "but we have not ragged him since then, in fact we were wondering what became of him."

So, while we thought our little prank was so clever, our Chopra had been milking the situation for weeks on end, bringing out motherly instincts in the girls by making up tales of tremendous atrocities by seniors.

We realized we had met much more than our match. He was out of our league – he was in a higher one.

–*Ghoda*

It was a week or two after our Freshies night, the freshies were now part of us and we were glad we had some fun recruits. Our thoughts had moved on to other things. Panda and I went to get a sandwich at the canteen to find that they had closed for the day. We decided to go to the neighbouring hostel to see if we could find something there.

Hostel 5 was famous for its rock star

musicians. Our friend Mogre in H5 was quite a drummer. So it was not a surprise that the place was rocking and reverberating as we walked down the path towards the lounge. But as we get closer, we saw that it was a special occasion. There was a crowd of guys around the tables, clapping with the beat and having a great time. It was dark, with a few coloured spot lights pointing to the table tops.

And this is where Panda and I took a step back. There was actually a good look-

He had to abscond because he was a glib talker who effortlessly took small loans of ten rupees from various guys and defaulted majorly in paying back.



ing chick, made up pretty well, doing a very sexy dance on the tables. The high heels were kicking up, showing a flash of thigh and she seemed happy with the cat calls and hoots as she suggestively pulled the blouse over her bare shoulder.

We were disoriented. Can this be true? Could this hostel be more fun than ours? How did they even pull this off?

Now the girl dancer on the table turned toward us. My jaw dropped. The girl doing this sexy jig was no other than Shona. Same curly hair, same smile, same flashing teeth, same eyes. Shona was in my class and over time I had got to know her pretty well. She was no starched pants – but this? How could this be happening? As I collected my jaw from the floor, I saw that Panda was as perplexed as I was.

The girl was waving a scarf. And as the boys egged her on, she straddled the scarf with its corners in her hands, moving her body and the scarf with the beat. The crowd was wild. This is where I got my final confirmation. This was the same scarf Shona wore the

previous Mood Indigo, the cultural festival. I was definitely rattled.

And then I noticed a whole similarly dressed line-up waiting their turn to be humiliated. And I realized – this was their freshy night and the “girl” was Shona’s kid brother in her borrowed clothes.

- Ghoda

For those who have forgotten Rupen Anklekar, he was a poor unfortunate soul who was ragged right through his stay at IIT, at least up until when I saw him last in ‘82.

Freshies were very young, and so freshy facial hair was sparse at best. This was a good area for adding insult to injury.



Like a few others, there was something about him that made him vulnerable to ragging. He always spoke in the present continuous tense – “I am not knowing” instead of “I don’t know”.

Pinakin Patel had got hold of a hideous, scary monster mask. One night, he went from room to room and momentarily freaked people out. The initially scared victim then joined him to go to the next door and scare someone else, and there was a lot of laughter after the initial scare. By the time Pinakin got to Anklekar's room, there was a sizeable crowd of ex-victims accompanying him, wanting to see how Anklekar would react. When Anklekar opened his door to Pinakin's knock and saw the monster, he jumped a few feet in the air and shouted “hoo-hoo-hoo” loud enough to be heard in H5, and then he ran out of his room and started howling in the footer (football) field between south and central wings. For a while, it appeared that Anklekar had lost it and turned insane.

All this happened around 10pm, but there were enough hostelites enraged by Anklekar’s insane howling who woke up Warden Lakkad

and insisted he come to the hostel and pull up the miscreants. Warden Lakkad wanted to see the offensive mask in order to understand why this was such a big deal. The mask was declared as missing.

I said to Warden Lakkad, “sir, the mask is missing, but if you call Ashwin Hattangadi (Hats), you'll understand what the mask looks like.” Hats was sore with me for an entire week after that. He even stopped bumming fags from me. Almost 30 years later, I am making it up to Hats by referring to our grand project as H4 HATS.

- Bakul

Ragging freshies was something all of us sometimes did - just as we sometimes took baths, had breakfast, went for lectures and spent hours faating (talking about nothing important, aka cacking) in the corridors. After a number of years of this regular ritual, the urge to do it waned considerably. One evening I came across a bunch of 2nd year guys whose enthusiasm for their new-found power was still alive. They had themselves a freshy victim, I think his name was Poddar. I watched as they tried out the routines played on them the previous year – describe your girlfriend’s assets, be a cuckoo clock, compare the measurement of your penis praying to God vs. Zeenat Aman, and so on. This guy – Poddar perhaps – stood there stony faced, hands folded across chest, eyes firmly directed at ground. He did not respond to anything. He didn't utter a word or move a muscle, no expression altered his face – not embarrassment, rage, disgust, nothing. Classical detachment, the personification of Leibniz's Monad. Almost a half hour of persistent effort yielded naught. It was interesting to watch the faces of his tormentors change from excited to outraged to puzzled to outraged to dejected to outraged to bored to outraged and finally to defeated and reconciled to their failure. If the freshy had even smiled his raggars would have thought their job done. This was a truly Gandhian

counter to ragging, more effective than any subterfuge I had seen generations of freshies use over the years.

And then there was Chitnis. I remember this non-incident because it ended my enthusiasm for ragging freshies once and for all. One evening, Blondie Mittal and I were sitting in the corridor by the stairs in NWSF (North Wing Second Floor). There was a gloomy, listless rain falling. This meant no volleyball, no boating, no cricket and nothing exciting to do. Mittal spotted Chitnis, then freshy, and thought, here is one way of making our time interesting. Chitnis looked like a fawn in the headlights. The usual ragging routine followed. Chitnis answered everything, responded to every probing question, every ribald joke about him, each lewd comment about his girlfriends. But his every answer was mundane and monochromatic. About the only thing that livened up the moment was a Beatles song he sang, and that was vaguely interesting not because he sang it well, simply because it was a Beatles song. The event couldn't have been better designed to bore even Mittal to death, not an easy thing to do. If we were gloomy before we ragged Chitnis, we were ready to jump off the ledge from the second floor after.

—*Satkya*

An interesting ragging incident involved one Sonawane who would have graduated in '83. I say "would have" for a reason. Sonawane was a sneaky guy who kept away from the hostel during his entire first year in order to avoid getting ragged. But in his second year, he became a new-born lion who not only stayed in the hostel, he would actually rag folks from the '84 batch.

During a Pagal Gymkhana in the hostel the few C'84 (graduating Class of '84) folks that we had regaled us with some fun and games by playing three-legged and five-legged race and hop-jump-squish in the mud and stuff like that. I also remember that Subodh Mhaisalkar was the star performer on that

day. Sonawane was very much present and was enjoying himself seeing his juniors suffer in a way that he was smart enough to avoid.

Toward the end of the event, some signals were exchanged. Nobody is sure what exactly went down, but I know that Sood was one of the guys who gave a signal to the C84 guys. Quick as a flash, all these freshies suddenly converged upon Sonawane. Sonawane, at first too stunned to react, recovered fast enough and sprinted like his life depended on running

Each hostel's seniors sent freshies to classrooms with their hostel's particular shave pattern, which was decided by the seniors' popular vote.



away fast enough. He did precisely that. He ran out of the hostel and kept running. The freshies gave up the chase near the gymkhana but Sonawane continued running till he was out of the main gate.

During dinnertime that same evening, Warden Lakkad came to the hostel with the Deputy Diro to inquire about the 'Sonawane episode'. This was already classified as an episode and had a senior level delegation out on a fact finding mission. Deputy Diro asked me, "who was responsible?" I tried telling him that the freshies chased Sonawane because they were told to do so by the seniors and were certainly not responsible, and, before I could explain further, junta began to run down Sonawane vociferously. To our pleasant surprise, Lakkad too opined that it was better that people like Sonawane don't come back and spoil the atmosphere. So that was Sonawane, who would have graduated in '83. He did not ever return, that day when he left the gate, he ran away into permanent oblivion.

—*Bakul*

The inter-hostel drama competition was a

good time to add some extra-curricular drama to the lives of the hostelites. We were staging the play 'The Bet'. One of the props required for the play was a door. Memon, Giri, and company thought it would be a bright idea to borrow the Convo door for this purpose. The main door and other doors at the architecturally aesthetic Convocation Hall were heavyduty doors carved in solid wood and very impressive looking. They also thought it would be a good idea to assign this project

Ragging freshies was something all of us sometimes did - just as we sometimes took baths, had breakfast, went for lectures and spent hours faating (talking about nothing important, aka cacking) in the corridors.



to the freshies under their guidance. Sandeep Bhise, Kicks, Duddy, Kripalani, and a few others were the chosen ones for this important mission. These chosen ones expressed their concern about what would happen to them if they were caught. Their guides informed them that they would be kicked out of the institute. But ever the logical minds of IIT, they also pointed out that if unable to perform this simple task, they were not fit to be there anyway.

For the next ten days, the freshies practiced unscrewing and screwing doors. They had a plan. Duties were assigned: Duddy would turn off the Convo lights. The practiced unscrewers would unscrew. Others would stand watch, and raise the alarm in case of danger.

The day arrived. Memon led the would-be borrowers of the Convo door to the hall. He instructed the guards to yell "Run You Bastards" in case there was need to do so. He instructed that the bastards, on hearing the

alarm, should then run in different directions, and stay away for a couple of hours.

As soon as Duddy turned off the lights, they all heard the call, "Run You Bastards!"

Run they did, all the way to Powai Lake.

After their return two hours later, and for the rest of the two years that Memon and Giri had left at IIT, the gang were the objects of derision. They were the useless ones who could not carry out a simple mission.

Two years later when Memon was leaving the institute on his graduation, he explained to the suitably vilified and much insulted group that not only was it not possible to remove the Convo door without getting caught, it was not possible to remove the door at all.

- told by Sandeep Bhise, '72-'77 to Pradeep (Blondie) Mittal, '72-'77

Escapades of a Freshman: Drenched and Screwed

SAHIL VAIDYA

“Abey, ditch yaar” muttered a languid Mukund. Despite his nonchalant expressions, I tried hard to convince him. We desperately needed one more team member. Mukund Mehta was three rooms away from me, and his roommate Sameer and I were pretty excited about this treasure hunt. Sounded fun, amidst all of the chemistry and maths and mugging. Mukund had ditched us because we couldn’t find a fourth member.

But now we had found someone special. Anna was the most erratic guy in our whole wing and probably in the entire universe. He NEVER got things right. Never at all. And watching him screw up was one of the biggest delights mankind would ever know. So once we managed to trick him into joining us, Mukund decided to give it a shot too.

In the evening, we had seniors coming over to give us “tips”. Nothing interesting, they just kept asking us not to help people from other hostels, or even better, misguide them. We were repeatedly explained why it was important for H-3 to win it, and how crucial it was to bring glory to the Vitruvians. Some even blabbered about their heroics in the previous years, which were made up of course.

At 8.30 pm, we finally reached the SAC – Students’ Activity Center. This is the place where all the fun stuff at IIT happened. The four of us anxiously stood outside the gates, up for the challenge and praying for our brains to work like they had during JEE. At this

In the evening, we had seniors coming over to give us “tips”. Nothing interesting, they just kept asking us not to help people from other hostels, or even better, misguide them.



point, for the first time, we learnt the timing convention at IITB. 8.30 pm actually meant 10 pm. Till then, 500 freshies simply kept shouting at the top of their lungs. I joined in at intervals but stopped and wondered how it just didn’t make sense.

The hunt commenced shortly. As soon as we got the clues, we realised how dumb we were. Time seemed to flow faster than it did in exams as I relentlessly struggled with the most onerous clue of the lot. We were one of the lucky teams to have a cycle at our disposal. Before I could demur, Anna said that he wanted me to ride pillion. To this day, I feel sorry for my butt.

Our first task was to name 5 porn stars. Apparently the senior was trying to troll us as he had been asking names of Hollywood actors to the other teams. I made my team proud by naming 10 in a jiffy. Astonished, he then asked me to name a male porn star. Amidst intense cheering and hooting, I blurted out two names. I had never felt more confident in



life. Even though my moment of glory didn't last long, I fondly remember those stupefied expressions. We proudly marched away with the next clue as he whispered away to another senior "Abe isko to mere se bhi zyada pata hai". We left the lecture hall, and BOOM. Within 10 seconds it was raining. It took the campus a few minutes to turn into a storm zone. Everyone was drenched, confused, and in a race against time. And Anna's cycling was something extra that only I had to deal with. As the dilapidated cycle plunged downhill, I could envision both of us getting into a brutal accident very soon. I took control of the situation and jumped off, managing to avoid a very bad fall. Recovering from the shock, I gasped heavily and looked up, only to be greeted with Anna's mindless gawking and road safety tips

Somehow we assembled at Hostel 6 and went in for our next task. With an evil gleam in his eye, a burly senior asked us to eat some chillies. We just threw them away when he was busy deriving sadistic pleasure from watching others burn and run around for water. The next task involved climbing Hostel 11's wall, doing some push-ups and climbing back to the other side. While coming back, I happened to ignore a huge gutter. It was HUGE – more than my height in depth, and five of me in width. Jumping off the wall, I wondered why it was taking so long for my feet to touch the ground. In a fraction of a second I fell head

first into it as others watched water splash in all directions. If it hadn't rained, I wouldn't have been here writing this stupid diary. People stared blankly as I got up and tried to stand straight. Crawling out of the gutter, I felt dizzy and collapsed. But my teammates didn't run away. They helped me get back on my feet and carried me for some distance. As they say, the "enthu" was still there and I managed to run till SAC in order to finish the wretched hunt.

So in the end, we won nothing, got injured, drenched and I lost my phone. But for some weird reason, I kept feeling that I took away something from the whole expedition. Got to know how a team works. And that watching porn helps. At least sometimes.



Sahil Vaidya

Sahil Vaidya is a dual degree student of Energy Engineering and has just completed his fourth year at IIT Bombay. He has co-founded a creative venture called 'The Minimalist' which creates thought provoking designs and campaigns for brands and professionals. In my free time, Sahil likes to work out, play drums and listen to music.

Careers@Singapore: Data Analytics



Contact Singapore had a chat with Manik Bhandari, Director of the Accenture Analytics Innovation Centre (AAIC), to find out how to unlock the hidden opportunities behind data analytics.

Organisations have always known that there is an enormous goldmine of information embedded in the data they have collected. The trick has always been in getting to it. Accenture believes that with modern data analytics and programming techniques, combined with astute business insights, we now hold the key to unlocking the secrets in these vaults.

However, a lingering challenge remains where the demonstrable benefits of data analytics fell short of the business managers' expectation. "This could be due to anything from not defining the right question to be answered, an inexperienced analyst and unclear datasets to incorrect application of insights to the business problem at hand," explained Manik Bhandari, Director of the Accenture Analytics Innovation Centre (AAIC) in Singapore.

This is where analytics centres, like the AAIC, come in. They are able to help bridge this gap by providing data analysis and consultancy as a service to help business managers discover the potential of data analytics, by

helping them focus on the outcomes, and not worry about the analytics.

"We see ourselves as value architects who are able to help clients quantify results to demonstrate the power and application of data analytics in their organisations," Manik said. The AAIC team will guide the

|| The range of data analytics application is extremely wide," commented Manik, "In a way, the potential of data analytics is limited only by the enthusiasm of the business manager and the resourcefulness of the analyst. ||

clients through the entire analytics project – educating, encouraging and reassuring them along the way.

To Accenture, Singapore represents a unique value proposition for data analytics. "The country is well-connected and organised. We are able to collaborate effectively with policymakers who have a clear interest to improve public services and citizen engagement. It presents us with an invaluable opportunity to create scalable models using real-time data which we can then replicate for application in other cities," said Manik.

In addition, there is a large and accessible scientific community for consultation and recruitment. The public sector is progressive and prepared to invest in cutting-edge innovation. The centre is also able to acquire clients who are keen to pilot and apply data analytics in their operations.

AAIC hopes that its efforts together with client organisations will eventually generate breakthrough solutions that will positively impact the lives of Singaporeans and global citizens. "It's just a matter of time," promised Manik.

Contact Singapore engages overseas Singaporeans and global talent to work, invest and live in Singapore.

For more information on Contact Singapore, visit www.contactsingapore.sg or email mumbai@contactsingapore.sg.

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There is no better time to be who you've always been

Like they say “The more you celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate”. And what better than to be in an ecosystem where each day is spent celebrating wonderful moments and living a lifestyle that is healthy, active and engaged; giving you an opportunity to be who you've always been!

Just picture this:

The morning view from your window is mountainous and charming – it's a wonderful way to start your day. You don't give the messy bed and undone dishes a second glance as you leave your spacious apartment for a freshly prepared breakfast at the restaurant in the clubhouse. You pass an inviting heated indoor pool on the way there and promise yourself a refreshing dip after a robust post-breakfast yoga class with your personal fitness instructor. A lush putting green sprawls in the distance – you know you will find your friends there. The day is spent at the expansive clubhouse, playing cards and unwinding after an active morning workout. After a long, lazy lunch with friends, you return to your delightful apartment and if need be have someone manage the daily chores in an attentive yet unobtrusive manner. And all of this in the most picturesque location of Dehradun where the oxygen rich clean air promises a much healthier life!

Wouldn't you love to be in an ecosystem where you live an enriching and enjoyable life amidst like-minded folks on your own terms? And that is what Antara Senior Living offers: a safe and healthy environment, impeccably designed, rigorously serviced, integrated with nature and in a community of evolved, joyous individuals whose zest for living reflects and reinforces your own. A part of the Max India Group, Antara is bringing to India the first ever world class senior living residential community in Dehradun. Spread over a

sprawling lush green 14 acres and set against a magnificent view of the Mussoorie hills, Antara has an evergreen, protected Sal forest reserve to one side, and the river Tons on the other.

Striving for perfection and relentless improvement, Antara Senior Living makes it possible to immerse yourself with like-minded people; motivated on living a purposeful and remarkable life. Over time, people are learning that the time leading up to one's sixties is a time that people can focus completely on their own needs and desires. Antara Senior Living allows you to do just that, by taking the stress out of 'running' your life and letting you enjoy your choice of pleasures in your own time at your own pace. You can enjoy hassle free living and an unparalleled service-oriented experience provided by a team of over 200 professionals.



Garden Verandah Rendering, Clubhouse, Antara Dehradun

Antara thus is a beautifully conceived and crafted continuous-care proposition-a comprehensive ecosystem that embraces and encourages the idea that life can stay magical. With Antara's perfect blend of lifestyle, lifecare, hospitality and sound financial thinking, you could discover a new chapter in a well-lived life, another milestone on a well-trodden path.



As Tara Singh Vachani, CEO, Antara Senior Living, says, “The road to Antara started in 2010 with a question: what would it take to give people the best life they could possibly have as they got older? The quest for the answer took us around India and the world, to study best practices that would eventually become the foundation of Antara. What we learnt was powerful. A learning that encompassed a new way to think about later life. A life that radiated hope and energy, along with the promise of a decrease in worry and an increase in the quality of life. The vision of a community of like-minded people that makes every one of its residents feel significant, healthy and enriched, is what gave life to Antara. A community that is both impactful and holistic, where our genuine spirit of care is expressed through careful attention to every detail, to craft a space where life is lived openly and joyously”.

Every Antara apartment is individually crafted, built with the finest materials and finished with meticulous attention to detail. The exploration of life-enhancing ideas combined with an obsessive attention to detail that goes into each feature makes the Antara apartments beautiful, perfect and timeless.

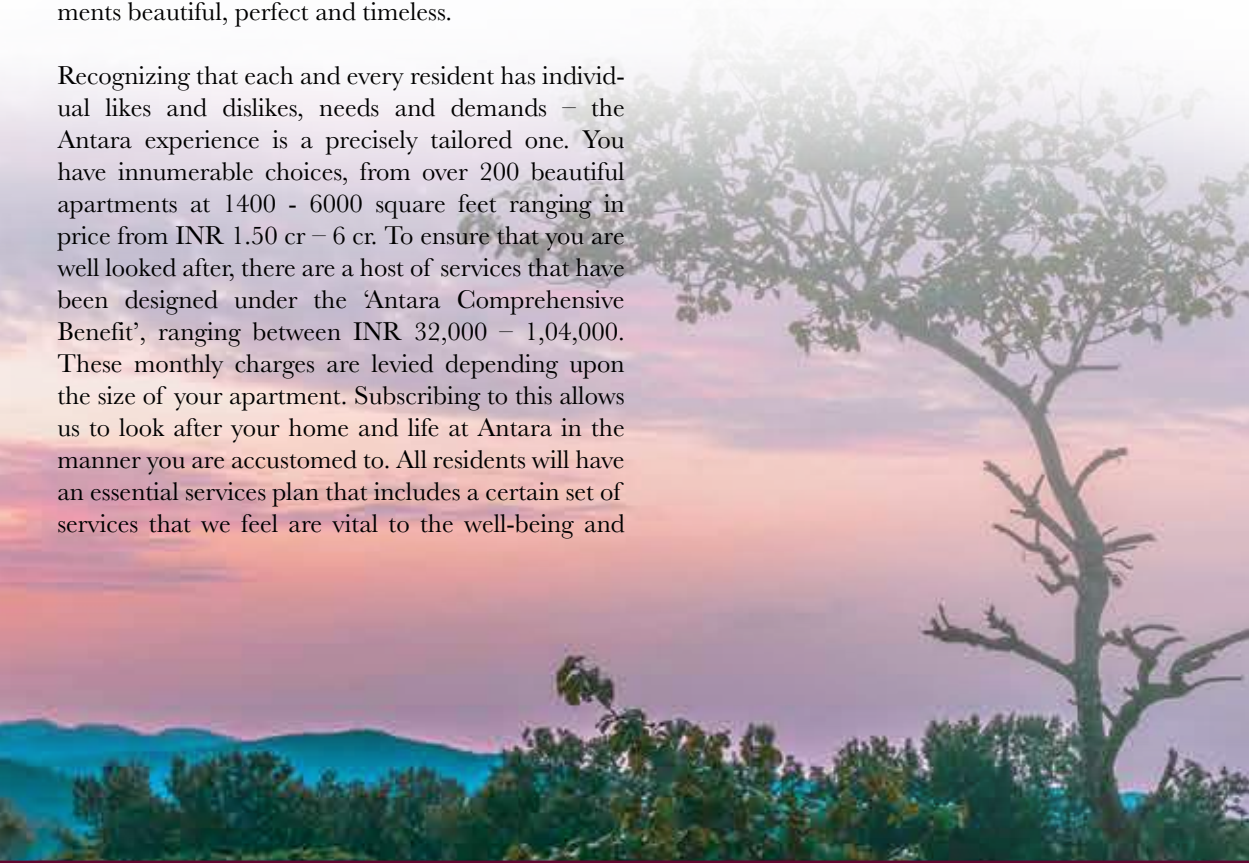
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quality of life of our residents. Antara is a celebration of life lived to its fullest. We believe that for the progressive few, age is just a number, and with the ecosystem we provide, you can stay active, vital and fulfilled for years to come. All it takes is a different point of view, what we call the Antara Way.



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Escapades of a freshman: STP Unclubbed

DEVANG THAKKAR

Some names *may* have been changed to protect identity.

I was waiting outside Hostel 1 for twenty minutes now. He had said he would be back in five. I hadn't had anything for tiffin earlier that evening, but Tanmay was worse off – he hadn't even had lunch because he had been promised a dinner in Pizza Hut. (This is an important part of the events that followed and shall be reminded to you at regular intervals.) And then when Prateek finally arrived, he had Satwik with him for company. Not that we disliked him, but we weren't too fond of his company either – he always had an air of arrogance around him, which gave him a reputation for repelling people. While we complained to him about the time he had kept us waiting and Tanmay calculated the number of hours since the last morsel of food had entered his mouth, Satwik said something about the clothes we were wearing, which made me realise that both Prateek and Satwik were wearing clothes way better than us. I didn't mind that because I had been to Pizza Hut in jersey shorts once, so three-fourths were definitely an improvement.

I felt something was wrong when the auto-rickshaw took a left from the Main Gate because Pizza Hut was on the right, but I didn't say anything because the weight of Tanmay on my lap was making me moan at every pothole we went over. So then when we got off at Kanjurmarg station, we were enlightened

I didn't mind that because I had been to Pizza Hut in jersey shorts once, so three-fourths were definitely an improvement.



that we were going to a club in Lower Parel instead of Pizza Hut and that Tanmay could have some street food on the way. I hadn't been to a club before, for the sole reason that there were no clubs in Nagpur. Tanmay was infuriated because he wanted to have pizzas, but was open to the plan for the same reason I was. I was told by my room-mate that clubs usually have an entry fee if you are single, but Prateek convinced us that a certain Coupon mama had told him about this club where the entry fee had been waived off for a month. In fact he had been there himself the night before, he said reassuringly. It should be put to record that Prateek was an extremely adventurous person because, besides planning this trip, it was he who suggested that we get on the train without tickets as it was past ten already and the checking would be lax at this hour. So as we traversed the length of the foot-over-bridge, it was observed that a train was already there and it was the general consensus that we were to take this train if we wanted to reach there as early as possible. The train was already moving when we got down the stairs and not knowing the structure of a local train,

we got into a ladies compartment with a policeman in it. Prateek said he had tried to stop us from getting into the ladies compartment, but what he said was lost in the hullabaloo and our excitement to get into a running train.

The policeman summoned us with a nod of his head and regretfully, Prateek tried shouting “Ladies dabba hai ye” through his closed lips. Putting on the best puppy faces that we could, we told him that we were new to the city and didn’t know that there exist-

Ragging freshies was something all of us sometimes did - just as we sometimes took baths, had breakfast, went for lectures and spent hours faating (talking about nothing important, aka cacking) in the corridors.



ed such a thing as a ladies compartment, to which he questioned “Kidhar tak padhe ho?” “Heisenberg’s principle in physics and...” is what Satwik had planned on answering had Prateek not said that we were from IIT and were new to the city. The man in uniform told us how good a college ITI was and that its students weren’t expected behave like this. Before any of us could correct him, a train of “Sorry” and “won’t happen again” came forth from Tanmay and we were instructed to change our compartment at the next station. Ten minutes with a cop in a wrong compartment, without a ticket – it looked like we had depleted our quota of luck for the month.

It was past eleven thirty when we were walking down the Lower Parel station road which was quite desolate now. The only thing with signs of habitation was a tobacco shop at the junction. Tanmay asked for food for the umpteenth time which made Prateek go to the

tobacco shop and ask “Bhaiyya, water kaha milega?” Two people dying of hunger and he asks about water. Prateek, the expert pacifier that he was, said that a place that served water would definitely have something to eat as well. So we walked on the way we were directed. And we walked on till we reached the shop. It was pretty crowded for midnight so we decided against sitting there among the rowdy junta there. Prateek and Satwik bought a bottle of watereach while I had a samosa and bottle of soft water. Tanmay decided against having any water and ordered two samosas. Having finished my drink, I placed my bottle on the sidewalk and was devouring my samosa peacefully when Prateek and Satwik threw their bottles at the divider and started running down the road. Unsure of what had just happened, Tanmay and I started running as well, resulting in one of Tanmay’s samosas falling on the footpath in that minute of frenzy.

One look at Prateek and we knew that we would not be able to blame either of them for their actions further in the night. When we finally reached High Street Phoenix, the mall was shut down for the night but the clubs inside were still open. On reaching the club entrance, we waited for Prateek to come back from the washroom. Tanmay was totally awestruck by the crowd out there (read: girls) but it was only a matter of time before it became common knowledge that the free entry offer wasn’t valid on weekends. Satwik was in his most enthusiastic avatar thanks to the water he had on the way and then at his theatrical best when he heard that he would have to shell out thousand bucks only to get in there. He wanted to go in there at all costs, he shouted out hysterically. He even asked five girls standing there if they would get him in, but obviously, to no avail. It was then decided that we would head back to the station and wait for the first train in the morning because the mall security had started shooing off the people sitting outside the club. Satwik was completely



Image credit: Frits Ablefeldt <http://openinnovation.cc/photo/278/Cook-in-the-soup-Color-illustration.htm>

overcome by emotions and was trying to coax tears out of his eyes as he wailed with his head on Prateek's shoulder, who was busy staring into oblivion and giggling for no reason at all. And it had been eighteen hours since Tanmay had any food, if the solitary samosa be left aside.

More out of pity for Tanmay than out of hunger, we walked off in search of some wholesome food, while barely being able to drag Prateek and Satwik out of danger's way. We were finally able to hail a taxi, to which the directions were "Koi khaane ki jagah le chalo." After half an hour, we left the taxi driver two hundred rupees richer and an inch closer to madness, thanks to Satwik sitting shotgun. The place that he dropped us at had an unnaturally high number of policemen for five o'clock in the morning. The milkman passing by told us that there had been a police raid in that South Indian joint half an hour ago and things were still being cleared up. Lucky to have escaped police attention once again, we ditched all our thoughts of food and walked our way back to Dadar railway station, with Satwik wanting to go Marine Drive for the sunrise. All efforts to convince him were unsuccessful and we had to hold both his

hands all the way to the station to make sure he didn't wander off whereas Prateek was in much better control over his body. At the platform, we spotted one of our seniors who was, clearly, in an inebriated state after having one too many last night. He told us about a party he had been to at a club and as it turned out, it was the same club we had tried getting into; the entry was free if you entered before nine.

We reached the campus at eight and before going to sleep, Tanmay had the same noodles at Sunrise Dhaba that he had a day ago.

P.S. The writer was not the person involved in this affair and having heard this account from another freshman, the verity of this account is not completely assured by the writer.



Devang Thakkar

Devang is an avid bibliophile, budding graphic designer and a writing enthusiast, albeit a moody one. A regular squash player, he is greatly captivated by branding and designing and hopes to venture into entrepreneurship soon.

The Horizon

VIVEK AGARWAL



*The horizon was reluctant,
 To let the Sun go;
 It feared the demons of darkness,
 Breathing down its neck,
 Prancing within viciously;
 Cause the moon too,
 Had asked for a respite;
 The fortnight long show,
 Had worn him out;
 Therefore, the audience, that,
 Shimmered and applauded the previous nights,
 With their chums and constellations,
 Preferred not to unveil themselves;
 Now, it was all alone: the horizon;
 The dark abyss with the deafening silence;
 But there was no nothingness;
 It could let out a cry,
 Hitherto hidden in its layered depths,
 Without being embarrassed;
 It could revive that dried drop,
 In its eyes,
 And set it free;
 It would lose,
 All the hardness it faked;
 And surrender to the agony,
 Creeping out of its pores;*



*It would face its demons,
Of shame and guilt,
And the misery that inspired them;
To fight them once more;
To let its soul go;
But as this turmoil would transit,
It will find peace,
In those fleeting moments of solitude;
Then,
The Universe will spin a degree;
The darkness will dilute,
And the sky will swirl a shade lighter;
And there shall rise again,
The sun from within;
To let the world see its new color,
A Vermilion hue.*



Vivek Agarwal

Vivek Agarwal is a Computer Science Undergraduate from IIT Bombay who is also enthusiastic about writing poetry and painting. He likes to write poems on nature and human emotions, several of which can be found on his Quora blog. He loves to combine art and philosophy in his paintings, which can be found on his home page. He will be graduating this year and joining Samsung in South Korea.

The Psalm of Existence

(Original Marathi story 'अस्तसितोत्र' by G A Kulkarni) ©

TRANSLATED BY SHRIKRISHNA D PANDIT

The sky is clear and bright, like a skull that has been roasted to a shine in the sun; and under it, the ocean stands motionless.

The ocean is perfectly still.

In the wildfire of the scorching sun, every single thing appears seared and lifeless. To one side, a part of the ocean stretches to the horizon, but not a ripple moves on its impassive surface. The discoloured sprawl has the appearance of a dead body of water, its remains lying forlorn and exposed to the elements. On its shore, rocks of dried-up salt lie scattered in places; but on their desolate slopes, not a drop of shade can survive, even for a moment. At many places the wind has eroded them into grotesque shapes. Some them have forms that are almost human – accursed ones who have seen forbidden sights and brought curses upon themselves. At some places the hills are seen reflected in the water. The sea bears the images, caring not if they are ornamental designs or leper's blemishes.

The ocean is absolutely undisturbed.

Along the other side of the waters, parched sand stretches to the horizon. In that endless expanse there is not a sign of stunted vegetation, not even a blade of grass, dried up and shriveled into a yellow line. The wind, invisible, roams in gentle waves of heat, as if the still-hungry soul of the hot shimmering ocean is wandering in the desert. Its movement constantly disturbs the patterns in the sand

and the entire landscape seems tense and still, waiting breathlessly for some climactic event.

One place in the desert is home to a different kind of whiteness. Scattered there are skeletons of giant prehistoric animals with skulls large as hillocks. The heat pouring down from above wears away their strength till the moment when the massive shapes, blindly buffeted by the wind, crumple into dust and are lost in the sand. In this lifeless region, this change of form is the only sign of life seen on the surface. The shapes of the salt rocks change and with them, their reflections in the water. But the sea is unaware if it is a new joy or merely a fresh sting of an old hurt.

The sea is utterly unfeeling.

But one day, a speck was seen on the horizon and very slowly took shape as it crept closer. After a great length of time, marks appeared in the sand that were different from the waves etched by the wind. After a while, the old man reached the heap of skeletons. His still-hungry eyes still showed what others look upon as madness – the glint seen in the eyes of someone who, in the monotonous sunlight all around, is able to see his own star shining brilliantly. His body was dried up – like the sticks offered in the sacrificial fire and against its background his white beard was looking like cloth made of a thousand jewels. Tired in body and mind, he looked at the heap of bones. One of the gigantic skulls was still intact. The eyes, once like deep pools, were gone



and in their place empty sockets stood like twin caverns. The large teeth that had once decimated enemies with ease now looked dull and lifeless, like a meaningless couplet written in the alphabet of death. The old man entered the skull and the shade inside comforted his body. He sat down contentedly resting his palms on his knees, closed his eyes and with a focused mind, began contemplating the mystery of existence and creation.

The flaming rays of the sun carried on their mission relentlessly. At last the skull was at the end of its endurance. A crack appeared on it like the manifestation of death and, with a last sound, it crumpled into fragments and scattered over the sand. The scorching heat now descended onto the old man's feeble body; but he took no notice. His arms remained steady and his contemplation undisturbed. But his zeal finally proved unequal to the aggressive heat of the sun. His frail form collapsed on the sand and his eyes, which had seen a flower in the root growing from the soil and in the flower, the soil that nurtured the roots, gave way to spheres of darkness.

The heavy grey curtain of the ocean is immobile. The rocks, assured of their existence by the reflections in its waters, stand cold and aloof.

The ocean is purely an observer.

There was brief movement where water met sand. The sand was disturbed and a thumb-sized crustacean emerged. But one touch of the inferno outside sent it scurrying blindly, as fast as its little legs could move, to the old man's skull. As it entered the shade, the heat clinging to its carapace went down and the terror left its eyes. Folding its legs, it settled in a corner.

The old man's skull cracked and its remains dispersed in the sand. The pebble-like armour of the creature suddenly heated up and its legs burst before they could start moving. Now there was movement nearby, in the sand below a piece of bone. An ant emerged

partially. Its eyes were tiny as points of a thorn dipped in kohl; but they were quick enough to serve the small life they served. The ant made its way into the body of the creature and found comfort in a moist corner.

Somewhere, an even smaller life-form is waiting.

The expanse of the sea stands still. In the salt rocks on the shore, lifeless forms are born; give rise to their own reflections; but the sea remains unaffected. It has no flow and therefore, no ebb. It has no burst of creation and therefore, no dissolution of death. It has no fear of death, therefore the ocean of non-life is immortal.

And for it alone, there is no contemplation, for its contemplation has reached its end.

Now the ocean merely is.

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Shrikrishna D Pandit
B TECH EE '73, H 7

Shrikrishna D Pandit has worked in the field of EPC projects. His translation work started more than 20 years ago. He kept it up despite the severely limited time available, translating literary pieces both Marathi to English and English to Marathi. Recently, his book 'The Best of GA Kulkarni' has been published by the reputed publishing house Popular Prakashan and is available for online purchase on Amazon, Flipkart, and www.popular-prakashan.com. The present story, translated by Shrikrishna Pandit, originally appeared in Marathi as 'Astistotra' in GA's collection 'Sanjshakun' and was published by Popular Prakashan (Mumbai) in 1998.

Motion of the Picture

In the internetlessness of the pre-80s era, where the only commonly available means of entertainment were either the part time mono-channeled black & white Doordarshan or shellac discs spinning at 78 RPM on something called a turn-table to belt out “kajra mohabbat wala...”, the Convocation Hall at IIT was a life saviour. People got convocated once a year in its precincts, but they got entertained by feature films once every week. Friday evening to be precise. Same movie played on Saturdays too, but that was for the campus residents. Students saw the movie on Friday evenings before scurrying home for the weekend, mainly to get clothes washed and eat some decent food.

Watching movies on Fridays made a lot of sense for several reasons. For one, you paid ₹2 per month rather than ₹2 per movie in theatres. You could see Helen gyrating to RD Burman’s drums in full 35 mm glory rather than the 8 mm and 16 mm jobs that one hired during hostel functions. You could walk into the Convo in shorts, in lungis, and even in towels, place your legs on the table, recline and whistle away like some cine goers did in the front benches of theatres, i.e. non-balcony, non-stall. If you liked a cabaret number, you could shout “once more” in unison with your friends and the song would be rewound and re-played. You did not have to stand in attention after the movie, because the national

anthem did not need to be played. Back then, movies were made only in huge glitzy studios and one never ever thought of making a movie. There were no VCRs, no video cams. Yes, a few stinking rich folks did own a portable 8 mm movie camera and a home projector that was used to film weddings and kiddy birthday parties. Of course, they were silent jobs since soundtrack was expensive. No one was intrepid enough to think of making a feature film in 8 mm, save a group of crazy guys from H4 and H7, who made a movie back in 1982 as a part of their EP/PAF event.

H4’s Madhouse book is replete with references to the Friday evening movie outings in the Convo and also carries the story of the attempt at filming a masala movie on the banks of Powai and Vihar lakes. With permission from the authors, we reproduce 2 short snippets about the Convo movies as well as the longer story about the film making attempt.

It took another thirty years for technology to advance in the Indian Institute of Technology; for digital inventions to replace celluloid technology. In those days, there was a Film Club and a Film Society. The Film Society was the one which screened movies in the Convocation. The Film Club was the arty type and screened movies on Thursday evenings in the Lecture Theatre. Then, it was for people rich enough to cough up ₹2 every month to watch a movie. Now, the club is for those who want to MAKE a movie which hopefully others



will watch. One can now film a movie on the go – while walking, while chewing gum, while hanging clothes out to dry. Cameras fit into a pocket now and special effects, sounds, cinematography, scrolling titles... these can all be accessed and applied with a few punches on the keyboard and a few mouse clicks. But again, this easiness creates a level playing field for all competitors who have to therefore stand out by virtue of their creativity and imagination. Siddharth Babbar the Film and Media Secretary of Silverscreen, the club for the movie lovers of IIT Bombay, tells us the story about his maiden film produced some 30 years after the H4/H7 venture i.e. 30 years after Raj Babbar's time. Despite advancement in technology, film making is still full of trials and tribulations. You have to master casting, scripting, editing, acting, filming, production, and sound. You now do not use good old fashioned tomato ketchup for faking blood. You now use Gulaal as Sid did in his comedy horror film. That's the extent of detailing now. Sensitivity to ketchup blood vs. Gulaal blood.

Read on to travel a 3-decade journey of film making in IIT. It's a story of the motion of the picture. Not a picture of the motion, that's in Piku.

Stumblebee

Wax pass? Or Faux Pas?

EXCERPTED FROM MADHOUSE

IIT showed us four movies in a month with four Fridays and five in some months. The monthly pass came at a princely Rs. 2, which was sheer highway robbery as far as some scientific minds were concerned. If Necessity is the Mother of Invention, IIT was her maternity ward. The necessity of spreading this Rs. 2 expense over ten people led to an invention called 'coat the pass with wax'. Once the pass was ticked with a pen, or so thought the usher who actually ticked on wax, the successful entrant into the covo (convocation hall where the movies were screened) rubbed the tick away and slipped the pass out through a grill for the second man to attempt entry. In IIT guys asked each other for the usual match, lighter, cigarette of course. But sometimes they asked if anyone had a candle to spare. If you carried a candle in your pocket, you were respected as an individual with foresight.



Liability of Aas-ets

EXCERPTED FROM MADHOUSE

Image source www.unsplash.com

We were provided passive entertainment every Friday night, in the form of the Friday Night Movies in the Convo. These contributed significantly to many pleasant memories of IIT. Over half the hostel would empty, because the locals – those with homes in the city – went home. The campus descended into a soothing end-of-week tranquillity. The silly Hindi movies enhanced this experience. H4 junta had their regular seating area, a spot on the front right of the Convo entrance. The movies were entertaining, but not always in the way they were intended.

Some seniors before our time had a kind of a bet that one of them would go up and kiss the heroine on the screen while the movie was on. Let's assume that the heroine was Zeenat Aman. In order to help this intrepid hero, a few guys walked up to the screen with him, formed a human pyramid like we used to during Krishna Janmashtami celebrations, allowed him to climb up on the shoulders of three layers of guys to reach Zeenie's lips. But by the time he reached the top, the scene changed and our hero was rewarded with Pran's lips when the kiss materialized.

One of the Friday movies had maniben Asha Parekh in the lead and Garam Dharam was the hero. The scene shows Asha Parekh in a temple talking to God with a small wish in her mind "Bhagwan! Meri ek chhoti si aas hai..." The entire convo erupted with peals of

Some seniors before our time had a kind of a bet that one of them would go up and kiss the heroine on the screen while the movie was on.



laughter at this request, and some cried out that Asha was extremely ungrateful. Everyone remembers how well stacked Asha was there, and yet she had the cheek to call it "chhoti si aas."

1982: Not a Love Story

EXCERPTED FROM MADHOUSE

Bakul's crazy ideas, which, by his own admission had severely dented Fish's sense of discernment, had not always failed. We had achieved our elephant on campus, thanks to one of them. One of these came at the end of his time in IIT. With contributions from many of the stars, Bakul tells the story of his last EP (entertainment program) contribution.

In 1982, H4 was paired with H7 for the EP competition. It was early August and I was to bid adieu to IIT soon, but remained enthused enough to offer some "parting advice" to my juniors, most of whom had become my good friends. As it happened with all previous EPs, most of the initial ideas came over some lazy off-the-cuff remarks made in jest during tiffin time, when the organizers supposedly congregated for a serious brainstorming session. I had reasoned that our 1980 Hitler's motorcade and the elephant had been sensational hits and H4 should carry on the tradition. I said we should rent a helicopter during Friday evening Convo movie time and throw confetti on the guys walking to the Convo. As usual, this was greeted with jests and barbs and a "let's see you try to pull this off".

The elephant-renting success made me believe I could whistle "chopper" and the rotor-ed version would soon be hovering overhead. Soc-sec Sameer Vijaykar sanctioned a budget of Rs. 500. The chopper company guy (I think company was Pawan Hans) asked

me lots of questions about why IIT needed a chopper and why they need to throw confetti from the air rather than from the ground and if there was "nothing fishy" in the deal and whether we would get the Police Commissioner's permission "at our cost". After answering his questions satisfactorily, he quoted a figure of Rs. 6000. Fortunately, this was on the phone, so he could not see my eyebrows aiming for the sky and neither did he catch my "oh shit". I decided to at least compensate myself for the princely 50p I had paid for this call. I asked him if he had paratroopers to land near the Convo. I asked him if his aircraft could skywrite H4. I asked if he was willing to negotiate his figure "a bit". Sure he was. How much was the bit? Could he look at Rs. 500 all told including the confetti? He was incredulous. Surely, I meant five thousand and not five hundred, right? "Wrong", I told him. It was five hundred I wanted to pay him. The answer was the click of him hanging up. Clearly, he was not a Bawa. I was half hoping that he was, so that I could reply to his inevitable swear words with what I had learned from my friends Sharookh and Irani.

One evening and one more tiffin later, amid guffawing and more jests and barbs, I was selling my new idea of the day. Instead of showing the customary slides that we generally did during the intermission of the Friday movie, why don't we film a ten minute trailer and run it during the intermission? In those days when video cameras were not even heard of, thinking of renting a movie camera and a projector was more ambitious than getting a helicopter. I waited for the next series of barbs.

Surprisingly, there were serious and silent faces all over the table. Jetu spoke up finally. "Why should we spend money and make a trailer for publicity? Why don't we make a movie and run it as a feature in the main EP?" Ideas started flowing soon after this and it took us another evening and another tiffin to

start discussing specifics with Photography & Fine Arts sec Sheshgiri Rao aka Shesh from H7. Shesh could and would borrow an 8 mm movie cam from his friend. A ten minute reel would cost us Rs. 350 and another Rs. 150 if we wanted it with soundtrack. Brilliant IIT minds decided that they would beat the soundtrack system by dubbing the vocals on a cassette which would be played synchronously with the movie and we would spend the saved Rs. 150 on beer to celebrate what looked like

I said we should rent a helicopter during Friday evening Convo movie time and throw confetti on the guys walking to the Convo.



a clear cut box-office silver jubilee hit the moment Shesh said yes.

I left for Hyderabad soon after but returned within barely one week when an excited Sood and an equally excited Vijaykar called me in Hyderabad to say that the movie deal was through and that we were going to film it on so and so day. I got to H4 early on that so and so day. Vijaykar ran the oral script by me hurriedly. It was going to be Bollywood masala all the way. Two lost brothers. Villains with dens, goons and molls. Car chase. Comedians. Dubbed songs. I was to play a guest role. I was to drive the mobike with the hero in tow to rescue the heroine from the villain's clutches. But before that, I was to milk a cow when the hero comes running to me asking me for help and I was to stop the milking and jump on the nearest mobike to take the hero on the chase.

Vijayakar had already talked with head sweeper Kalidas who was going to loan his favourite milch cow for the scene. Kalidas had assured Vijaykar and team, "Saheb! I will give you such a cow, fountains of milk will spring forth from her teats." And the rascals had conspired to get me to be the comedian discover-

ing these fountains. I had to make a hurried and secret trip to Kalidas's dwelling just north of the north wing (which also housed The Dhoban). Kalidas was washing and scrubbing the cow while his family members babbled excitedly at the big day in their cow's life, little realizing that I was about to play spoiler. I reasoned with Kalidas that I was appearing in the fillum too with my cow i.e. my mobike, and I had carried an ironed pair of my favourite striped shirt and cream trousers for this momentous shoot, and would he please leave his cow where it belonged and would he please tell Vijaykar that she had taken suddenly ill? Kalidas apparently remembered a few lucrative deals with me in the past, including a bounty of my discarded clothes which I shamelessly made a big deal about, and dejectedly agreed to send his cow to graze in pastures of faceless anonymity. There would be no fountains of milk, as Vijaykar would discover later in the day.

Shoot started sharply at noon at Powai lake. It was decided then that the script would be developed as we went along and improvised at will. Two heroes, Shinde and Pa came from H7, while Radhika and Priti came from H10. This was a coup scored by Jetu, Sood, Khosla and gang. Rather than getting guys dressed up as women, they managed to get "the real thing" as Jetu said. It was quickly decided that Radhika would be the heroine and Priti would be the gangster's moll. Shinde was decidedly more handsome than Pa and also owned and wore a denim jacket and "non-slippers" and was selected unanimously. Pa had started a week ago with "I don't mind being the hero" to "I'd like to be the hero" to finally "Please make me the hero". Though ousted, he was sporting enough to break the coconut he had bought from Y Point to mark the token start, and he also did a mock muhurat clap shot. Shinde and Radhika sat in a boat whose ropes were held by Alexander while Shinde pretended to row the boat and Radhika pretended

to sing a number from the film Tere Mere Sapne. Lyrics were “Jeevan ki bagiya behekegi, mehekegi”. During dubbing however, the song was changed to “yeh jeevan hai” and nobody gave a thought to how the lip-synching would look on D-Day. Shinde and Radhika then stepped out of the boat hand in hand while the short cute athlete Bhinge playing the comedian got up from the boat (where by implication, he was hiding) and jumped into the lake. The new found film makers in us decided to mimic the veterans to the extreme. We now shifted our action to Vihar lake in the same manner that a lead pair starts singing a song at the Eiffel tower and finishes it at Qutb Minar. We needed Powai for the boats, but Vihar was more photogenic and gave us access to the pipeline where we had the car chase scene.

While the cameraman Shesh and a few others drove in Chintya’s black Fiat to Vihar and other trudged their way there, we realized that my bike would carry me and Shinde while Chintya’s car would carry the villain and the kidnapped heroine Radhika and Shesh would need another vehicle to film the car chase scene. That’s when we hit upon the idea of roping in DOSA Isaac, ostensibly to play a guest role, but in reality, to provide his scooter for the cameraman. Jiten and I rode to Isaac’s cute bungalow A-11 by the lakeside. Isaac was not thrilled to see that “Bak Bak” was back on campus after promising to stay away. The aftermath of the recent scandal “Campus Call Girl” was still fresh in everyone’s mind and Isaac was already frowning hard and loud on seeing me. I had to go down on my knees twice, I said his non compliance would cost our “crew”, thousands in damages. Jiten laughed his trademark loud Ha Ha every time I made a fresh attempt at melting Isaac, who finally relented when he knew I would not leave without him. He did ask what role he was to play in the movie, I told him truthfully I didn’t know (except for the scooter part). “The director will decide”, I said. He was

unconvinced, but came to Vihar all the same. At Vihar, after a hurried discussion, we gave him a pair of binoculars and asked him to look toward the lake and snap his fingers to summon an imaginary sidey. In the film, he would look through these field glasses at Vihar and espy Shinde and Radhika alight from a boat in Powai, and his snapping fingers were deleted and rather a Boss, he was transformed into a sidey who tells his Boss, “bass! Panchi aa gaya hai.” Bass was the tall, mean look-

Instead of showing the customary slides that we generally did during the intermission of the Friday movie, why don’t we film a ten minute trailer and run it during the intermission?



ing Meshram from H7 who had shaved his head for the role. Boss was seen sitting on the banks of Vihar with his moll Priti (not our Boss Patil and his real life Priti), telling her how they would escape with the “sona” after abducting Radhika. The Shinde-Radhika duo who had alighted at Powai was now walking, same hand in same hand, except that it was at Vihar now. They were still singing the “yeh jeevan hai” to the lip movements of “jeevan ki bagiya” while Meshram quickly moved behind them and grabbed Radhika’s hand and ran off with her.

Shesh was on the camera, there was nobody to direct as such and improvisation was the decided order of the day. Radhika brought in a new dimension to the script by running fast along with villain Meshy while screaming a sing song “bachao.” Shinde was quick to run in the opposite direction looking for his lost Radhika who was still in the frame while Shinde ran away. Shinde ran to a Charsi “sadhu” sitting under a tree and replied to his

question of where Radhika was, “gone man! Solid gone.”

- Rohan

Shinde then turned towards the pipeline and saw me sitting on my stationary mobike while singing, “Musafir hoon yaaron. Na ghar hai na thikana.” Vijaykar was seen scratching his bald head wondering why Kalidas’s cow had acted up. Shinde jumped on my mobike and I started it and raced off towards the direction of Meshy’s getaway car. Eventually, I caught up with the car and then saw Shesh sitting backwards on Isaac’s pillion, ahead of the car, filming the scene with a heavy wobbly camera resting on his unsteady hands moving up and down due to Isaac’s bad shock absorbers. Later, we could see that when he zoomed into the car to catch a shot of Meshy and Radhika, they were seen laughing while Radhika was still shouting “bachao”. A damsel in lesser distress was never seen before. An excited Shinde decided to catch the car by its window when we got there and almost got us killed by getting my mobike pulled close to the car. I started hitting Shinde’s hand to detach it from the car. It was captured on film.

The light was fading and Isaac had to go out and we decided to pack up shooting and continue next day at Kol Dongri sanctuary at the edge of Powai. Kol Dongri was an ideal setting for the villain’s den as it had some old crumbling walls which would crumble when a hero threw a villain’s sidekick into them. Before shooting on next day, we had an interesting and an animated discussion about how to film a scene where a hero dodges twelve armed villains by jumping backwards from the “ground level” to a landing or a floor or a wall top that could be classified as “upstairs”. The motion had to be smooth and fluid and nonchalant as in the real thing seen in not so real movies. Again, many intelligent engineering minds stepped in and offered solutions including filming a guy jumping down and then pasting each frame in reverse order.

Fortunately, a few idle minds concluded that holding a camera upside down would also do the trick. The scene shot at the villain’s den was the best, in my opinion. The villain’s lackeys were bare-chested and went down one by one in double slow motion to Shinde’s dishum dishum. One degree of motion was due to Shesh filming in slow motion. The other degree was the guys themselves falling down in slow motion, unaware that Shesh’s borrowed cam would do it too. When the last sidey was hit, he was made to collide against the wall and sure enough, as expected, it came crumbling down. Finally, Shinde and Meshy decide to fight it out solo. Meshy said, “Main woh toofan hoon jis se takrakar, ped hil jaate hain.” Shinde struck a match on Meshy’s bald head and said as he lit his cigarette, “Main who Chattan hoon jis se takrakar toofan ruk jaata hai.” More fisticuffs. A pendant comes out of Meshy’s shirt. And suddenly, there is recognition and a finally heart rending “Sohan” and “Mohan” kind of reunion between lost siblings. While the duo gets united, Radhika decides to run away with comedian Bhingee into a scene which shows “The End”.

During screening the projector began to vibrate and made Isaac vibrate to the tune of “yeh jeevan hai.” Shesh stopped the projector but Kohli did not stop the cassette player. Sound travelled at the speed of sound while light travelled at the speed of a faulty projector and we could hear “Sohan and Mohan” from the Charsi Sadhu who intended to say, “gone man! Solid Gone.”

All in all, the audience got a gist of what we attempted and as a concept, we got a lot of points for novelty. Jetu touted it as a multi-dimensional project which involved three hostels, faculty and alumni. Isaac was faculty and I was already an alumnus. While leaving the Convo, Isaac was heard remarking, “These chaps made me look like a fool. I hope that Bak bak has left for good.”

I left IIT and H4, but certainly not for good.

The Ghost of Water-loo

SIDDHARTH BABBAR

Being a film maker isn't easy. You have to combine genres ranging from writing, scripting, acting, camera skills, fine arts, and finally film making itself. So much so that Michael J. Fox, actor from the iconic "Back to The Future" movie series, said, "Pain is temporary, Film is forever". Going through all those pains and problems, spending hours and hours on end and getting that one great film, this is a film maker's dream. Be it Tarantino or Kashyap, or Spielberg or Rohit Shetty, or your little known and struggling film maker, all of them aim for that one great final product, that one film to rule them all.

In my 3 years as a student film maker, I had many interesting experiences. Some were good, some were bad, but it was the end product that mattered. A good film makes the making worth living through, as every film maker would second me. I have had experiences in making my own films, helping others make theirs and being guided by more experienced seniors in a few cases. I met interesting people, had funny takes and retakes, had real night-outs sleeping at 10 am, had few minor accidents and what not... it is all a part of the learning experiences.

Well it is said that you can't forget your first love. Well, I can't forget my first film either. Even though the finished product wasn't very good, it is close to my heart. This film was made during our very own inter-hostel freshman competition or "Freshiezza". Al-

Being a film maker isn't easy. You have to combine genres ranging from writing, scripting, acting, camera skills, fine arts, and finally film making itself.



though I had made an ad-film 2 weeks before, this was the first real short film I made. The experience can hardly be penned down, but I will try my best to describe it as vividly as I can. Please forgive me for the use of any technical film-related terms, I promise I won't use them unless absolutely necessary. Here it goes:

After being declared the winners of the Ad-making competition 2 weeks ago, my friend (and teammate) Paresh came to me with an idea. He wanted to make a horror film. He had the complete story in mind and was very confident about it. I was enthused by the idea, but wasn't very confident about it. The previous evening, someone had taught me how to replicate the ghost flying effect. I saw this as a great opportunity to test it out and agreed to the film wholeheartedly. Eventually though, I ended up using all the meagre film making skills I had acquired by then, and the broth that I ended up making wasn't all that bad!

Once we had the story, the next step was to look for actors. As had been told by our seniors and we had found by the previous

experience, this was perhaps the toughest step. But not for us... we had the complete hostel at our disposal. We rounded up a few wing-mates, or “wingies” for short, and forced them into roles that we thought would befit them. We needed two main characters, the ghost and a puny little guy to be tormented by the ghost. Well that is what we kept the eligibility as, the shortest, thinnest guy became the haunted guy, and the biggest bulliest looking guy became the ghost. Although he has still not

Making this film was one of the best experiences I had. I learnt a few things on how to make a film, but I learnt hundreds of things not to do while making one.



forgiven me, the ghost was happy with the role back then. Adding a few supporting roles, the cast was complete.

Now came the shooting. A fact that might be worth considering is that this movie was made in 24 hours from conception. And to get that eerie effect, we wanted to shoot at night, unaware that shooting in bad light is not good for the film. And the 24 hour thing meant that we had just 1 night to complete the shoot. So at 8 pm, out comes the camera and the cameraman (that’s me). The camera was a puny little 8 MP digicam, found in almost every household... nothing sophisticated. And we set out to shoot. First road block: the ghost doesn’t look like a ghost. He needs make up! Now who here has a girlfriend so we can borrow her make-up box? Sadly none of us had one. So my innovative friend Paresh takes inspiration from the Dark Knight and makes his own make-up for the ghost. Simple items from an art enthusiast’s cupboard (another one of my wingies) like white chalk powder and graphite black from a pencil does the trick. Lo and behold, we have our own custom

made ghost ready.

Now for the first scene. The soon to be haunted guy is sleeping peacefully in his bed. We imagined the movie to open with a shot of his face zooming into his closed eye, which suddenly opens up. Imagining is easy, but god knows how those film makers do it! Well this is how we did it. Imagine the poor little guy sleeping on his bed (my bed, in this case, for the lack of funds). Now, I am standing over him with my camera in one hand, and the other hand clinging on for dear life. And where is the camera? Well, it’s pushed into his face so that we have his eye in focus and his face in the frame. And now when Paresh says action, I have to zoom in by moving the camera closer to his face and shouting out to open his eyes at the right moment. Now you know why movies are dubbed ;). A few retakes did the trick and we were really pleased with the product.

Moving on, we encountered problems after problems but we handled them somehow and went on. There was one scene where we needed flickering lights. Being the editor of the film, I wasn’t convinced that I will be able to do it in the editing. So we ended up actually turning the light on/off to get that shot! Luckily, the tube light responded well and did not give those extra flickers it gives at the start. Another scene was when the protagonist runs away from the ghost and into the camera kept on the floor. Cinematography wise—bad idea. But who cares? Anyways, he is running into the camera. Wait, who prevents the camera from flying away, being kicked by the actor? Happy realization! I ended up scolding the actor to be extremely careful close to the cam and I was behind it ready to catch it if anything goes wrong. Nothing did.

After shooting various scenes, we needed some blood. Sauce? No man, too obvious. Well somebody produced a packet of gulaal—from somewhere and voila! Here’s the blood ready. You will see some good uses of this blood if you actually see the film. A Batman

Begins inspired spray can (hallucinogen) made an entry too somewhere but that was brief.

Soon we realized, we needed a tantrik. Enter Girdhar, winner of the best freshman actor. Being a tantrik he deserves a dramatic entry and he got one, I made sure of it in the editing. The exorcism is carried out, the dying of the ghost is shown, he haunts them for one last time (my dear flying ghost effect!!) and everyone goes home happily. Oh wait, my horror film has turned out to be a comedy one. Why? Because the ghost dies way too dramatically, a heart attack which came after he wasn't allowed to answer nature's call. Don't blame me for that, not my idea. And by the way did I mention that the ghost's name is *Sandaska bhoot* and he haunts toilets? We soon realized that it would be a good idea to declare this as a comedy movie and it was received well by the audience as that. Although we ended up adding more twists and turns including a detective (played by Paresh himself), a scam by the tantrik, and what not, we did complete the shoot on time.

Next whole day went in the editing, sound mixing (yeah, we mixed lots of tracks) and finishing the product. I applied all I knew and left no scene untouched. Bad idea, but didn't know it back then :P After this crunching schedule and 2 sleepless nights, we had our film ready. Not very good, but was good enough to win the competition, among allegations of too much sound mixing and copied scenes.

Making this film was one of the best experiences I had. I learnt a few things on how to make a film, but I learnt hundreds of things not to do while making one. Made new friends, many of them are still good friends, including the poor ghost. I also developed an interest in this field and went on to learn a lot and soon enough, even teach aspiring film makers. Paresh went on to become the hostel Film secretary and the next year, the cultural councilor of Hostel 7. Most of the others

never made a film again. But they helped me raise an interest in it.

I have purposefully left out the editing end of this experience. Apart from being too technical, it will be quite boring for most of the readers. Hope you liked the story, and I assure you, all the characters, events and names are real. You can even go and watch the film, "The Last Laugh" on YouTube: or just Google "The Last Laugh iitb" and you'll find it. Although most of the readers would find it really difficult, I would encourage you to at least once try to make a film, or get involved in one. It's an exhilarating experience.



Siddharth Babbar

Siddharth Babbar is a third year (soon to be fourth) undergraduate in the Department of Energy Science and Engineering, IITB. Interested in many cultural activities including, but not limited to, film making, photography, designing, literary arts, speaking and music. Hates Sports, except swimming. Loves to goad about himself. Introduced to film making in the freshman year, went on to be in the institute cultural team for the next two years, wishes to take it up as a hobby.

She too had a Dream

EKLAAVYA MAHAJAN

*Let me establish the story from the start
From where my life began
There was that first spark in my heart
Soon myriads of heartbeats ran.*

*It seemed I was packed in a box -
Darkness and no freedom
I could only hear some gabby talks
Guess they're my dad and mum.*

*One day I started kicking my jail
In an attempt to get out
I assumed my kicks would make her wail
But merrily she seemed to shout!*

*Days went on as I kicked and slept
Inside my small dark cage
Then one day I slept quite deep
And woke up to a new stage.*

*I was out and crying so loud
As the other faces smiled
I was surrounded by a crowd
I was a girl child.*

*Life was then fun as I grew
And started following my dreams
After passing my college I knew
Life's not half as bad as it seems.*

*I got married to the perfect guy
And happily we did live
Hearing our child's first cry
We got all we asked God to give.*

*As time went on and we grew old
One day I again fell asleep
This time I saw what was untold
As time took a backward leap.*

*I heard someone say it's a girl
And the others expressed dismay
I was asleep and rolled up in a curl
As they cursed God to whom they used to pray.*

*All my dreams were just my dreams
I was too naive and just off the boat
I never got freedom from my cage it seems
As a knife reached my throat.*

*My body was wrapped in a new box
I was too numb for kicks
I again heard some gabby talks
As I was being buried under some bricks.*

*I will end my story which could never start
As my life never began
They extinguished the spark in my heart
Because I was not a man.*



Eklaavya Mahajan

A guy in search of a perfect and ideal world - I write poetry as a way of letting out my feelings whenever my heart feels burdened with intense emotions, be it happiness, anger, sympathy or sorrow. I use my poems to maintain balance between solitude and dependence in my life.

The Currency of Language

A case for the advancement of the IIT *slanguage*

DR. KRISHNA S. DHIR

Early in the inception of IIT Bombay, its students were already developing the unique vocabulary used by them today to express concepts, experiences, sentiments, and emotions that are unique to their IIT experience. Somehow, the vernacular languages represented at the Institute were simply inadequate for effective reporting of one's thoughts and feelings within the context of the IIT acculturation. The process of living the mainstream life at IIT was so demanding that it required its own *slanguage*. For instance, if one performed badly in a quiz, one's dejection was reported as, "*tamboora bajgaya!*" This was to state that the individual had a difficult time concentrating on the questions asked in the quiz, because some melody kept playing over and over in the person's head. In three simple words, a deep emotion, and the associated resignation, was effectively conveyed. Those three words explained both the cause and the effect of poor performance. If a colleague was found in a confused state of mind about some theory to be applied to a problem, he was told, "You need to get your *fundas*, yaar!" This implied that the individual was ignorant of the basic tenets of the theory and ran the risk of becoming inconsequential, with little to offer to the learning of his peers. Over the years, students at various institutions have developed their own 'slang language' and the phenomenon has achieved a degree of sophistication, enough for this phenomenon

to attract serious attention of social linguists.

Eventually, my experience with *slanguage* at IIT Bombay came in handy when I began working in corporate organizations, first at Borg-Warner Chemicals in West Virginia, manufacturing high-impact plastic resins, and then later at CIBA-GEIGY AG in Switzerland, manufacturing pharmaceutical drugs. I noticed that corporate organizations, too, develop their own *slanguage*! Often the evolving vocabulary is derived from the unique characteristics of the industries in which the corporations operate, technologies they use, specialized disciplines they deploy, and the ambient culture in which they reside. The practice is widespread. For instance, at IBM, to resolve an issue was to "flatten" it. To nonconcur was to disagree. A foil referred to an overhead slide and to reswizzle it was to improve it.

I too encountered unique vocabularies, while working for CIBA-GEIGY AG in Basle, Switzerland, at their world headquarters. The local language spoken in Basle was Basler Deutsch, a dialect of German unique to a narrow, well-defined region. Not too far away is Zurich, with its own dialect. During my time in Basle, through the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s, Basle was home to two additional world headquarters of pharmaceutical multinationals, one for Sandoz, and the other for Hoffmann La Roche. While the working language in CIBA-GEIGY was English, in Sandoz it was French and in Hoffmann La



Picture Credit: Frits Ahlefeldt Source <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bikingartist/>

Roche it was German. I wondered why three major multinationals with headquarters in the same city, operating in the same industry, would opt for three different working languages. I started reading literature on choice of language. I found that corporations choose a language that best enhances their competitive advantage within the strategic environment in which they operate. The same is true for a community of people. If available languages do not adequately and effectively facilitate exchange of information or cultural nuances, the members of the community develop a new vocabulary.

I also found that philosophers have long contemplated on the relationships between wealth and knowledge. Their insights have resulted in such observations as, “His word is gold,” and “Money talks.” Coins are minted and so are words! Florian Coulmas quotes a 17th century thinker, Stefano Guazzo, as stating, “Just as all sorts of coins – golden, silver and copper – issue from the purse, expressions

and other words of greater and lesser value come out of the speaker’s mouth.” John Locke viewed a word as “the common measure of commerce and communication.” Locke’s contemporary, Leibniz started the mischief of linking Language and Money. Subsequently, David Hume went further, describing parallels in the development and functions of language and money.

It is important to note that their analogies were between Money and Language. Therein, I thought, was the problem! Just as money may be managed in different currencies, so can a message be managed in different languages! Imagine my shock, when I began to entertain the idea that these great philosophers, the likes of John Locke, Leibniz and David Hume, needed to get their fundas clear! I was seeing a parallel not between Money and Language, but rather between Money and Message, and Currency and Language! Just as money could be managed in various currencies, so a message could be crafted in many languages. I find

it rather surprising that even when examining the parallels between the functions of money and language, Hume did not catch on the misplaced analogy! I can imagine the reader asking, at this point of this essay, “So, what then are these functional parallels?”

Introductory study of the nature of currency informs us that currency has three basic functions. These are: (i) accounting for value, (ii) storing value, and (iii) exchanging value. As a tool for accounting of value, currency can be used in various ways, including invoicing trade and denominating various financial instruments. As a store of value, currency serves as an investment device, allowing value to be transported across locations and applications. As a medium of exchange, one may use currency to settle various financial transactions, including trade. To explore the parallel functions of language, one needs to go no further than to examine the roles of IIT Bombay’s own slanguage! What, after all, does the lingo developed by the students at IIT Bombay over the years do for them?

The students are admitted to the IIT through a stringent screening process, then to be subjected to a highly demanding routine to attain superior performance before graduating. The screening process creates a student community that shares a set of values that stresses learning, professionalism, team-work, and high academic achievement, among other qualities. The common values of the students, their experiences, their traits and habits, their responses to the demands made on them, all contribute to the creation of a distinct IIT Bombay culture. As stated by Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871, “Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” The language of IIT Bombay is at the heart of this culture.

The students use the vocabulary of their slanguage(i) to account for their culture, and

affirm it, through their narratives; (ii) store their culture through a specialized vocabulary, which ensures that their shared beliefs, social forms, attitudes, values, practices as a group, are perpetuated; and (iii) exchange their culture to acculturate new students joining the Institute, and communicate it to communities outside IIT Bombay. Similarly, the functions of a language may be viewed as parallel to the functions of a currency in a corporate setting as well. In a corporate setting too, as in any community, a language may be seen as performing three parallel functions: (i) accounting for culture, knowledge, or information, through narratives; (ii) storing culture, knowledge, information, and know-how; and (iii) exchanging culture, knowledge, or information. Further, note that information has value, especially in an emerging knowledge-based economy. Therefore, in an economic context, language is a corporate asset, and in a social context, it is a community asset, in a manner similar to currency! The student lingo plays an essential role in student learning experience at IIT Bombay. At IIT Bombay it should rightly be deemed an institutional asset and should be conserved and promoted as such.



Krishna S Dhir
B TECH, CHEM E, '66, H 6

Krishna S Dhir is the Dean of the College of Business and Economics at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. He served as Vice President of BioStarMedical Products and a pilot-plant manager with Borg-Warner Chemicals in the US; and an executive of CIBA-GEIGY in Switzerland. Elected Fellow of the Operational Research Society in 2004, he served as the President of the Decision Sciences Institute during 2011-2012. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado.

The moon[©]

SANDEEP KISHORE

*The day I took
The moon in my hand
it looked,
as if it had been waiting
for me, for a very long time.*

*It settled
in my hand
and said,
you took a while.*

*I observe them everyday
everyone looks at me
many desire me
But few have the courage
to grab me.*

*All it takes is to jump
and get me,
I am far
for a reason.*

*I play with the sun's rays
and change my shape
sometimes, I am complete
and sometimes half,
I even hide behind the sun
to get away*

*People with deep conviction
don't rest at night,
be it a full
or
moonless night*

*I always see their
inner light to be on*

*It's difficult, but not impossible...
Even I wait.*

*Go and get your own moon
Go and get your own moon*



Sandeep Kishore
B TECH CIVIL E, '87, H 9

Sandeep Kishore is a global business leader, writer, blogger, poet, speaker and, above all else, a dreamer and doer. He is a corporate executive and a respected strategic thinker in the IT industry. He is an advocate of growth through applied innovation, transformation and market leadership. Sandeep is a regular speaker at global industry events, analyst forums and leading management schools. He is a frequent contributor to several leading industry publications. Sandeep, along with his wife Sushma, is the co-founder of Har Asha Foundation, a non-profit organization focused on skills development and vocational training programs. He lives in Silicon Valley, California. This poem is from Sandeep's first collection of Hindi-English poems 'Your Shadow Wants to Walk Alone', which was recently published by Rupa Publications Private Limited. The book is available for online purchase on Amazon and Filpkart.

Made of Honour?

A discussion on academic ethics

ANTARIKSH BOTHALE

My first reaction on listening to the recent ethics committee decision was: "Der aaye durust aaye".

So far, IITB used to make half-hearted pleas for this elusive thing called academic honesty, while actually doing nothing to change the existing system—a system that is tipped heavily in favor of the dishonest.

In this respect, IIT Bombay is a microcosm for the country as a whole. I have argued elsewhere that, in a place like India, where dishonesty and corruption are often the norm, it's almost unfair to expect people to be honest while the system remains optimized for the dishonest.

Whether it be corruption at the national level or academic dishonesty at the college level, the fundamental equation remains the same—the disincentive needs to be systemic and systematic, not incidental.

Take the case of someone who is given a fail grade in a course merely because he didn't attend enough classes (let's keep aside, for the moment, the rather contentious topic of whether XX/DX grades do any good). His friends, who attended fewer lectures than him, have managed to pass through because they asked someone to sign the attendance sheet for them. Alternatively, imagine a student who gets a lower grade than the rest of his class because no one else found anything wrong in cheating in a major assignment.

If you need to fix this, you need to change

If you need to fix this, you need to change the incentive structure, and it can only happen top down, with the institute making clear and strict policies, and more importantly, implementing them consistently.



the incentive structure, and it can only happen top down, with the institute making clear and strict policies, and more importantly, implementing them consistently.

Honestly, I don't even need to write this all in justification, because IIT Bombay has previously tackled something similar—ragging—and it has worked extremely well.

While ragging and cheating aren't exact parallels (for starters, the benefits of cheating are significant, especially in a system that largely ignores it), it is pretty similar to our current topic of handling academic dishonesty in many ways.

The institute wants neither to happen. Both activities give some kind of immediate positive utility to the person who commits them. Both are very strongly linked to the 'culture' of a place. Most people roughly agree that both are bad. In both cases, the perpetrator justifies their actions rather easily ("I was ragged for two years, why should I not rag my



Image credit: Fritz Ablefeldt, <http://openinnovation.cc/photo/1/Innovation-on-the-edge.html>"

juniors now? It's all just fun" / "Everyone else is cheating in the take-home exam. If I don't, I will be the only guy who gets a low grade.")

Today, ragging is no longer a part of 'IITB Culture'; 10 years ago, it was. What changed? For sure, students did not suddenly decide not to rag out of the goodness of their hearts. The institute made it clear that ragging would be dealt with in a no-nonsense way, and did not shy from making true on that promise. Sure, it pinched the initial few batches who got a raw deal, but today, we can proudly talk of a ragging-free college and a ragging-free culture.

Culture will take care of itself. Especially at a place which refreshes its population every

five years.

There is another case study in the institute, and this one's right at the heart of the matter: the CSE department. It is typically stricter about this issue—students who copy assignments often get burnt right in their freshie / sophie year, with a clear message that dishonest practices would be met with at least a grade penalty (with an FR as fairly likely too). This does two things: it significantly disincentivizes dishonest practices, and it makes it 'okay' for students to not abet cheating. So the next time someone asks you for your assignment, you can simply say that you can't risk getting an FR, and voilà you are no longer termed "RG"

for refusing to partake in this behavior.

If the institute encourages a culture of dishonesty by doing nothing about it, and then randomly penalizes a few fourth year students at the end of their IIT career, giving them FRs and ruining their graduation, it's not being wrong, but it's acting like the mother in a famous fable who doesn't stop her kid when he steals small stuff from his schoolmates, but later blames him for becoming a thief and going to prison.

Culture will take care of itself. Especially at a place which refreshes its population every five years.



So far, the institute (barring a few cases) has largely behaved like that mother, dealing with academic dishonesty in a very ad-hoc fashion. Some professors get riled up over even minor copying in a lab report, while others don't bat an eyelid despite students photocopying entire assignments and submitting them.

Now, it is true that there is at least some influence of curriculum design, teaching methods, quality of assignments etc. on students' desire (and self-rationalization) to cheat, and the institute should definitely be trying to improve itself on these axes, but as far as dealing with the general malaise of dishonest practices goes, there is but one way to go.

Step 1 of the transformation is now over. The institute has defined infractions and their punishments reasonably well. It remains to be seen how well different departments end up enforcing them. I will keep my fingers crossed.

This article was published in Insight as an Op-eds piece in the month of May. Insight is the official student media body of IIT Bombay. It is currently the only active official media body in the institute run voluntarily by students.

insight
the third eye



Antariksh Bothale

B TECH, MECH E (DD), '12,
H-3

Antariksh is an alumnus of the Mechanical Engineering department of IIT Bombay. An ex-Insight editor, he also writes on Quora and his personal blogs.

Inside Government Schools

VINEY KIRPAL

Let me share two scenarios with you. In the first I am teaching a small group of students in IIT Bombay. The year is 1974. These are the first eight students selected under the affirmative action scheme for the undergraduate program in an IIT. They have been admitted to the year-long preparatory course meant to bridge the gap in their subject proficiencies. They are all underprivileged village and small town boys. The class has no girl students. The students, by a committee report mandate, have been selected down to zero marks in the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE). They have rejected the call for admission to college to come to the more prestigious institute. They look happy and work hard. Next year they are absorbed in the First Year of the regular B.Tech course. Now the pace of teaching has accelerated. They are competing with JEE entrants who are toppers from different institutions. Soon they are feeling lost, lagging behind, doing badly in the tests, getting melancholic. As this pattern repeats itself the next year and the next, they come to be known as “backloggers”, some carrying a baggage of as many as 10 uncleared courses. Three years later, they are asked to leave the institute. For no fault other than the kind of schools they have studied in, they quit, broken in spirit, not knowing how to face their families, armed with no more than their Std. X passing certificate. What they lacked was the sound foundation needed in Science,

It is a challenge to get the students to master Std. X Maths and English when they can neither read nor understand the language, nor do they know how to multiply, divide, add or subtract. The harm has already been done.



Maths and English to do well in IIT. The story remains unchanged even today, barring a few exceptions.

Now cut to the second scenario. The year is 2010. GREAT Foundation, the NGO I had founded in 2002, has been working to empower and develop less privileged children studying in government schools by providing educational materials including notebooks and sending volunteers to teach English and Maths to Std. X students. The volunteers report that the concepts of the students are very weak. They try their best to teach the students. The job is hard. The students are to face their Board exams three months later. It is a challenge to get the students to master Std. X Maths and English when they can neither read nor understand the language, nor do they know how to multiply, divide, add or subtract. The harm has already been done, except in a few countable cases who are comparatively



Conducting science activities at a government school

better. The SSC exam is taken. The results are declared. Ten students across three government schools actually score above 80%. One of them tops with 84%. He aspires to join an IIT after completing Junior College. GREAT Foundation supports the ten students with college scholarships sponsored by a company which assures them of continued monetary assistance if they get 60%. Only one girl student, who was studying Arts, returns to collect the second installment. The rest, who had taken Science, have plummeted to less than 50% in six months, less than 40% at the end of the year. Including the IIT aspirant. What has gone wrong? For one they didn't know English despite having passed the SSC Exam. Secondly, their concepts in Maths and Science were too shaky to help them do well in Junior College. Their performance fails to get them into degree college.

The government schools that GREAT Foundation supports are at least 60 years old. Yet not a single engineer, doctor or architect has been produced by them. They are an

analogy for most government schools across India. The budget of the nine or ten schools is over 100 crore. Most of it goes towards maintenance and teacher salaries which are substantial after the sixth Pay Commission. Unfortunately, majority of the teachers have not been selected on merit. Their teaching methods are archaic—the chalk and talk method, text book and rote-learning based pedagogy. The subject knowledge of the teachers leaves much to be desired. Given a test, most would fail. There is no accountability, only indifference and protection, typical of government set ups.

What compounds the problem is the background of the students. All of them belong to low income communities comprising rural laborers who have migrated to Pune in search of jobs. They live in slums close to the schools. Their parents are illiterate. The fathers are raddi wallas, drivers, rickshawallas, daily wage earners, and so on. The mothers are house maids. Over 70% mothers are the sole earning members. Here too the fathers snatch away their earnings to get their daily drink. Wife

and child beating is rampant. The children lack economic and emotional security.

There is no rapport between the parents and the school. The schools do nothing to build a relationship with them. On their part, having sent their children to school, parents believe they have done their duty. They expect high returns from this decision. Their involvement in most school matters is absent. On the one hand is fear of the school authorities, on the other are compulsions of earning a liveli-

Despite several representations by government schools and teacher associations not to send teachers on election and census duty, state governments and local bodies do not pay heed. Teachers are regularly sent out of school to collect, verify and compile data for long durations unmindful of the damage it does to the students.



hood which discourages them from absenting themselves from work to attend Parent-Teacher or School Management Committee (SMC) meetings. They cannot challenge teachers who do not teach well. Being uneducated they are diffident. In a rare case, where a parent very politely informs the SMC that students are unable to understand the Std. VII Science teacher, they are told that the matter will be looked into. Even if it is examined, nothing much comes out of it because there is little that the Principal can do to improve the teacher or her teaching. Having been Chairman of the SMC of three government schools, I have seen the pattern repeat itself.

After the RTE Act of 2010, the promotion of every child has been assured upto Std. VIII with negative results in government schools. At the slightest excuse, the parents keep the child back at home. Sometimes, their rickshaw won't turn up. This is especially so on Saturdays when attendance in the schools is less than 50%. Sometimes, parents send their children away to the village for weeks without realizing the harm it does to the child's performance. In case the school tries to adopt a disciplinary stance, parents protest saying that the school is unduly making an issue about their ward's poor performance when there is no such requirement from the government.

The government should re-examine this clause of the RTE now that four years of its implementation are over. It has generated a lack of seriousness about studies both on the part of the students and their parents who are illiterate and don't understand the value of sending the child to school regularly. As the students are promoted irrespective of their having learnt anything, a large number of them drop out after Std. VIII once it is clear that they are almost as ignorant as when they had enrolled.

Continuous Evaluation, which is supposed to be an inalienable aspect of schooling under the RTE Act, is not followed. Who wants to work more, design active learning exercises and evaluate them? There is no perceivable benefit for the teaching fraternity. So, the status quo continues: One week of unit tests preceded by one week of revision every quarter. Thereby no one really knows how well the students are faring until Std. VIII when the marks scored by the students in the final exam become the basis of promotion to Std. IX or detention in Std. VIII or discontinuation of school.

With few good teachers around, the schools divide the students into sections according to their proficiency levels. Students in Section A are considered the best and are



Science workshop

assigned the better teachers. The rest are assigned to the remaining teachers. Everyone understands the meaning of being in a particular section. The students in the low performing sections only get more demoralized and de-motivated. Although it is a practical arrangement and it might be better to mix students so that they learn from one another, the reality is quite different.

Further, despite several representations by government schools and teacher associations not to send teachers on election and census duty, state governments and local bodies do not pay heed. Teachers are regularly sent out of school to collect, verify and compile data for long durations unmindful of the damage it does to the students. With every teacher who is sent on such duty, the class ratio of 1:60 (already a big number) goes up to 1:120 as sections are combined. In the absence of adequate teachers, non-subject teachers including computer teachers and lab assistants are sent to teach the students or to keep them occupied. When such conditions persist over long

periods, students are known to get psychologically disturbed and instances of spontaneous violence such as brawls among boy students erupt, creating serious problems for the Principal and the teachers.

Parents are sent for every small misdemeanor on the student's part. Principals are seen loudly telling the parents in public of their ward's misdeeds in language which would be very humiliating to any child. In response, the parents, especially fathers, in their anxiety to show their support to the school authorities, are known to even remove their chappals and start hitting their grown up son or daughter in full view of every one. "Isko maro" (Hit them), they tell the Principal. The teachers do that anyway. The banning of corporal punishment holds no meaning. For small mistakes, an arm is twisted, a slap or two lands on a tender cheek. Caning for more serious instances of indiscipline is resorted to, in order to set an example. "That is the only language these children understand" you are told by parents and teachers alike. There is

almost glee in a teacher's voice when he or she tells another, "*Aaj maine inko khub peeta*" (I have given them a good beating today) as the causal incident is described.

A joyless life, that's what it is for the students. Beating at home, beating in school, the narrative is the same from Balwadi to Std. X. An aptitude test that our NGO had organized in one of the schools confirmed that the students were in a depressed state of mind. The SCERT which conducted the test revealed that the

This brings me to the dream scenario. The year is 2030. Some of the best schools are free schools for the less privileged. The best teachers teach there. They are trained in the latest pedagogical methods. Teaching is concept-based and effort is made to help every child learn.



students were equally unhappy at home and in school. A question that needs to be answered by different bodies is: Can an emotionally discharged child do well academically? What are less privileged school children being subjected to? The aptitude test report also showed that the students were weak in Science and Maths. How does anyone expect the students to do well in a Science College or enter an IIT?

Very little teaching or learning seems to go on in the schools. A large number of extra curricular activities in the name of children's development take place during class time. Classes are cancelled for the smallest reason, children are pulled out of class for dance or song practice with least concern for the importance of the subject being taught. When actual class is on, children are kept busy

writing from the text book so that they don't make a noise. Teachers pass time by reading from the text books or better still out of guide books. No one teaches them the subject concepts.

Std. X students are taught using 'Likely Question' sets. Upto 20 marks in each subject, and marks for Science practicals are awarded by the school for inclusion in the aggregate of the SSC exam. Is it any surprise that a larger percentage of students seems to be passing the SSC exam yearly, with every school awarding the maximum towards internal marks? One need not stretch one's imagination to know why even those who score in the 80's in the SSC have weak subject foundations and find it hard to survive college for long. Now and then, an exceptional child escapes through this Kafkaesque system of schooling and achieves good results. Maybe her parents or at least one parent was very supportive. One such is a girl named Komal who has completed her diploma in Computer Science and is now studying in second year Computer Science Engineering. At such times, many may come forward to claim their role in the student's success. Some of it may well be true, but the fact is that most students do not return to their school after leaving it; the bonds don't exist.

While the data for different schools are not available, enquiries reveal that not all join college after Std. X. Of those who do, the majority drop out after Std. XI or XII for academic, financial and personal reasons. The vicious cycle then continues. Boys take up the professions of their fathers or do not take up jobs at all as they cannot find any, befitting their literate status. Not knowing how to speak English is a major factor. Girls after SSC or Std. XI are married off and usually end up as housemaids, like their mothers.

A good number of corporate houses, under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have started short-term sponsored programs in employability skills through NGOs and

company volunteers for youths between 18 and 25 years of age. This is definitely a useful initiative for school and college dropouts, more so for the latter as students passing out of school are typically not more than 16 and cannot be employed. The advantage of these projects is that they are measurable by the number of youths who get gainfully employed after the training. However, it is a challenge for the sponsors to get sufficient numbers to train, despite a huge shortage of skilled labor

Corporate houses can actually help NGOs bring about this change by setting up good public schools for low income communities or finance NGOs to run existing schools as institutes of excellence under the PPP model that the RTE Act has recommended both for rural and urban India.



that PM Modi has also talked about along with aggressive plans for skill training as an important developmental agenda. The reason is that, somewhere, the beneficiaries are not motivated to undergo training for a period of 3 to 12 months in a disciplined manner. That mindset has to be shaped in school. Probably, the answer is to link skill development programs with school and increase their duration to 2 to 3 years as was envisioned in the 10+2+3 pattern. Corporate houses could still sponsor and oversee their execution.

Corporates could play yet another important role in the schooling of the underprivileged. Here, a paradigm shift in thinking is called for. One must ask “Why should quality English schools not be set up for less privileged children? Don’t they deserve them?

Why is it considered enough to send them to some school and never considered important to monitor or demand quality education for them? Is it only the preserve of the rich? Why should the less privileged become electricians and not electrical engineers? Why must they only become nurses and not doctors? Corporate houses can actually help NGOs bring about this change by setting up good public schools for low income communities or finance NGOs to run existing schools as institutes of excellence under the PPP model that the RTE Act has recommended both for rural and urban India. A few such schools have been set up by Bharti Airtel, Thermax and Reliance. If more corporate houses could come forward, alone or in conglomeration (since the cost is high), and support this initiative, then a revolution of sorts could be engineered in poor schools. Many such partnerships can ensure measurable results and proper learning outcomes on a big scale. Under such partnerships, selection of the best teachers, curriculum development in context of the children’s socio-economic ecosystem, regular teacher training, setting up of deliverables and measurable performance targets and fulsome engagement with parents can be reasonably ensured.

I want to conclude with a dream. Anand Kumar’s Super 30 is doing a great job by training free of cost 30 bright less privileged children every year for successful entry into the IITs. Dakshana Foundation set up by Canada-based entrepreneur IITian Mohnish Pabrai, taking the cue from Super 30, selects 250-300 students from Navodaya Vidyalayas and sponsors their training for JEE yearly to see them join the IITs. India’s coaching classes are doing that in lakhs for her middle classes because they can pay for their children to be in good schools and for their coaching. However, it is only when thousands and lakhs of less privileged students, trained in quality schools, are available for being coached for the JEE that the dream India of 2020 with thousands

and lakhs of scientists, technocrats and other professionals from low income communities will be realized. Only when quality education is offered to India's less privileged children on a mass scale will it widen the catchment area and impact generations. This brings me to the dream scenario. The year is 2030. Some of the best schools are free schools for the less privileged. The best teachers teach there. They are trained in the latest pedagogical methods. Teaching is concept-based and effort is made to help every child learn. There is a child-friendly atmosphere in the school. Parents and teachers work hand in hand for the development of the children. Children love to come to school. They are given good values and trained to become confident. When they pass the Std. X exam, they are knowledgeable and competent to clear the exam with flying colors. Like middle class children, they too get coached for the JEE and a good number make it on merit. Next they are sitting in the First Year B. Tech class and enjoying their lectures which builds on their earlier knowledge. Everyone has to work hard in IIT. So they too put in the required effort. Four years later, they face the campus interviews and are selected in companies as technologists or scientists. Possible? Yes, very much so if we all work in that direction and express discontentment with the status quo.

What about existing government schools? Can't they be improved? Of course, they can be transformed provided the following steps are taken. First their teachers should be chosen strictly on merit. Secondly, teachers should be trained in the best teaching and child management methods. Thirdly, teachers must not be sent on census duties to the detriment of the students' education. Fourthly, targets of performance and learning outcomes must be set by teachers and increments and promotions should be based on their fulfillment. The schools set up by public-private endeavor could become benchmarks in quality for exist-

ing government schools till they too become the best.

True democracy, equality of opportunity and justice for all, as enshrined in our Constitution, lies in such schools. Can the Prime Minister, the Minister of Human Resources Development (MHRD) and philanthropic business leaders please step forward and help make this ambitious dream come true?



Dr. Ms. Viney Kirpal

Dr. Ms. Viney Kirpal is former Professor and Head, HSS, IIT Bombay. She is President of GREAT Foundation which she runs in Pune since 2002.

Creative Bees at Fundamatics

ILLUSTRATION



Shreyas Navare

M MGMT, SJMSOM, '08,
H-13

Shreyas Navare, Mumbai, Senior Manager, Marketing and Corporate Communications at a private bank. He freelances as a Editorial Cartoonist for Hindustan Times. He has covered elections in 6 Indian states through the eyes of a cartoonist on behalf of HT. Shreyas has held many cartoon exhibitions, two of which were inaugurated by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. His first solo international cartoon exhibition was held recently at Bangkok. His second exhibition was held at Nehru Centre recently. Cartoons featured in this issue are from the exhibition.

EZINE



Abhishek Thakkar

B TECH, CIVILE, '03 H-5

Abhishek Thakkar or just 'Thakkar' as he was known throughout campus is an alumnus of H5 from '03. Having a lot of it, he loved throwing his weight around, and escaped many a bumps which he'd have got for his PJs. Now he channels all that creative energy in designing beautiful, scalable web and mobile interfaces.

DESIGN



Anand Prahlad

M DES, IDC, '07, H-8

Anand Prahlad is an independent graphic designer and artist. When not designing books, magazines, corporate identities or illustrating, he is an active gardener, culinary expert and amateur musician.

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