

the spark

ISSUE #11

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IIT KANPUR



Life in the GH (Part 4)
The Musical Legacy of Professor P.T. Narasimhan
From Culfest to Antaragni
Antaragni '24: A Syncretic Jaunt

The Spark

January 2025

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* Pages 1-432 refer to the Spark Issues #1 - 10, available at <https://iitk.ac.in/dora/spark/>

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Views and opinions expressed in The Spark are those of the Editors and Contributors and not those of the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, unless specified otherwise.

Editorial

The Spark wishes its readers its best wishes for a Very Happy New Year.

We begin the year with a special double issue, made possible from your many contributions. Part IV of our series on the Women of IITK takes us to the GH of the 1970s and 80s, with stories from three different perspectives. The first highlights the challenges faced by International students, who in addition to the academic workload and the imbalanced gender ratio also had to deal with cultural differences, language barriers, and family and financial responsibilities. The Yami sisters met these challenges and went on to take up leadership roles in Nepal. They cherish their years at IITK.

Two other stories describe the challenges IITK women faced within the male-dominant, sometimes misogynistic campus community. The perspectives differ, but in both cases, these women came through with shining colours. Within all these stories, there is one strong, common thread. In every case, they and their families wanted them to get the best possible education, and nothing, absolutely nothing, was going to come in their way. All these young women embarked on revolutionary journeys, becoming trailblazers of long-lasting changes in society.

We have now published the entire repertoire of stories received for our 'Women of IITK' series and plan to explore new subjects in our forthcoming issues. However, 'the Women of IITK' remains an open theme for future issues. We welcome your ideas and suggestions for more stories.

The 'Cultural Festival', as it was simply called in its earliest days, went from a small inter-college event with plays, songs and debates when it started (in the mid to late sixties), to near-death in the early eighties, to re-emerge now as Antaragni, a gigantic event with a plethora of amateur and professional talent spanning a vast cultural spectrum. It has gone from small events held in hall quads, lecture halls and tents, to a campus-wide panorama organized by students who have perfected the art of raising funds and attracting the best talent that (sometimes) money can buy.

This issue carries stories from its early days, to the hiccups in between, to what it is today. What is amazing is the brimming energy visible everywhere, coupled with deep-pocket resources to support the gala. Kudos!

January mornings near the tennis courts...

ain't it foggy outside?

*Picture: Krishnendu Paul
(PhD, Earth Sciences)*



Letters to the Editors

Please write to us directly at spark@iitk.ac.in. We love to hear back from you and will try to publish as many letters as possible.

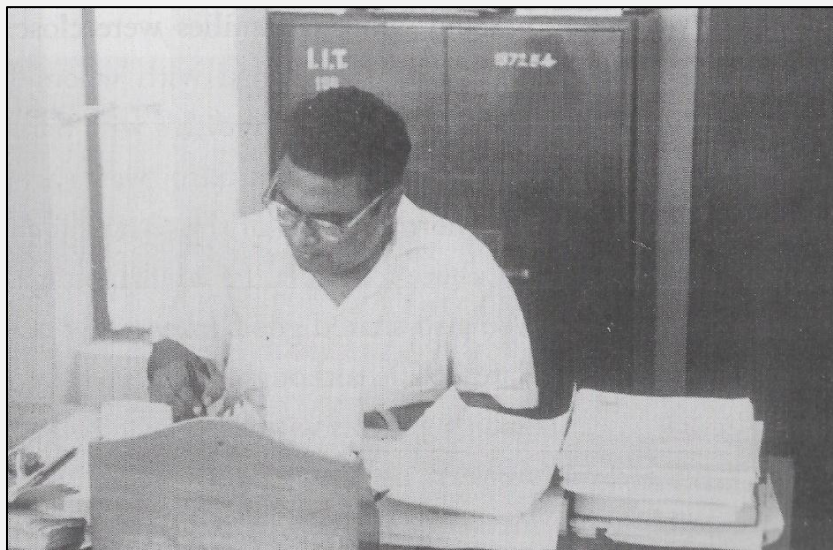
Memories of the Chemistry Dept at IITK

Thank you for the recent issue of the Spark. The stories about the Chemistry Department brought forth a lot of memories!

In July 1970, when our batch entered IITK, the institute was all of ten years old - an infant as Institutions go - and the USAID KIAP programme was ending. Even though we all knew that, a few Professors from US Universities were still around and teaching.

The young Institute had already garnered a formidable reputation for overall academic and research excellence. In this atmosphere of excellence two departments were 'more equal than others'. The Computer Centre was the pride of IITK and its IBM7044 was reputed to be the most powerful computer in India. Of course today, after 55 years, we carry more computing power in our laptop bags than the large room filling IBM7044. The second department of extraordinary repute was the Department of Chemistry. Several of the faculty members were internationally known, including Profs CNR Rao ([Wikipedia](#)), PT Narasimhan ([Wikipedia](#)), S Ranganathan ([Wikipedia](#)), Animesh Chakravorty ([Wikipedia](#)) and MV George ([Wikipedia](#)) (names are not in any particular order).

Our first introduction to Chemistry, at IITK, was CHM101 with Prof CNR Rao as the course in-charge. The course was on general and inorganic chemistry with Sienko and Plane being the textbook. Prof. Rao was a very energetic teacher. He would rapidly walk around on the stage, and rarely stood still for any length of time. He also had a flair for theatrics, like when he suddenly threw some liquid nitrogen on the stage. The guys sitting in the front row got a bit of a fright. It was probably the first time anyone of us had seen liquid nitrogen!



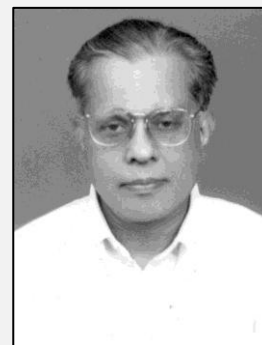
Prof. CNR Rao in his office at IITK. He was at IITK from 1963 through 1978.

Picture: *Climbing the Limitless Ladder*, 2010

Prof. M V George's reputation as a very strict person was part of campus folklore. Many people would change their route, if they saw him coming, just to avoid bumping into him.

Prof. George taught us Organic Chemistry in Chm102. He was also the class tutor for my section, section D3. During his lectures, he had the uncanny ability to pick out the 30 odd faces of his tutorial group from the sea of 390 faces in L-7. If someone was absent, then at the outset of the next tutorial, he would start with 'Mr ... Where were you during my last lecture'? He always addressed the students as Mr (whatever).

One unforgettable incident, during his tutorials, was just before the mid-term break. He had given us a test and warned his tutorial section that no one should extend the holidays by taking a couple of extra days off at the start and miss his next tutorial as he would return the test papers that day. Well, my batchmate Nanavati did exactly that. The next tutorial day came and Prof George started to hand out the marked papers. When he called out 'Mr Nanavati', there was no reply. Without batting an eyelid, he just threw the copy out of the window. That was that. I don't know whether or not that copy landed on anybody's head or just floated away.



Prof. MV George was a Faculty member in the Chemistry Dept from 1963 until retirement in 1988

Other chemistry greats were Prof D Balasubramanian (Balu) who taught us the basics of biochemistry and Prof. PK Ghosh who taught us physical chemistry. This was perhaps in second year CHM201. That was when we were introduced to the concept of multiple choice answers to short questions. The twist was the negative marking for a wrong answer. After the first such test, Dr Balu informed that he had administered the test to some 4 or 5 batchmates, all sworn to secrecy, to ensure that the test was not too long and was doable.

As an engineering batch, our direct interaction with Chemistry ended with CHM201. However I had switched, after 3rd year, from Metallurgy to the 5 year Integrated MSc (Chem) course. Hence my memories of the Department are many. I was the only person in the 5 year course and joined the dozen or so 2-year MSc students.

Besides these Profs., Chemistry was fortunate to have other eminent chemists like Prof. Animesh Chakravorty. He was a large man, more than 6 ft tall and broad. When explaining something, if there was an empty chair in front of him, he had the habit of putting one foot on the chair and rocking it backwards. After the first class everyone avoided sitting in the second row – just as a precaution!



Prof. Animesh Chakravorty was a Faculty member in the Chemistry Dept from 1964 till 1977.

Prof. G Mehta was a great organic chemistry teacher. Others were Prof. S Ranganathan, who did some pioneering work on Prostaglandins. Prof. PS Goel, better known as 'Moon Rock' Goel, because he received a small sample of a moon rock that had been brought back to earth by one of the Apollo moon missions, from NASA. Prof. Devprabhakar taught us about the chemistry of natural products – he was a good friend of Prof. Kudhchadkar.

Prof. PK Ghosh was my MSc project guide. In those days procuring research equipment was difficult; hence Prof. Ghosh and his students had parts fabricated in the IITK workshop to build the required instruments. It was a time consuming and heart breaking task.



Prof. PK Ghosh was a Faculty member in the Chemistry Dept from 1966 until his retirement in 1998.

A mention must be made of Dr AP Shukla who was a labour union leader as well as a great teacher. He gave us only one lecture, that too, on a very abstract subject - Schrodinger Equation and Hamiltonian Operators. The way he explained it, the whole thing seemed so easy and simple.

Others in the Department were Dr VBS Chauhan and Dr PC Nigam. Dr PC Nigam was the elder brother of Prof. NC Nigam of Aero. He was the first faculty member to join the IITK faculty, joining as Institute Employee #13 in July 1960. There were 2 additions to the faculty in 1974-75, Dr SK Dogra and Dr P Guptabhaya. I hope I am not missing anyone else, but after all these years memory has dimmed.

Just as a final note, Prof. CNR Rao went on to become the Director of IISc, Bangalore and then Scientific Advisor to Government of India and received the Bharat Ratna in 2014. Profs. D Balasubramanian and G Mehta became Vice-Chancellors of Universities in Hyderabad. Prof. Animesh Chakravorty moved back to Kolkata as head of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science in 1977. Profs. PT Narsimhan and MV George stayed on at IITK, till they both retired in 1988. Prof. Ranganathan retired from IITK in 1994.

Arvind Agarwal

MSc Chemistry, 1970-75

Thanks Arvind! Prof. CNR Rao taught Chm101 to my incoming class (1973) as well. He would come in with almost the entire chemistry department, bringing gigantic models of DNA helices, very large experiments, and a joke or two. One time he asked, "What is it that hangs from the ceiling, smells terrible, and goes 'tee-tee-tee'".

Earnest front benchers, always eager to please their teacher, leaned forward eagerly, racking their brains to identify this new 'something'. Us back-benchers had some interesting thoughts, but discreetly kept quiet.

*Upon everyone giving up, Dr. Rao told us, it was a fish.
Everyone was mystified, so he explained.
It was hanging from the ceiling – because he had hung it there.
Smelling terrible – because he hung it up there last week.*

*But what about the tee-tee-tee?
Oh, that? That was just to fool you all.
Yes, he was like that.*

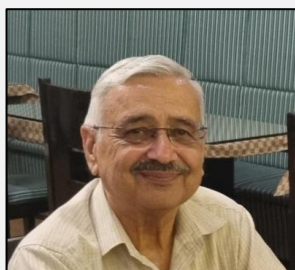
Shirish Joshi (BT, ChE, 1973-78)

Our 3rd Year (ChE 361) Organic Chemistry class in 1980 had Prof. MV George as the instructor. The classroom was on the 4th Floor of FB within the ChE Department area (this room now serves as the HOD office). Prof. George displayed extreme displeasure with students who arrived late. When we pointed out to him that we had only a five minute window between classes and had to walk over from a very distant location (like Northern Labs), he nodded his head in acknowledgement.

Now, he would wait patiently at the start of every class, sitting in his chair, looking steadily at his watch, for exactly an additional 5 minutes. At that point, he would get up and close the door shut, and nobody dared enter the room after that!

Of course, his lectures were absolutely brilliant, delivered without the use of any notes or props in an amazing theatrical performance. Personally, I would sit in the front row, totally enraptured, listening awestruck in complete fascination (mind sometimes wandering, if MVG is this, what was CNR like...)! Sadly, this also meant that I did not write any notes, which did not bode too well for exam time, but that is another story.

Aseem Shukla (BT, ChE, 1978-83)



About the author:

After completing his MSc from IITK in 1975, Arvind joined McMaster University in Canada for post-graduate studies. He subsequently returned to India to manage the family business of manufacturing heavy chemicals in Kanpur and then moved back to his hometown of Bareilly to handle the family's ancestral farm and other properties. Now retired, he is happy to continue managing the family investments.

Addendum:



We have received feedback that in this picture (The Spark, Issue 10, page 408), the fourth professor on the far right is not Prof. Animesh Chakravorty; rather, he is Prof. G.K. Raut, who was on campus in the early 1960s, but then moved to the US in 1965. A picture of Prof. Chakravorty is shared on page 437.

(L to R): Professors M.V. George, P.T. Narasimhan, C.N.R. Rao and G.K. Raut

Picture: Prof. Irving Rabinowitz, 1964.

Thank you for the Feedback

Thanks for the very interesting Spark Issue 10. I often go to IITK to give lectures and these nostalgic essays are very much appreciated.

You might enjoy reading about my experiences of IITK days (1967-74).

<https://nariphaltan.org/iitkdays.pdf>

You can use whatever material from my experiences in your future issues of Spark.

Ashok Khanna was a very dear friend of mine and it is sad that we lost him in the early 1980s.

Best wishes,

Anil Rajvanshi

BT 1972, MT 1974, Distinguished Alumnus 2022

Thank you Anil! We have gone through the stories on your website, and there are several that we would like to use in our upcoming issues. We will reach out to you before releasing them.

Thank you for the new issue of the Spark. I have some thoughts on the new campus architecture presented in your last and a few of the previous issues:

After World War I Frank Lloyd Wright (USA), Walter Gropius (Germany) and Le Corbusier (France) developed a kind of non-insular industrial architecture for the common man that now is called modern or modernist architecture. Achyut Kanvinde, the architect of the old campus was one of the proponents of this then-new architecture in India.

I personally consider him to be one of the masters (in the sense that Rembrandt, Vermeer or Velasquez are considered masters) and I will always find the new architecture a little too common compared to the brick and concrete old campus. Please let me add that the new buildings look just fine when seen outside of this context.

Regards,

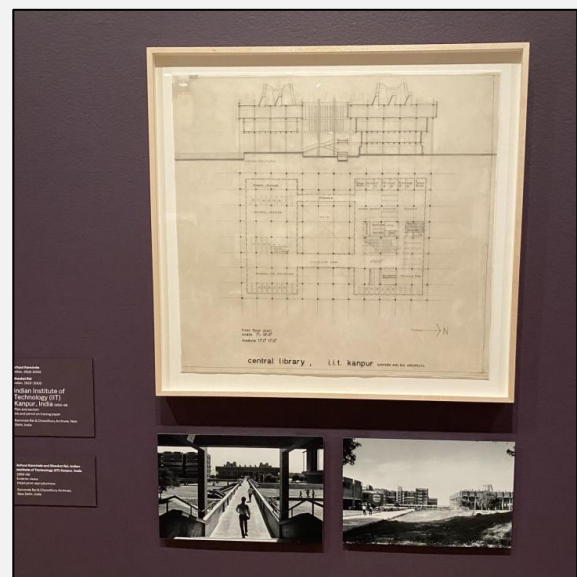
Kaustav Dasgupta

M.Des (2007-2009)

Thank you Kaustav. Indeed, the original IITK architecture holds a special place in Indian design history; it has been extensively studied and still features in international exhibitions, such as the one at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 2022. (The Spark, April 2022, Page 77).

PS: If you click on this picture in enough detail, you will see a planned 'VOID' in the middle of the building. Wonder why!

Picture: Aseem Shukla, July 2022



The First 'Girls Hostel'

I read with interest the September issue of The Spark, and would like to say that I am very glad that the campus newspaper has been revived. Kavery Muthana, (BTech, EE, 1965-1970), the first woman B.Tech. from IIT/Kanpur, and I, (the second, in '71, also in EE), used to write a fifth column for The Spark occasionally, when it was first launched. Both of us are pleased to know that it has been revived.

I would also like to share my experience of being a resident student on campus during my years at IIT/Kanpur, and the beginning of the GH. A Girls' Hostel became necessary when I arrived on campus as a first year student in 1966. I was the only woman student in my class, as Kavery was in hers. Since residence on campus was required for undergraduates, a Girls' Hostel had to be established (Kavery stayed with her parents, since her father was our Deputy Director at that time).

Type V bungalows (two to begin with) were set up as a Girls' Hostel. Each house had three upstairs bedrooms which were converted to rooms for us. Initially, the master bedroom was double seated, the others single. As more women students joined, the other rooms were made double seated as well. A cook from Hall IV came and prepared our meals in one of the houses, the ground floor of which served as the hostel dining room. The "study" beside it was our common room with a radio to begin with.



Faculty House #510 in the Director's Row was part of the original GH and was Neeru's first home on campus in 1966. By 1967-68, 22 girls were living in four such homes. This row of houses looked very different in the 1960s without the trees and boundary fences.

Pictures: Aman Kumar Singh (BT-MT, CE, 2020-25), with thanks to Prof S. Ganesh, Deputy Director, IITK.

We lived in exalted company... Our neighbours were Dr. Muthana, who was then Deputy Director, our wardens, the Chair of EE, and other professors and heads of departments. Our neighbourhood inspired me to work hard.

Since our hostel was mostly a graduate student hostel, administratively, we were affiliated to Hall IV, the only men's graduate students' hostel at the time. The warden of Hall IV (Prof. Mahanty, Physics) was our warden administratively, and his wife, Dr. Mrs. Mahanty, also a Physicist, was the GH warden.

The other women students in the hostel were in the graduate programs -- M.Sc., Ph.D., and M.Tech. (all in EE). There were two women in the Ph.D. program in EE, Arundhati Badrinath and Lakshmi Dwarkanath. Lakshmi was also a lecturer in EE, and was allotted a Type II flat, in which she and Arundhati stayed. Lakshmi was requested by Dr. Kelkar, our founding Director, to move to the hostel when it started, to help me settle in, since I was the youngest member of the hostel. Lakshmi (now Dr.

Lakshmi Viswanathan) agreed, and both she and Arundhati moved to the hostel. That was wonderful for me. They have been my role models since and I am still in touch with them.

Three women joined IIT/K for M.Tech. (EE) in my time, in three consecutive years. They were toppers from the then Roorkee University (now IIT/R). Asha Goyal was the last of the three. She joined M.Tech. (EE) in 1968, and returned for her Ph.D. in 1975, while she worked for TCS. She completed her Ph.D. in 1979. In those pre-internet days, I lost touch with the senior two women, but remained in touch with Asha; she has had a stellar career.

I would also like to mention Dr. Meera Murthy, who completed her Ph.D. in Physics as a day scholar. She also, was among the first women Ph.D.s. Meera is retired now, and lives in the US. Of these pioneering women Ph.D.s, Lakshmi defended her thesis in 1970 (December) and Meera finished her Ph.D. about the same time. Incidentally, the Institute records will indicate that there was no convocation in 1971 because the war for Bangladesh was on.

The new Girls' Hostel was ready by the end of 1970, and we moved-in in January 1971. I was glad to be able to stay in the new GH in my last semester on campus.

Best regards,

Neeru Mohan Biswas

B. Tech. EE (1966-71)

After graduating from IITK, Neeru completed her Masters in EE from Brown University in 1973. She worked in the corporate world, in Boston and in Toronto, before joining the faculty at Ryerson (now Toronto Metropolitan) University, where she helped advise and set up the curriculum for the first undergraduate program in Telecom Management in Canada.

Now retired, Neeru and her husband, Dr. Tridib Kumar Biswas, spend their time between Toronto and India. In India, Neeru has been a consultant to the CII, taught part-time at IIT Roorkee, and has been very happy helping underprivileged children go to school. As a member of the National Council of the Institution of Electronics and Telecommunications Engineers (IETE), she established, with the help of IBM and IETE, a centre for teaching computer skills to the visually impaired.



Cover picture of a very special issue of the Spark from 1968, autographed by members of the contributing team. Among the signatories are Kavery Muthana and Neeru Mohan.

Thank you GH, for the Feedback!

Thanks for sharing the latest issue of Spark. There are so many memories attached to IITK and the latest pictures make me wallow in nostalgia. Even though I left IITK mid-way through my research, I still feel a special bond with the place. It has changed so much, and yet it hasn't! I hope to reconnect with some of those memories when I visit the campus this winter.

BTW, Team Spark: you all are doing an amazing job, imagine digging out photos from 60 years back; kudos to each of you! You truly rock!!

Nivedita Haran

1977-80, HSS, Retired IAS, GOI

Thank you so much for all you are doing with Spark. Your initiative of focusing on Girls Hostel has been a wonderful idea. I have thoroughly enjoyed the entire series. The latest issue was great. It has meant a lot to me to have our lives represented in Spark...to have stories of our struggles and triumphs and fun times be told. Thanks to the entire Spark team for the great job you all do in keeping the alums informed and in touch with IITK.

Roli Garg Wendorf

BT EE 1976, MT EE 1979



Memories of the GH Reunion from 2017, organized by Ratnamala Chatterjee (PhD Physics 1980-85) at the IITD Guest House. Ratnamala retired from IIT Delhi in June 2023 and is currently Professor Emeritus there. The group picture appeared in the Spark Issue 10, September 2024, page 420. Shared by Amrita Tripathi Sheikh.

The Elusive Cat!

October 28, 2024: A leopard has been observed last night on the road from the Health Centre to Barasirohi gate. The Institute security force has been deployed to monitor its movement, and the Kanpur forest department has been requested to take appropriate action. All campus residents are advised to be cautious and avoid moving out during late night hours.

November 5, 2024: The combing operation is still going on, and a combined team of forest officials and Institute security has located the animal. Last night, the animal expanded its movement zone and was tracked around the oxidation pond behind the pronite ground. The current location is expected to be in the green patch behind the old SBRA, faculty apartment to Shivli gate.

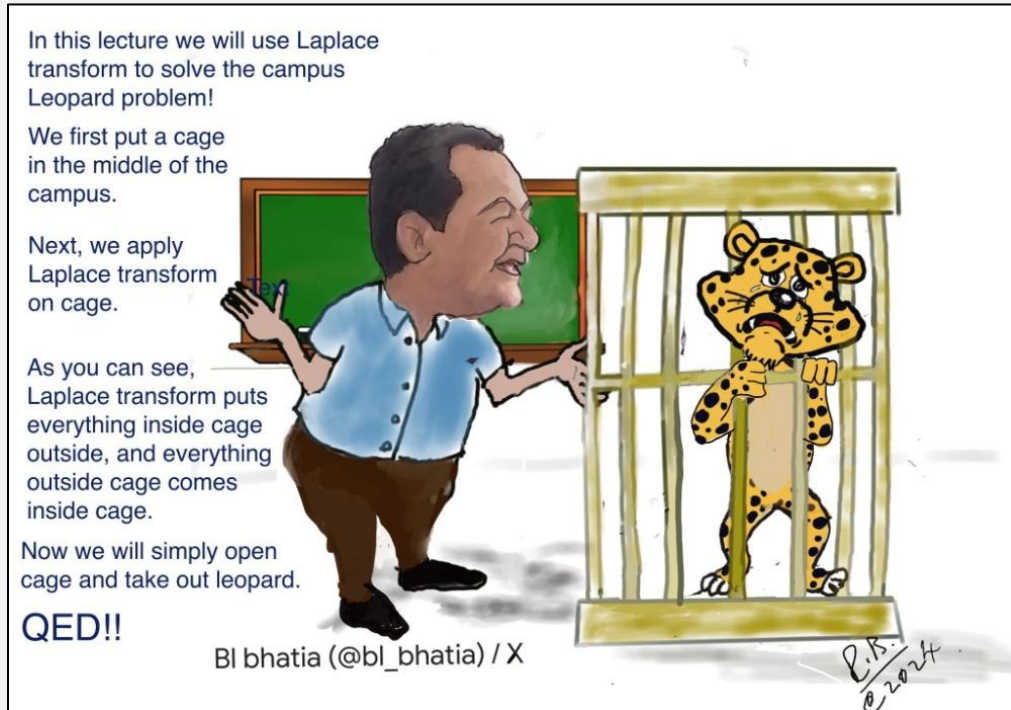
The security is on high alert, and continuous tracking of the animal and its eventual capture is being attempted by the forest department team.

Residents are advised to:

1. Avoid sitting outside or in open/isolated areas during the night hours.
2. Avoid late-night walking in the area near green covers.
3. Avoid moving alone in isolated areas.

Vipul Mathur, Chair-SAEC

Campus police try every trick in the book to capture the canny leopard but nothing seems to work! Finally a beloved old math professor decides to step in and save the day!



Shared by Raman Bhatia (BT, ME, 1977-82)

The leopard was first sighted on the IITK Campus in October 2022. For earlier reports, refer to the Spark, December 2022, page 178, and the Spark, September 2024, pages 396 and 431.

Campus Celebrations

The IITK Campus celebrated Diwali on the night of October 31, with the decorations continuing through the Institute Foundation Day celebrations on November 2, 2024.

We share some images contributed by the students and the campus community.



*The Hall-II T-Junction on Diwali night
Picture: Shakti Chaturvedi (Research Scholar, IME)*



Diwali Celebrations at the Open Air Theatre (OAT) attached to the new SAC. The red and blue design is the logo of the IITK Counselling Service. Picture: Aman Kumar Singh (BT-MT, CE, 2020-25)



*The PK Kelkar Library lit up for Institute Foundation Day.
Picture: Shakti Chaturvedi (Research Scholar, IME)*



Recipients of the Distinguished Alumnus Award, 2024, on stage with the Director, Deans and the Chief Guest, Mr. Rajnath Singh, Minister of Defence, GOI.

Picture: Girish Pant (Information Cell, IITK)

Recollections of Timila Yami Thapa

(BT, EE, 1970-75)



Timila Yami was a Professor in the Electronics and Computer Engineering Department in Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, before she retired in 2015. Her contributions are wide-ranging -- from the educational sector, in the area of information technology and computer engineering, to the industrial sector in both administrative and entrepreneurial capacities, and in the social sector working for women, child-education and youth employment. She has served on the Advisory Board to the Prime Minister of Nepal, and chaired committees that manage water supply and sanitation services, rural communications, and women's upliftment.

My Background

My story at IITK is closely linked to that of my parents, their political activities and struggles for the upliftment of the Nepalese people, especially women's higher education. My other beacon was my mother's wish that we should be well-educated. She died at the age of forty-eight in 1970, the year I came to IITK.

At that time, the cultural mindset in Nepal was very different from what it is now. Access to education was confined to the higher castes and wealthier economic strata of the population and the masses were largely illiterate. Social norms discouraged education for women, and early childhood marriage was the norm. I was surrounded by relatives telling me not to leave the country at a young and vulnerable age. Some insisted on my marriage prior to attending IIT Kanpur.

Arriving at IITK

I was the first female student in the history of Nepal to go to study Electrical Engineering in India. I consider myself lucky to be admitted to the top ranked Indian Institute of Technology. I took a ride in the train and the plane for the first time in my life during my first journey to IIT Kanpur.

My batch had 410 boys and only two girls: Vini Nigam and I. I was very shy and apprehensive of the boys due to my cultural upbringing. Vini was the only person I communicated with during the first year. She would often find me grieving about the loss of my mother and worrying about my younger sisters.

It was only towards the end of the program that I learned to trust my batchmates. I realized that I should have shared my problems with friends who would have helped me with my ongoing stress,

coping with the tough academic environment, and managing the responsibility of bringing up my younger sisters. Savita Gupta, a Ph. D student, advised me to bring Hisila, my youngest sister to IITK and enrol her in Central School, to reduce some of my tensions.

Competing with the Nation's Best

I was enrolled in the Electrical Engineering program that was considered to be the top engineering program of the nation, and attracted the top rank holders of the All India Joint Entrance Examination (JEE). Often, they were toppers in their respective schools, and behaved like "little kings" of little princely states.

The faculty had very high expectations from the students, and grading was very harsh. However, most of the faculty, although very strict in academic matters, were very helpful, and encouraged students to unleash their latent potential. Students and teachers were equally enthusiastic to share a moment together outside the class in the playgrounds and various students' clubs. While students were very focused in studies, they excelled also in the extra-curricular activities. This creative environment not only transformed my life but also helped my sister Hisila's all-round development.

Life in the Girls Hostel

Following Savita's advice, I brought my youngest sister Hisila over to stay with me on the IITK campus. The warden of the girls' hostel refused at first to provide a room for Hisila because children were not allowed in the adults' hostel. After a lot of persuasion, I managed to get permission for my sister to stay there. It was a turning point for our lives. The transition from instruction in the Nepali language in Kathmandu to instruction in English at Kendriya Vidyalaya was tough for Hisila. With some encouragement and effort, however, she flourished and excelled in academics, sports and cultural activities. She was one of the best athletes in her school, and won sports awards in all-India Junior Sports Competitions.

Hisila's hard work, boldness and excellent all-round performance saved me from packing my bags and going home. I am very grateful to the girls at IITK for loving and caring for my sister. They called her their "darling little sweet bubbly girl."

Vasundhara Choudhary taught her to play the Sitar. Other girls taught her Bharat Natyam and Kathak dances. Some taught her Hindi songs. Sandhya Deo taught her table tennis. Kalpana Mehta took her to the boys' hostel to watch various sports competitions.

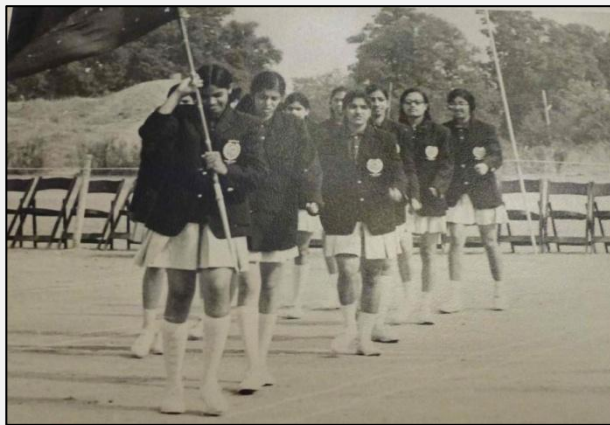


*At the IITK GH (L to R): Roli Garg, Hisila Yami, Sandhya Deo and Timila Yami, c. 1974
Picture: Roli Garg (1971-76)*

The interesting thing in the girls' hostel was that the warden, Mrs. Nanda, got very worried about the safety of the girls when boys entered the visitors' room. She tried to introduce rules and restrictions which were unusual, knowing that girls worked late hours in the research laboratories and in the library. I feel that these restrictions were not to protect the girls but to satisfy anxious parents who had allowed their girls to study with boys for the first time in their lives.

Some of the girls used to invite us to spend time with their families during short holidays when it was not feasible to go back to Kathmandu. During those visits, I observed the grandmothers of my friends, some of them in the mid-eighties, reading the "Times of India" and other magazines. I was shocked to see the level of education of grandmas in India during those days. Suddenly, the educational gap in Nepal became very apparent to me.

After my mother's demise, our family and our finances were in disarray and despite my scholarship, I was always short of cash. We bought clothes from shops selling inexpensive materials. My worst days at IIT Kanpur were when the hostel warden scolded me in front of some of my classmates in the corridor, when I couldn't pay the mess-bill for four months in a row. I am grateful to IIT Kanpur for allowing me to work part time and earn some money in the library. I am also very grateful to Professor T. R. Viswanathan for offering me a job after my graduation from the B. Tech. program, for three years in a research project. This was a source of income that helped me sponsor Hisila's studies at the School of Planning & Architecture in Delhi, until she managed to get a scholarship of her own. It also helped to support my sister Kayo's PhD at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (the Pusa Institute) in Delhi.



The IITK kho-kho team, early 1970s. Visible from the front onwards in the nearer line are: Vini Nigam, Sandhya Deo, TBD, Abha Singhal, Timila Yami and Renu Malhotra

I came to know many faculty families through Hisila's friends. These included Mrs. Meera Parasnis, wife of Professor Arvind Parasnis of the Physics Department. Her son was Hisila's classmate. I had gone to borrow children's books in English at her home so that Hisila could pick up English. Knowing and being with her was like finding my own mother once again in my life. I appreciated the role of the Counseling Service at IIT Kanpur. My student counsellor Professor Raghubir Sharan and his wife Raka used to give us lovely food while mentoring the students. My student guide Neeru Mohan, a final year student, helped me overcome the gap between the English standards of Nepal and IIT Kanpur.

One of my father's aunts, Maya Nini Aji, had dedicated all her life to Buddhism. She was living at Sarnath, Kushinagar. She used to be very worried about my personal safety in Kanpur. Once, she sent a Buddhist monk (Mr. Chandra Mani) from Kushinagar to check on us. A Buddhist monk from Kanpur used to come all the way to our hostel to invite me for different programs.

My Father's Visit to IITK

My father visited me in 1975. I took him to one of the lecture-halls 'L-7', where he asked me: "Why do you attend classes? I never went to any classroom to study, and I authored more than twenty popular books. You are supposed to do self-learning and not depend on any teacher." I was not fully aware then that my father was well known for his passion for self-learning, nor that he was a renowned scholar and

a popular writer. He wanted to deliver a lecture in the big hall. I worried if the audience with many different backgrounds would appreciate his lecture, and I didn't inform anyone.

A telex announcing my father's death arrived two months after he visited me, just before the end-semester examination. My father was only sixty years old, and Hisila and I had never known he had any health problems. I was devastated, and was ready to leave for Nepal to attend his funeral. But Mrs. Parasnis took immediate control of the situation and convinced me not to go to Nepal, but to take the end-semester examinations. For me, IIT Kanpur was not only about academics, it was also about people like Meera Parasnis who saved me from possible consequences of a drastic emotional reaction.

Career in Nepal

IIT Kanpur inspired me to bring sharp changes in Nepal, especially in improving technical education. I had the opportunities to contribute in the ministry, government organizations and private sectors in Nepal. I joined the engineering faculty of Tribhuvan University. This faculty, established in 1972, offered only a three-year technical overseer degree at that time. I feel proud that I helped in initiating the master's and Ph.D. programs at the Institute of Engineering (IOE), Tribhuvan University, in cooperation with the resource sharing and faculty upgrade program of IIT Kanpur. I made special efforts to initiate a Computer Engineering program for the first time in the history of Nepal in 1998.

Negotiating the male dominated work-places in Nepal also taught me useful lessons. I felt the need of advocating for the policy of inclusion of women in top decision-making places, especially in the public sector where women can play an essential role, notably in addressing the problems of vulnerable populations.

Coming back to the IITK Family

After the earthquake of Nepal 2015, past faculty members like Prof. Viswanathan, Prof. R Sharan and the IIT Kanpur community got in touch to express concern about my safety. Some of the key people from Pan-IIT also communicated with me during that great disaster that destroyed Kathmandu Valley. This disaster also helped me in re-establishing old connections including the IITK community. Facebook, Group mails and other social media brought us back together, helping us to reflect our past student days. Reunions like the Silver Jubilee, and the 40th Reunion, are certainly helping us in connecting with our past and allowing us to share our experiences.



Returning to IITK for the 1970-75 batch reunion celebrations

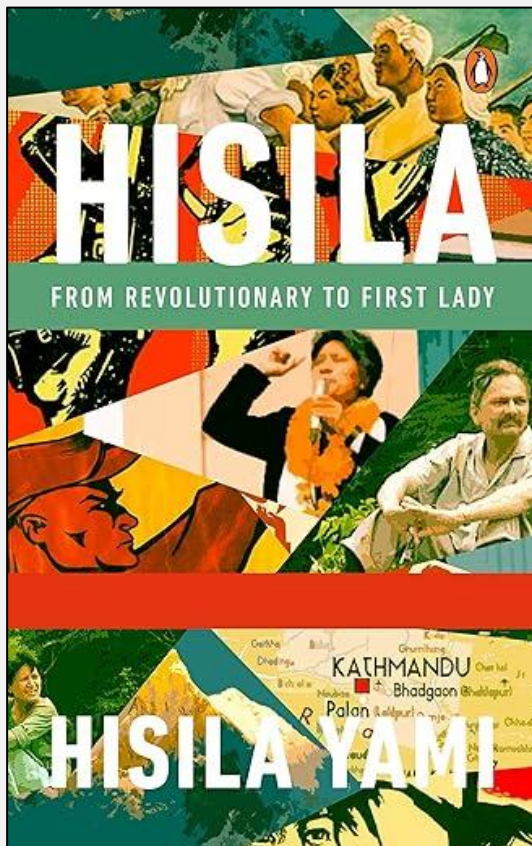
Recently a batchmate, Pulin Kinkhabwala, introduced me to his son when he visited Kathmandu, saying "This is Timila and I am speaking to her for the first time in my life!" This showed how cut off I was from the other students. There was a similar scenario when some of my batchmates introduced me to their spouses during the batch-reunion. I am so happy that social media has brought all of us together once again.

Looking back at my IITK Days

My years at IITK were very difficult because of my personal situation and the highly competitive academic environment. However, that environment transformed me completely. The peer group was superb and Hisila always says "IIT Kanpur days were the golden period of my life" and she often tells us that most of whatever she is, it came from here.

That was a place where some teachers could be real mentors whom you could confide in. We had so much freedom in our campus without the fear of being judged, or hemmed in by rules and restrictions. I recall a lighter moment once, with Prof. Usha Kumar asking the boys in the class "Why is there so little interaction between the boys and the girls in IIT Kanpur?" I firmly believe that the deep relationships I have with my IIT Kanpur friends, especially the Girls' Hostel friends and the faculty members are because we had no urban affairs to distract us from being together in the campus.

Before my mother's death, she would tell us "Study hard...no one will be able to steal your educational qualifications. People may steal wealth and jewelry, but not knowledge." Now I feel satisfied to see that my mother's wish about the future of her seven children is finally fulfilled. All of us have managed to get excellent educations, and have contributed each in our own way to social causes of Nepalese society.



About Hisila Yami:

After completing her studies at KV, IITK, Hisila Yami ([Wikipedia](#)) graduated from the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi in 1982. She completed her M. Arch. from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK in 1995.

Also known by her nom de guerre Parvati, she is a leading Nepalese politician and architect. She is a deputy chairman of Nepal Socialist Party and a former president of the All Nepal Women's Association. During the 1990 uprising against the panchayat regime, Hisila was one of the most high-profile women leaders in the protests.

The text for this story has been adapted from <https://www.timilayamithapa.com/blogs/view/44.html>

Men are from Mars, Women are... from the Trans-Neptunian Kuiper Belt

Anuradha Jagannathan (MSc, Physics, 1975-80)



Picture: Shirish Joshi (1973-78)

I think my title, adapted from a popular book, aptly describes the men and women of our IITK campus back in the late 70s. My most vivid memories date soon after our arrival in 1975. One got to the campus after a long ride through an unfamiliar rural landscape. Once there, we found a sort of self-contained settlement where there were people using the latest technologies and were clearly from another planet compared to the surrounding area where residents of Earth were living. The seniors, Martians of diverse visage and habits, were roaming around the halls and catwalks and accosting freshers.

We IITK women, on the other hand, discovered that we were from the outer solar system. When one of us was detained for questioning by the upper year Martians, they regarded us as a rare species indeed. For girls, “ragging” was restricted to asking questions like “What’s your JEE rank?” followed by “what department?” and then in my case “Why did you choose Physics?” followed by “True, you girls don’t have to work for a living”, a comment typical of those times. The encounters were friendly enough, and pretty soon I had a nickname, JJB, based on my clothing and luckily almost never used in my presence.

The Martians tended to stay mostly in the campus, but sometimes they made expeditions all the way to the capital city of Kanpur, for boisterous dinners or movies etc. The 4th and 5th year Martians turned out to be most affable, and I owe to them my best experiences at IITK – the clubs, the ping-pong, the airstrip, the closed circuit television, the hiking, participating in events at the cultural festival, and much, much, much more. But as a voyager from the Kuiper Belt, I felt I could never truly belong. The feeling of being watched and judged was permanent and quite daunting – perfectly illustrated when I went to hit tennis balls at the wall behind Hall 1, very early one morning. Looking up after ten minutes, I saw boys with toothbrushes observing me from the verandas. No wonder, we girls were happiest on our own, as when we rode our bikes to the dhaba outside the Gate to have anda parathas, with the midnight traffic of interstate trucks roaring past.

As far as our own batchmates went, we got off to a bumpy start – as in our first morning in L7, when we three girls came in and sat at the very end of a row of seats -- and the entire row slid off and went to sit at another location! But very soon, we made some friends, and had many occasions to visit them in Halls 2/3, the zones reserved for these recent arrivals. One could never be certain what prank might be played next and that definitely lent a piquancy to each visit. By and large inoffensive pranks, these unwelcome attentions were sometimes actual harassment, requiring action by the authorities.

One simple trick was locking the door from outside and removing the fuse, which of course was best done after sunset. Then our hot and embarrassed host would have to wriggle out of the small opening above the door to get out and unlock it, while the grinning culprits beat it out of sight. We girls almost all had bikes, due to the longer distance we had to get to our hall of residence, the GH. Quite logically, these became our proxies for pranksters. One evening, we came out of a Spark meeting, and our bikes weren't where we'd left them and it took some running around and searching before they were finally spotted strung up on the trees behind Hall 1.

That brings me to the GH and how it was different from the other halls of residence. The GH was like a little hive of busy bees riding off on their bikes at all hours to work in the library or the labs. Other than a slight UG/PG divide, all the girls were pretty good comrades. There were welcome breaks from the daily grind, with sociable meetings in the common room, impromptu birthday parties, or hanging around sunning on the rooftop in the winter.



(L) A quad picnic in the GH, c. 1979. Visible L to R are (sitting): Neera Tandon, Geeta Wattal, Anu Jagannathan, Anshu Gupta; (standing): Renu Khanna, Shobha Madan, Pratibha Chopra Picture: Shruti Agrawal Raina (1977-82).

(R) Hanging out on the GH steps (from back to front): Leena Chatterjee, Malini Raghavan, Anuja Mathur, Abha Varma and Nandini Raghavan, c. 1984. Picture: Nandini Raghavan (1979-84)

The most exciting times were when the GH prepared to attend an evening music concert, like the memorable one of Shiv Kumar Sharma and Zakir Husain. Then, there was a flurry of exchanging clothes and accessories after rushing back from class! I always had to wait for someone to help me tie my sari, with the help of dozens of safety pins. A special haven within the GH was our Mess, with its busy, reliable and youthful staff. It was an indescribable pleasure to come back there at teatime, with samosas, if one was lucky. Only the rainy season was horrid, because the GH would have the occasional snake crawling inside from the surrounding fields, ugh. But all in all, the GH was a haven because we needed it to be – for, outside it, *that* was where our challenges lay.

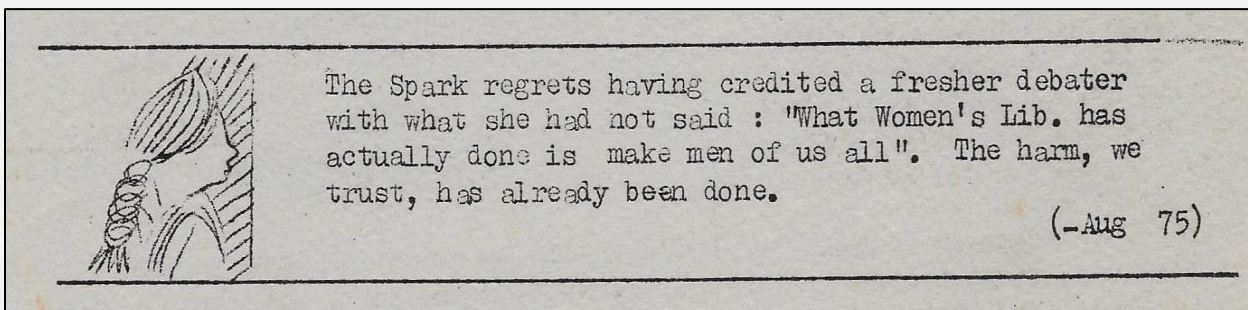
Now, girls form a much larger fraction of the student population, and I wonder what changes have occurred as a result. Hopefully the girls are now Martians in their own right. Truth to tell, in hindsight, the five years in IITK were very helpful for my future career in theoretical physics, where women are *still* a rarity. Being from the outer Solar system everywhere I go, all the time, has not at all been a problem. For this and my excellent education, thank you, IITK!

About the author:



Anuradha Jagannathan is a theoretical condensed matter physicist, at the University of Paris-Saclay. Condensed matter physics is devoted to explaining the physical properties of real (or yet to be discovered) materials, by means of models that take into account the microscopic structure and interactions between particles. Anu has been primarily interested in electronic properties in quasicrystals which are structures that can host exotic quantum magnetic or superconducting states.

After completing her MSc at IITK Anu attended Yale University, where she obtained an M.Phil. in Physics. She then went on to work in Statistical Physics at Brown University (just up the road in Providence RI) with J.M. Kosterlitz (Nobel Physics Prize, 2015). After postdocs at Rutgers and UCLA, she moved to Paris in 1990. At IITK, Anu had been a very active member of the Cultural Council and TVC. She was a member of the Spark during her years on the campus, serving as the Publisher in 1978-79.



Shadows Beneath the Lamp: A Minoritarian View

Sudha Bharadwaj (MSc, Mathematics, 1979-84)



Picture: Karin Scheidegger

Sudha Bharadwaj completed the 5-year integrated MSc program in Mathematics at IITK, from 1979 to 1984. Born in the USA, and then brought up in UK, she gave up American citizenship when she was 18, preferring to study and work in India instead. In 1986, she joined a trade union, first as a teacher and then a trade union activist. She then became a lawyer in the High Court of Chhattisgarh taking up cases of labour, land acquisition and human rights violations. She has been a Civil Liberties activist for many years, and founder of the Janhit People's Legal Resource Center that provided legal support to villagers, communities, gram sabhas, and workers.

Sudha has taught at the National Law University in Delhi, and is currently working as a lawyer in Mumbai. In 2019, she was among 21 women honoured by the Harvard Law School through a portrait exhibition on the occasion of International Women's Day. She received the Auther Award for Best Non-Fiction in 2024 for her book "FROM PHANSI YARD: My Year with the Women of Yerawada" describing the plight of incarcerated women during the time she spent there, from Nov. 2018 through Feb. 2020, in the high security section of the Yerawada jail in Pune.

When I passed the JEE in 1979 and could get my favourite subject (Maths) at IIT Kanpur – just the right distance away from home (Delhi) - I was understandably very excited. I loved Mathematics and still remember the sheer joy and philosophical challenge of grasping the concepts of pure mathematics that I learnt at IITK. Although I did not pursue academics, the knowledge, skills and confidence I acquired in IITK have really helped me in life as I worked with diverse people. I had learnt a lot about society in those five years at IITK: about the light from the lamp and the shadows beneath it.

The “Girls” Hostel: I remember arriving unaccompanied, but instantly felt at home in GH, which I fondly recall as the friendliest place in IITK. Neera and Rema—our student Guides who were two years senior to us—were really warm and assured us that grades were not everything. We endured very slight ragging, mostly fun, and from the start we had seniors like Shobha Madan and Amrita Tripathi to consult about getting adjusted to the tough, tense and competitive life of an IITKian, particularly as young women.

Hostel life was all about desperate last minute “mugging” in “night out” sessions; leaving buckets of soaked clothes to gather fungus; special dinners with most of the paneer out of the “mattar paneer” being finished in the first half hour; numerous cups of coffee warmed on the banned electric heaters; and sneaking down to the post-graduate hostel (Hall 4) for a midnight meal. I can still remember the embarrassment when the waiter would shout “Ladies... 4 aloo paranthas” in an effort to locate us, while all heads turned! Our batch and the ones immediately next to ours made up a motley group from very different backgrounds, enduring different kinds of challenges over time.

American Institute of Technology? There was something very American about IITK, including the names of the lanes (36th Street, 5th Avenue, etc.), the slang (“quizzes” and “sems”), and the aspirations of students. Most of my batch did eventually go to the US for further studies, and most of the others opted for Management courses. Also pervasive was the American fear of left-leaning views. Students from non-English speaking backgrounds had a difficult time, even if their mathematical or technical skills were excellent.

Paradoxically, students of IITK once elected a most unlikely President of the Students Senate – Ganesh Bagaria, an avowed Gandhian who wore a white dhoti and *khadaus* (wooden sandals) to class. He refused the ritual dinner at the Director’s residence, but invited the Director to his hostel instead! That was democracy leading to a memorable meal for the Hostel residents!



Competition: Most of us had been considered outstanding in our respective high schools – but here we were just like everyone else. We were told that we were the “cream of the nation” – a mere 2000 selected from lakhs of students all over the country and exhorted to excel. Fortunately I had never been stressed about coming first, nor was that much an issue in my home, so I settled in, concentrating on the subjects I liked and being content with SPIs between 7 and 8.

But I know that for many ‘Chatur Ramalingams’ the first few semesters were agony. One student of our batch went to the extent of slashing his own finger as an excuse out of fear of failing a quiz. The competition was cut-throat, and in the final semesters, it was said that some students would go to the extent of stealing placement invitations from others’ mailboxes! Fortunately, the atmosphere at GH was one of mutual co-operation. We were often in each others’ rooms doing “combined study” and copying ‘veteran practical logs’ which while not very efficient in terms of grades, made for good friendships and helped keep all of us afloat.

Sudha at IITK, c. 1981. Picture: CK Mohan (1978-83)

Life at IITK involved a gruelling succession of weekly quizzes, assignments, midsems, endsems, with practicals thrown in. After a while, this meant that learning ceased to be a leisurely, pleasurable, soaking-in of things in depth, and instead became a mad rush. Not everyone could cope. Many had to join “slow pace” classes, repeat papers in the summer and there were hangers-on from senior years in our classes. The very first semester I joined, I remember being a part of a funeral procession for a dalit student who had committed suicide. He had needed to clear one paper for his degree but he “flunked” it with a narrow margin. In the silent march, the grief and anger was palpable in all the participants.

Library: For those who decided to learn, rather than bother too much about grades, our Library was the biggest attraction. It was really well-stocked with books on a wide range of subjects, and is one of the most memorable things about IITK. Being air-conditioned, it was also the most comfortable place in the hot summers of Kanpur and the library staff would go around waking up those who were taking a nap in its various nooks and corners! During exams, the Library would be open till 2 am and was filled with students.

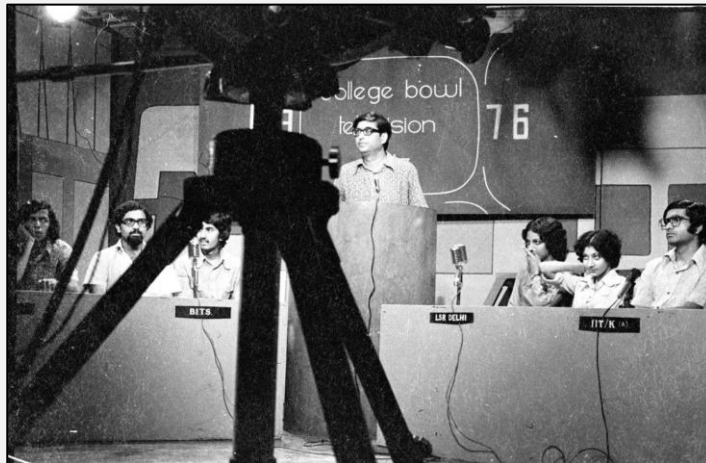


The IITK Library, c. 1975. It was the coolest place on campus, where students could study, relax, or just take a long nap. Picture: Shirish Joshi (1973-78)

Learning: We had some really excellent teachers, Professors Kalyan Banerjee, UB Tewari, AP Shukla, HS Mani, KS Gandhi.....and so many others, who introduced us to the logical and yet marvellous, complex and intricate and yet rational and comprehensible worlds of physics, chemistry and mathematics. There were many classes in which we were so absorbed that we would be jolted when the hour bell rang.

Our first two and half years were spent in common courses and we only entered our departments later, in the fifth semester. While this made us, the “science” types a little impatient – we had to do Technical Drawing, Electronics and Material Science classes which were geared for the Engineering students – and this meant we knew much less Mathematics than a B.Sc Maths student would know when they joined us for the two year M. Sc course – but looking back I think it was good for us to “muddy our hands” a bit. We made sand moulds, cut plastic, did woodwork, joined circuits and performed experiments in chemistry, with all the other engineering students.

Prof VK Deshpande is seen here conducting the Quiz Bowl in the TVC studio, Festival 1976. Picture: Shirish Joshi (1973-78)



Prof VK Deshpande, then on the verge of retirement, taught our first Physics 101 course. He was a flamboyant lecturer and excelled in the huge L-7 auditorium where all 250 of us would attend common classes. I remember some of us went to request him to take some special classes on some subject not included in the course – I think on

Relativity - and we were fairly confident that most of our classmates would attend, but only 7 of us showed up. He laughed at our embarrassment and invited us to his room where we had a very interesting discussion.

Womanhood: Women often faced humiliating pranks – the air being taken out of our bicycles leaving us to a walk in the hot sun to our hostel (the furthest from the academic block); being caricatured in the skits in the cultural festival; having crass notes left in our books. If you did well, they assumed it was because you were a girl and the teachers had a soft corner for you. If you did badly, it reinforced their belief that girls were dumb.

The sex ratio in IITK was extremely unhealthy. We were 8 girls among a batch of 250, and in most batches there were just 2 or 3 girls. In our first semester, all 8 of us decided to go and see the Friday night film in the auditorium. We were warned, but we thought we could handle it. In the film the moment a romantic scene was shown, the boys went crazy – catcalls, obscene comments, dances and forcing the operator to project the scene again and again. We walked out after 10 minutes. That was the last Friday night film we ever saw.

On one occasion, we decided that enough was enough. Two MSc students, who had completed their BSc in a more normal college, went to another hostel to watch their male friends play tennis. To embarrass them, two boys paraded in the veranda of their upper floor rooms in their underwear, in full view. The women returned to GH in tears, shocked and humiliated. We had a General Body Meeting in the GH that day and spontaneously decided to march (70-80 of us) to Hall II. In response, the offenders were securely locked in and said to be missing; the Warden and Dean of Students arrived but they did not agree to our reasonable demand of a public apology. In a later enquiry, we were told that if we wanted to succeed in the world, we should learn to “face” and “take such incidents in their stride”!

The crass notes and other unwanted attention would usually stop after 2-3 semesters, because the girls would have paired up with someone, perceived as “going steady”, and thus “not available”. The otherwise conservative campus culture was liberal with couples who moved around together and visited each other. Many lasting relationships originated there.

We women would be thoroughly amused by the antics of our male colleagues in the annual “Culfest” – the IITK cultural festival. We would watch suits being pressed and the hectic borrowing of ties. Participants would be invited from the Womens’ Colleges (Miranda House, Lady Shri Ram, etc.), and

their heavy make-up, “dressed to kill” attire and feminine wiles were rather looked down upon by us. Almost as a statement we would insist on being casually dowdy and wisecrack about these “Brainless Beauties” and tease our classmates who would have spent most of their pocket money taking these beauties out to lunch and dinner!

Non-technical learning: We had to opt for a humanities and social sciences course each semester. Many students treated this as a “necessary evil”, but we had some excellent teachers, such as Profs Mohini Mallik who taught Philosophy of Science, Vinod Jairath who taught Sociology (particularly Development Studies), and Leelavati Krishnan who taught Psychology. They impressed the students, overcoming their resistant attitudes, and helped in making students more sensitive, multi-faceted in their outlook, and less technocratic.

Unlike at some other IITs, students at IITK were isolated from the rest of society. Many would spend the entire 5 years without even visiting Kanpur city except for the ride to the Railway Station. Most of us never learnt that this once-bustling textile manufacturing city had become a place where working class families were facing destitution. Most students and faculty were not even concerned with the plight of the construction labourers working in the campus. But some students and faculty on campus would discuss serious social issues and those discussions were extremely significant in shaping my life.

My first exposure to “real” life was when I joined the NSS at IITK and volunteered to teach in a nearby village. I had my first taste of rabid casteism when dalit children dared not attend a school we had started in an upper caste neighbourhood. Later, I visited the Rallis factory in Unnao where workers were killed in a police firing.

But indulging in non-academic learning was far from easy. One day some of us had gone to visit some flood affected villages and were on our way back to the campus. I had an end-sem exam that day and was extremely tense. We and a large number of villagers were waiting at the roadside for the bus. From a distance we saw it approach, raising a huge cloud of dust. We all heaved sighs of relief and expectantly stood up with all our bags in readiness. To our shock the bus just passed by. The villagers all sat down patiently again. I was furious. When will the next bus come? Oh, it comes twice a day, the next one will be in the evening, I was told with equanimity. Needless to say, I failed the exam and had to stay a summer semester. But I never forgot that the lack of adequate transportation was a daily reality for the villagers.

Mess workers: My best friends in IITK included the Mess workers Ramashish and Shubhkaran who led a cultural group. I love music, and participated with great enjoyment in their songs and plays, which were often based on folk tunes and spoke of the hard lot of the working class and peasants. In the 1970’s, radical IITK students had unionized the mess workers (and other karmacharis), and also led to creating the Students Senate.

Once, at Special Dinner time, a few GH residents complained that their Mess Bill was too high, and alleged pilferage by the mess workers. I was the Mess Secretary, and went to investigate. Puran, who was the Mess worker in charge, showed his two young children sitting on the floor having puris and kheer, and said “Didi, I have given my share to them, how can I eat without them?” In the next GBM we decided that for the Special Dinner, just as we could bring our guests, the Mess workers could also bring their families. We remembered that Puran was often helpful to us when we had to keep extra plates in our rooms for those who were late. He would always enquire after our health or how our exams went, and was there to greet us when we arrived each semester.

Around the Library Fountains.

Picture: Shirish Joshi

Summers: IITK in summer was hot, lazy, and relaxed. Usually, students who stayed back to repeat courses had just a couple of classes each day. Some of us stayed back to read in the library or just to be with friends. I remember learning cycling – a must in our large Campus for GH residents- the first summer with the inevitable falls and bruises, since I had got quite worn out walking and trying to get lifts. Summers showed the other side of IITK: somewhere in the crevices of our highly tense and competitive lives, there was still space and scope for thinking and also being different. IITK also had its classical music lovers, rock bands, film buffs, maverick philosophers, lofty thinkers, and high experimenters.



Langurs: Our Campus was beautiful and sprawling, providing space for a huge army of langurs that lived there. Walking in the open corridors between various academic buildings, we would see the langurs sitting on the parapets and swinging their legs imitating students (perhaps they aspire to be reincarnated as IITK students), occasionally triumphantly eating some goodie they had just snatched. Once a langur suddenly walked out of the Department Head's office door which was ajar, sending us into splits of laughter; he must have entered through the office window in the Head's absence. Another day, a friend had forgotten to close the large windows in his room, and was horrified to find a langur sitting on his table, happily squeezing out a tube of shaving cream. Although usually harmless, the langurs could get violent if their babies were touched, as I came to know from experience.

After we leave: When people hear that one has graduated from IITK, there are looks of admiration and approval. But sometimes the magic doesn't work: when I wanted to join a law course at the ripe old age of 40, it was a difficult job persuading the Ravi Shankar University at Raipur (Chattisgarh) that I had passed my B.Sc. with more than 50%!



Sudha is seen here with her daughter Maaysha in 2022, shortly after her release from prison.

This article was edited with permission from Sudha. The original is available at:
<https://nirvaakiitk.wordpress.com/2018/09/03/a-glimpse-into-the-iitk-life-of-sudha-bharadwaj/>

A Blast from the Past

*Suno freshers ke gam
IIT-K country bums
Kabhi aise geet gaya karo
Yahaan gam hi gam
Hai kyaa karen hum
Kuch tempo to laya karo*

One of the joyful moments of creativity in my first year at IIT happened during Galaxy, an intra-hostel competitive event organized by the students. That is when I discovered the voice of Shampa Banerjee, my classmate from Ranchi. An epitome of the argumentative, articulate, erudite Bengali, Shampa was superbly trained in Hindustani classical music and had a mellifluous voice. Jacintha, she and I were sufficiently emboldened to script an adaptation of a popular Hindi song *uthhe sabke kadam tara rum pum pum* from the 1979 Hindi film *Baaton Baaton Mein*. Our lyrics bathed in humour lampooned the culture of IIT Kanpur, in particular the boys, their discomfiture with females, and the endless cycle of course work and examinations. We sang with gusto, everyone cheered and we bagged the first prize. Subsequently, Shampa became a part of the musical legends of IIT-K.

*Kajoli Banerjee Krishnan
MSc-PhD, Physics, 1983-89
Editor, Spark, 1984-85*



(L) Memories of the IITK GH, c. 1984. In the back row (L to R) are: Jacintha Joseph, Shampa Banerjee, Ratna Kapoor, Akanksha Dubey, Nita Goel and Sudeshna Sinha. In front of Shampa (in the black sweater) are (back to front): Supreeti Das and Rita Sadvani. With the exception of Sudeshna Sinha (1980-85), all the girls in this picture joined IITK in 1983. Picture: Akanksha Chaurey nee Dubey.

(R) Shampa, Kajoli and Jacintha in a more recent photo shared by Shampa.

The IITK Girls Hostels

In Jan 1971, girl students moved from the faculty homes near the Director's Bungalow to the newly constructed GH. This new facility had accommodation for 72 students in its two wings. However, with only 30 odd girls on campus, the second wing remained unoccupied till 1976.



The Original GH. Picture: Anjali Joshi (1976-81)

In 2002, with the growing number of girls on campus, it became necessary to add a new Girls Hostel. GH-1 was constructed on the site of the original hockey and football fields, near H-4 and the Visitors Hostel. This Hostel, after additional expansions, currently offers residence to 450 students.



GH-1. Picture: Aman K. Singh (BT-MT, CE, 2020-25).

The number of women on campus has kept increasing over the years. Towards the end of 2014, it was decided to demolish the original GH building and replace it with a new G+7 story structure. This new building, alternatively referred to as GH-2, or GH Tower, or Hall-6, became fully functional in 2017. It offers residence to over 700 students through 160 double seated and 419 single seated rooms. Besides the Dining Hall, amenities include 6 guest rooms, 2 common rooms, a library, shops, and music, gym and recreation halls.



GH Tower (Hall-VI). Picture: Aman K. Singh (BT-MT, CE, 2020-25)

In 2022, Hall IV, the original PG Hall was converted a GH. The story had completed a full circle; in 1966, a GH was created in the faculty bungalows, and affiliated with H4. In what has definitely been a nice trend over the years, there are now enough girls in the campus to allow them to move into H4 itself.



Hall IV, November 2024. Picture: Aman K. Singh (BT-MT, CE, 2020-25)

The Musical Legacy of Professor P.T. Narasimhan

The children of Prof. Narasimhan reminisce about their father's talent and dedication to music and his influence on their musical experiences while living on campus at IITK.



Music was our father's abiding passion in life. His early exposure to music came through his mother, who had undergone formal training in vocal Carnatic music. Although he went through little to no formal training in music, his keen musical ear helped him to pick up Carnatic music, teaching himself to play both the flute and violin. Not surprisingly, the scientist in him had great interest in reading texts about the physics of musical sounds and the theory of classification of Carnatic and Hindustani ragas.

Our father's initial exposure to Hindustani (North Indian style) music came during his years at IISC, Bangalore. The various performances he attended, including Hindustani vocal practice sessions by Dr. M.R. Gautam (who later joined as faculty at Banaras Hindu University) left an indelible impression on him. Living in Kanpur further increased his exposure to Hindustani music and deepened his appreciation of that tradition. Amongst his favorite instrumental artists were Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman (violin), Dr. N. Ramani (flute), Sri M.S. Gopalakrishnan (violin), Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia (flute) and Pandit Ravi Shanker (sitar).

In those early days, music recordings were only on spool tape or vinyl LPs. Vinyl LPs were played in our home on one of our father's prized possessions: a restored Grundig audio system. LPs such as "The Dance of Sound", Thillānās composed by Lalgudi Jayaraman and played by him as "Jugalbandi" or duet, with Amjad Ali Khan, and others of Pandit Ravi Shankar and Pandit Jasraj were played more often than others. All India Radio's National Programme of Music broadcast on certain Saturday nights was not to be missed - this was the era before Doordarshan and TV!

On many Sunday evenings, our father would sit in the living room, playing the flute. The music wafting out of the open doors of our house enveloped walkers strolling in our neighborhood. Our father would also occasionally play the flute on a weekday evening after work and before dinner— playing music was clearly a way to relax after a day's work. His playing "Krishna, nee begane baaro" or "Raghuvamsasutaa" were a few of our (and our mother's) favorites.



Prof. PTN playing the flute with one of his grandchildren

Growing up, each of us was encouraged to and supported in learning music – sitar, tabla and vocals. Eventually we acquired an array of musical instruments at home which set the stage for occasional impromptu musical jam sessions in the Narasimhan household. Playing together on sitar, tabla, harmonium and flute, our melded musical harmonies also served to strengthen our family bonds.

All through our childhood at IITK, we each have vivid memories of the many performances by leading artists that were held at various venues, such as L7 or a “shamiana” erected in the lawns nearby. Even today, we fondly remember concerts by Pt. Ravi Shankar, Ustad Alla Rakha, Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma, Ustad Zakir Hussain, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and so many others. Our father and his colleagues also organized concerts by many (then) young and upcoming artists, such as Pt. Ajoy Chakraborty and Parween Sultana. Several mesmerizing dance performances by individual artistes and their dance troupes in a variety of styles that included Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, and Bharatnatyam filled out the classical cultural fare on campus

In his desire to bring classical music to the IITK campus, our father found wonderful partners in Prof. D. Balasubramaniam, Prof. J.D. Borwanker and legions of IITK students (many of whom were trained classical musicians). Later, with the support of our father and Prof. R. Ramachandran (Physics), there was a concerted effort to organize more Carnatic music events on campus.

The IITK campus has always been blessed by many local artists, whether students, or campus members. Many informal concerts were held in “baithak” style at a faculty residence that was converted into a “faculty club”. Audience exclamations of “Bhale”, “Besh” or “Waah-Waah”, along with well-timed applause seemed to bring out the best in the artists. Featured performers included (late) Mrs. Veena Saharabuddhe, Mrs. Snighda Biswas, Mrs. Veena Shukla and Mrs. M.B. Borwanker.



Mrs. Snighda Biswas performing for friends at an informal gathering at her home.

Picture: Shirish Joshi, c. 1977

By the end of most of these concerts, like the many other young children in attendance against our will, we were usually to be found asleep in the laps of our parents. Regardless of circumstances, the music must somehow have seeped into our subconscious minds helping to lay the foundation for our lifelong and deep love of music. Our exposure to arts and music, particularly classical music, during our formative years has created some of our most cherished memories. Now, as adults, we all continue to engage in the performing arts in some way or another, including passing our love and appreciation for music down to our children.



Prof. PTN seen outside his office in Southern Labs

Later in our father's life, while he was working at Caltech, he would participate in many musical events and festivals held in the community in the greater Los Angeles area. He was sought after as a flute accompanist for dance performances and debuts ("Arangetrams"). Although this kept his weekends busy (commuting, rehearsing and performing), he enjoyed the interactions and accompanying new friendships.

Even in his later years, our father remained an informal student of music. In his role as an accompanist, ahead of each performance he would practice the pieces that had been selected for that performance. He also kept very careful notes about compositions of major Carnatic composers (such as Dikshitar, Purandaradasa and Thyagaraja) and tagged each composition with its corresponding raga (melodic classification), tala (rhythmic classification), including references to commercial music recordings of those very compositions rendered by musical stalwarts. These notes, along with an array of flutes and recordings of music (LPs and later cassettes and CDs) are part of our tangible musical inheritance.

More important than any tangible aspects of our musical inheritance, we are grateful for the intangible parts –which enables us even today to appreciate Indian Classical music, derive peace and contentment through it, and use it as a creative outlet.

Through our financial support of the '*P.T. Narasimhan Fund for Performing Arts*' we look to continue our father's legacy and to give back with gratitude to the exceptional IITK community that we have been blessed to experience. We thank the many IITK alumni and former faculty that have also contributed to the Fund, and we are grateful for the partnership offered by the Director (Prof. Manindra Agarwal), IITK Foundation (Sameer Kaul and team), and late Prof. Sameer Khandekar (Mech. Engg., former DOSA) in helping realize this vision. We thank Prof. Shatarupa Thakurta Roy (HSS) for agreeing to take on the responsibility of managing the activities of this Fund.

For further information regarding the fund please see: <https://iitk.ac.in/dora/givingback/p-t-narasimhan-fund.php>



Prof. PT Narasimhan and Mrs Leena Narasimhan at a banquet in New York City

Our thanks to Nalini Narasimhan Murdter, Nandini Narayan and Vikram Narasimhan, for contributing to this memory and sharing their pictures.

Our Bits of That IITK

Monkey Business in Hall-I

'Twas the spring of '80. Final exams were approaching. We were all excited and exhausted. The weight of 5 years was upon us and an unknown future was staring us in the face.

In those uncertain times, a family of monkeys had taken up residence on the terrace of Hall 1. Soon, they began to lord it over us. No one was safe. Woe upon those caught with a food tray in their hands. I, too, was once a subject of their intimidation and extortion.

Finally, we had had enough. On a sultry Sunday afternoon, a plan was hatched in wing B by Dilip Patil, Peter Noronha, and others to get rid of this menace once and for all.

The warriors armed themselves with cricket bats, hockey sticks and other assorted weapons and declared war on the monkeys. With hooting and hollering, they herded the simians from one wing to another.

For a while, the antagonists were evenly matched. But soon, more of the oppressed rose up and joined the battle.

As the battle raged on, the spectators lined the hallways. Some cheered the warriors, some acted as lookouts and the rest just enjoyed the show.

For about 30 minutes, there was complete mayhem as people and monkeys were screaming and running about. Exams were forgotten. Futures were put on hold. The monkeys used every tactic to intimidate but could not overcome the sheer numbers and determination of humans. Finally, the monkeys had had enough and ran away to find safer pastures.

A great victory was achieved thanks to a few intrepid souls. The realm was safe and once again peace descended upon the good folks of Hall 1. As a bonus, a safety valve had been opened to relieve the stress of coming exams.

And thus, "Planet of the Apes" was averted in Hall 1.

*Vimal Parikh
BT, MME, 1975-80*

Sketches: Raman Bhatia (1977-82), Festival Invite, 1979



After graduating from IITK, Vimal joined Mukund Iron and Steel in Mumbai. He moved to the US in 1982 and obtained his MS in Computer Science from the University of Kansas. He joined computer graphics pioneer Silicon Graphics in 1984 and worked on some wonderful products. Over a career spanning 42 years, he worked for companies like ATI/AMD, Nokia, Nvidia and finally, Apple as Sr. GPU Architect. He retired in 2022, and has settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, spending time with family, travelling, reading and bonding with grandchildren.

A Hypnotic Spell Cast during Our First Year in Hall III

Mohan Tambe (BT, EE, 1975-80; MT, EE/CS, 1982)

"Double, double toil and trouble: Fire burn, and cauldron bubble." Shakespeare's Macbeth.

In the second semester Psychology course, Prof Tayal had taught us about the Hypnosis technique, as elucidated by Eysenck. Some of us — Jitendra Malik, Vinayak Eswaran and myself — were intrigued enough to go through Eysenck's book in the Library and were spellbound by it. We learnt how to put a willing subject in a hypnotic trance and plant post-hypnotic suggestions. Our minds were then itching to try it out.

Hypnosis represented the ethereal power which one mind could exercise on another willing mind. The mind which could hypnotize had to be special. But even the subject's mind had to be imaginative, with cooperative and respectful attitudes towards the hypnotist.

One evening, after we thought we were sufficiently trained in the technique, we started this Hypnosis session in the first wing, middle floor, last room (209 for the initiated).

The Pioneering Hypnotism Session

Vinayak Eswaran first tried hypnotizing Dinesh Naik but failed. Jitendra Malik then tried it out on Eswaran. After some time Eswaran burst out laughing at Malik's futile efforts. Malik was unfazed. He attributed this failure to the unwillingness of the subject. That's when I volunteered to be the hypnosis subject of my roomie.

With news that a Hypnosis Session was being conducted, people from adjoining wings began pouring in. The room was jam-packed with 20-30 students stuffed in different corners of the room, standing above each other, and even perched on the top of the cupboards on the sides. Latecomers were trying to peek in from the open door.



I was sitting on a chair with my back to the window, my eyes fixated on Malik who was standing near the door a few feet in front of me.

Malik started by dangling something like a pendulum and asked me to follow its movement solely with my eyes while keeping my head still. With the periodic movements came the repetitive suggestions in a soft voice, "You are feeling sleepy, your eyes are closing, your hands are going limp." With this my eyes felt heavy, then they closed briefly.

Credit: Raman Bhatia (1977-82)

(What follows is reconstructed from the tales of the eye-witnesses, as I wasn't supposed to have any conscious recall of what happened during the session.)

Malik then gave the suggestion that my hands had become light and they would drift upwards. That's what happened. That was the first indication that the hypnosis was working. This was followed by a series of experiments intended to verify all that we had learnt from the Hypnosis book.

Malik gave a suggestion that my body had become stiff like a log. And indeed, I straightened out, with just my head and bottom resting on the supporting chair. Everyone was amazed!

Hypnosis is also a way of getting the subconscious to reveal what the conscious mind has forgotten. So Malik gave a suggestion for me to recite a famous verse from Macbeth. Apparently, I did so. The people nearby, including Dinesh Naik, swore that although I seemed to be mumbling, the words were recognizable.

Next I was given a suggestion, that I was in a forest and a tiger was approaching me. Others watched with horror as my face contorted in terror and my body shrank back. Everyone was fearful that I might have a heart attack, so Malik quickly stated that the tiger had left. Everyone was relieved to see the terror fading from me.

The Post Hypnotic Suggestion

Malik then gave a Post-Hypnotic suggestion, “At 9 PM, you are going to get superhuman strength. Show us what you can do with it,” after which Malik released me from the hypnotic trance. I felt as if I had woken up from anesthesia, and was overwhelmed by the crowd and the attention.

Ajay Singh volunteered to be Malik’s next victim. Ajay too exhibited some of the characteristics which I had shown during hypnotism, but Malik kindly spared him the more dangerous suggestions. Ajay laughed heartily (with his eyes closed) when Malik told him to remember something funny. Malik now felt vindicated and was exuberant about the powers he possessed.

It was now nearing 9 PM. I left my room and went to the corridor, with others following me, curious to see what was going to transpire. Malik cued me the instant the clock struck that fateful hour. I felt a surge of strength in me and felt compelled to do something dramatic. So, with a fixated, glassy stare (or so people tell me), I lifted the heftiest guy around —poor, unsuspecting Kapil Dev Singh — with the intent of flinging him off the second floor. Fortunately the others intervened to overpower me. I came back to reality, horrified by what had gotten into me.



Credit: Raman Bhatia (1977-82)

ND Rai Runs Amok

News of this hypnotism success spread like wildfire in the hall. Soon there were many others trying to unleash their own hypnotic powers. Out of these, one case went to the extremes and precipitated this chain reaction.

Asim Jafa was hypnotizing ND Rai, with Amod Singhal and some others watching. Once ND was in a trance, Asim, presumably drunk with this new found power, went out on a limb with the most outrageous of suggestions, "Your best friend (Utpal Bhattacharya) has been killed." Perhaps, Asim intended to evoke a feeling of sadness in ND. But it backfired spectacularly, with ND interpreting it to mean that Asim had perpetrated the crime. ND flew into a rage, saying he was going to avenge this. He pulled out his trunk and flung out things till he got to his Khukri. This terrified everyone, especially Asim who recoiled in horror as the presumed victim.

There wasn't time for Asim to gradually terminate the hypnotic session, as he suspected that ND was now possessed of demonic strength. Pradyot Mukherjee and Alok Saboo also joined in on hearing the commotion. Amod and Pradyot managed to disarm ND from his Khukri, and then Asim grabbed it before fleeing for his life, and bolted the door from outside. A chastened Asim did not dare to sleep in his own room for a few days after that. The khukri was returned to ND only after a few months.

ND was boiling in rage, and had to be pinned down by Amod and others while his elder brother was called in from Hall 1. He was taken to the Health Center where he slept off his trance and was fine the next day, although feeling groggy while sitting for a Quiz.

Clamp Down

Soon, this disquieting news had reached the Warden, Dr. Iyengar, who immediately clamped down on any further experiments to pre-empt the possibility of similar disastrous consequences.

Throughout all this, Malik was still in the seventh heaven. He even talked about leaving IIT to follow his true vocation as a professional hypnotist, "I came here to become a scientist, but I may well become a Master Hypnotist."

He was dismissive when I tried to dissuade him by suggesting that others and I were faking it. He claimed that I was just trying to belittle his talents and that my subconscious might be just rationalizing my behavior.

But no further experiments followed, and the hypnotism wave, which had emerged out of the blue, faded out the same way.

Denouement

ND claimed much later that he was just teaching Asim a lesson. Later Tambe and Ajay Singh also admitted that they were faking it. However even today, these versions are not believed by everyone, possibly including Malik. As Vikram Dayal wryly notes: "It is quite possible that they were acting, but by not speaking up immediately, they have left a doubt - were they play-acting then or is the subconscious doing the justifications later?"

This collective memory effort has been made possible, thanks to the engrossing chats held during 2020 in the IITK Batch 80 Whatsapp Group. The mystery hasn't died down and some questions on what exactly happened keep surfacing. Thanks to Asim, Amod, Vikram and Pradyot for providing much of the thrilling details. A special thanks to Dinesh Naik for his enthusiastic efforts in ensuring that this article remains factual, lucid and compelling.

A Campus Struck With Terror



And thus, the saga of hypno-terror at IITK came to an end. Credit: Raman Bhatia (1977-82)

Mohan Tambe completed his BTech EE in 1980, and then obtained his MTech in CS in 1982. He is well known for pioneering the first Devanagari computer. This became the basis of the Indian language code and Keyboard, which are now part of the BIS and Unicode standard. He then started GIST Group at CDAC Pune developing the first ASIC, and has been a serial entrepreneur ever since. He still continues with his student life: hands-on programming, sprinting, cycling, gym, theories of mind and late nights.

Jitendra Malik completed his BTech EE in 1980, and then completed his PhD in CS from Stanford Univ. in 1985. He is a Professor of EE and CS at U California, Berkeley. He is well known for his research in Computer Vision. Mohan Tambe and Jitendra Malik were recognized as Distinguished Alumni of IITK in 2003 and 2008, respectively.

Teaching of Graduate Physics at IITK, Early 1970s

Pankaj Sharan (PhD, Physics, 1977)

PHY 612: Advanced Quantum Mechanics: The 'Repeat Exam'

PHY 611 was difficult enough for most of us, (I barely managed a B), but PHY 612 was much harder. It was mostly about scattering theory, representations of rotation, Lorentz and Poincare groups, and relativistic wave equations.

As feared, most of us did not do well in the end-semester exam. We were shown our answer books and there were many with 30s and 40s out of 100. The students requested Prof. Gyan Mohan to take a 'repeat exam', to which he agreed. He took back our answer books and fixed a date after one week for the repeat exam.

On that day, he returned our answer books, and, to our surprise, handed out fresh copies of the same question paper!

We did what we could to improve, but that was that.

After collecting those answer books for the second time, Prof. Gyan Mohan said something which I have remembered, and I have told my students all my life as a teacher. He said:

"An exam is not meant for me to find out how good or bad you are. It is meant for you to find out what you have not understood well. So you must always go back after an exam and solve the parts that you could not do properly."

PHY 624: Statistical Mechanics: The 'A' I did not earn

Prof. H. S. Mani came to some of us and said, "I want to learn some topics in Statistical Mechanics. Since the best way to learn a subject is to give a course on it, I am floating a course on Statistical Mechanics."



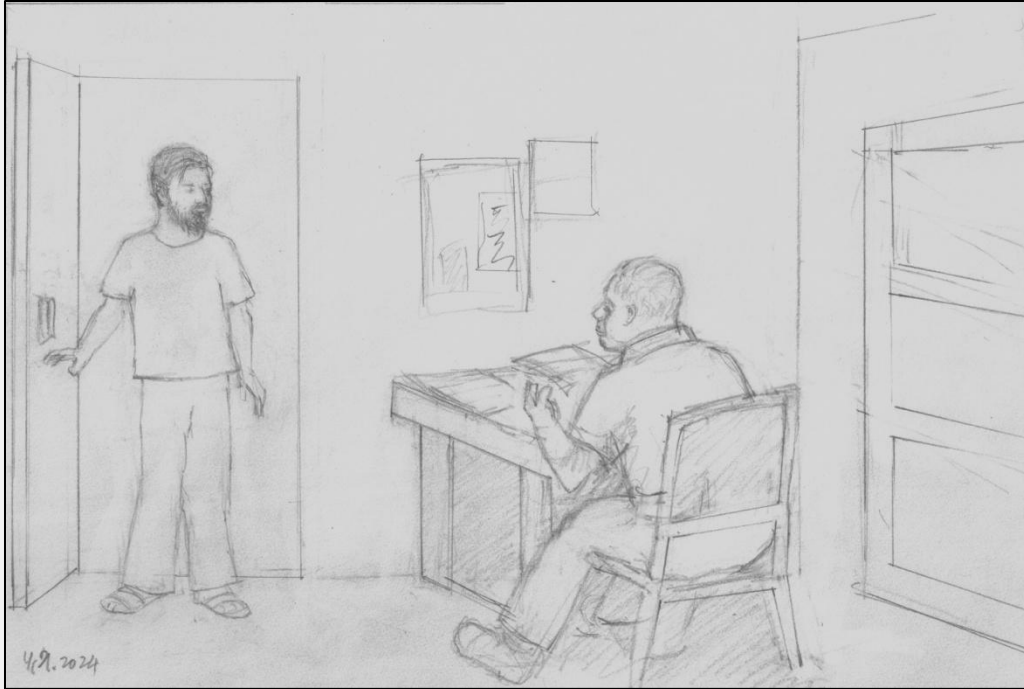
The problem was that at least four students had to register in order for a course to be offered. We had completed our course requirements and passed the comprehensive exam, so he was asking us for a bit of a favour.

I do not know who the senior student who negotiated with him was, but the agreement was that four of us would register, with the conditions that:

- (1) There would be no exam, only a term paper and
- (2) All of us would get an 'A'!

He agreed.

The course, with Kerson Huang's book as the main source was a success, and we learnt things like the Lee-Yang work on hard-sphere Bose gas etc.



Pankaj Sharan with Prof. Mani (in his office on the 2nd Floor of FB, close to the lift).

When the semester ended, Prof. Mani called me to his room one day and said, "Look I have to send the grades today!"

"तो भेज दीजिये, (*so send them!*) I thought we had agreed on what grades to send."

"Yes, but you have not submitted the term-paper!"

"Oh that? OK, I promise I will write a term paper and give it to you."

And that was the end of it.

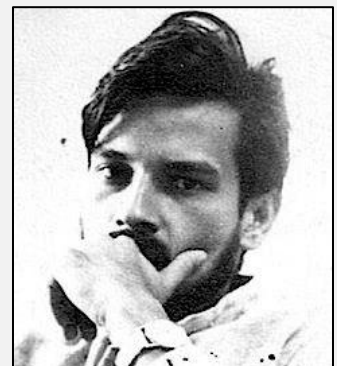
He completely forgot about it and never asked me again.

My work with Professor Gyan Mohan never materialized enough to earn a PhD. After four years I joined Dr. Mani as his student and completed my PhD in 1977. After a brief post-doc at IITB, I was lucky enough to get a job at Allahabad University, and then at Jamia Millia in Delhi, where I taught Physics for 40 years or so before retiring.

The term paper was never written. And I never got over the guilt of having got an A which I certainly did not deserve. Even if he had given me an 'F' (Fail) or an 'I' (Incomplete) it would not have mattered because I had already met the minimum course requirements (*for the PhD*).

A few years ago (in 2021) I narrated this story to Dr. Mani. He had, of course, forgotten all about it. But he agreed to absolve me of my sin if I helped him with comments on a book he is writing. This I will do.

Image: Prof. Pankaj Sharan from his years at IITK. All illustrations for these narratives have been shared by him.



Looking Back...

Based on the information available in the IITK Annual Report of 1967-68, a Cultural Festival was organized by the IITK Students Gymkhana in September 1967. This is generally considered to be the starting point of cultural festivals at colleges across the country. This event was a small regional affair, featuring English and Hindi Debate and Drama competitions. Only five teams participated, but the success of the event opened the door to a lot of possibilities for what could be done at the National level.

After this initial success, plans were quickly put together for a follow-up All India Cultural Festival in Jan 1968. Leading the effort was Anil Agarwal ([Wikipedia](#)), a very active member of the Gymkhana, and later, an internationally recognized environmentalist. The Industrial tours of the upcoming Winter Break provided the best opportunity to carry out these plans.

Jan 1968: The First All-India Cultural Festival

Anil K. Agarwal (BT, ME, 1965-70)

K. K., Khanna and I had gone to Bombay on a tour with our departments to see some factories. Most of us skipped them to go sightseeing but K. K. and I found ourselves doing another job.

The very first morning of our 'Industrial Tour' we were standing in a Police Station searching the telephone directory for the addresses of some important people who lived in Bombay. Soon a long list was made and we got down to work...

St. Xavier's College proved to be just too exciting. The numerous minis, and micro-minis, that kept floating by during my long wait were enough to provoke me. I cursed IIT/K and her barren life, especially so, when led into the conference room of the Union's Students' Social Work Committee. I got a glimpse of how social could social work be, and stared open-mouthed at the sociability. Damn Engineering is all I could mutter— Indian History is much more exciting!

Sofia College went a step further. Where Xavier's had made me curse IIT/K and her discipline, Sofia made me curse the whole city of Kanpur. I must have been a gentle looking boy who wandered into the girls' college compound right in the morning. True or not, but from the number of catcalls and she wolf-whistles I received, it was beyond doubt that I had over impressed them (or maybe under impressed them...)

The next hop was, obviously, Delhi. Sivaraman and Mehta were already there. The news was not heartening. LSR, Miranda, Lady Hardinge, Indraprastha— had all refused as they never sent their teams outside Delhi, and why not—people keep the best for themselves. St. Stephen's and Ramjas had given hope. IIT/Delhi was unimpressed and so that left only AIIMS—our old friends. For the first time we received a definite reply—a positive yes and that was heartening.

The next fifteen days were a period of real anxiety. Reminders after reminders were sent to participating teams and the invitees. When nothing seemed to be coming, telegrams were dispatched to over a dozen, and then one fine day a telegram did drop in. Then followed another, and another, and after that a spate of them. Most of them brought happy tidings. Things were beginning to come alive after all.

Team after team was sending its affirmation and amongst them was the most welcome though surprising affirmation of all. Mr. M. F. Husain, the country's internationally famous painter, had agreed to come. Mr. Bhist agreed to give us a collection of paintings from his college. The local artists were also keen to exhibit their paintings with Mr. Husain in the show, and paintings kept coming.

The first item, a Film Festival, was a reassuring success. Mr. S. Sukhdev, (*who was among India's finest film makers of the time*), inaugurated the film festival and became a hot favourite with the crowd. He felt that such a programme of documentary films had never been held before, especially, on such a large scale.

The festival went beyond our expectations. The films and the idea itself were greatly appreciated. We had received various award winning films from the Films' Division, Film Institute, AIR1TV, Archaeological Survey of India, Field Publicity Division, U. P. Information Division, Esso and Burmah Shell. Sukhdev and Rajbans Khanna (*another recognized film-maker of the era*) had sent their personal copies. All houses were packed to capacity. Eight shows in all, with many feeling that they were left out.

Mr. Chanchal Sarkar, the Director of the Press Institute of India, was amongst us to preside over the English Debate. The subject was quite interesting and with the members of the opposition asking questions, the proceedings were very lively. Chanchal Sarkar, too, seems to have been impressed by IIT/K and later wrote an article in Hindustan Times. The Kavi Sammelan was a star-studded one. The programme ended at 2.00 AM with many cursing me that it had been stopped too soon. A Sub-programme—a competition of young poets—was not so successful as the crowd were more interested in hearing the 'pros' and kept chanting for 'Kaka' (*Kaka Hathrasi*). I was jittery till it ended.

The next day, M. F. Husain inaugurated the fine arts, stamps and photography exhibitions. The Husain cup was awarded to Dr. S. Ranganathan, of IIT/K itself. And as not many people at the time could appreciate art, Husain was repeatedly asked questions, till Dr. Ranganathan himself, gave a talk on his painting. Sukhdev's talk on 'And Miles to Go' had been very interesting and so we decided to make another go with Husain's 'Through the Eyes of a Painter.' Husain's painting session was undoubtedly a success. A large gathering turned up to watch him display his prowess with the brush and paint. This was an item that had just chanced to occur and we were all very happy to find the crowd enjoying themselves. Later on, I came to know the centre of attraction was someone else, a participant who had obtained overnight popularity with the crowds of IIT/K—many photographers had an interesting time. The nude was anyway presented to the Gymkhana and will soon hang in the library, thanks to M.F. Husain.

The Drama and Music Competitions, as usual, were the most longed-for items of the festival. Unfortunately they failed to make their mark. Loreto (*now Avadh Girls*) again, fetched a number of trophies — the Best Play, Director and Actress, with Bandittoes and AIIMS excelling in Music. The festival brought some new talent forward in the form of the Meteors — a group made up of I and II year students. Some histrionic talent was also discovered in the form of Ashok Kush—the Best Actor's award winner for his superb portrayal of Aurangzeb in *Aurangzeb ki Akhri Raat*'. But most of all was the rise to instant stardom of a student from outside. The lady acted well, the lady spoke well, the lady looked well and naturally, the lady went well—with the crowds of IIT/K.

The last day, the 20th of January, passed off with mixed emotions. The Hindi Debate was presided over by Shri Yashpal, the famous revolutionary and Hindi author. The afternoon saw a children's on-the-spot

painting competition. A horde of tiny tots from the local Central and Campus schools laboured away at their sheets.

All this brought us to the last item of the festival, the Symposium 'Vision from Threshold.' Based on the film 'I am twenty', the idea was off the usual trend of talks and seminars. The participants were supposed to talk of their vision of this world around them now that they were at the threshold of the realm of maturity. The experiences narrated were expected to be very personal and the talk very intimate and in that lay the essence of success. Any erudite exposition of the subject would spoil it. Mr. K. A. Abbas, the noted journalist, author and progressive film producer presided over the symposium and the best prizes were carried off by completely impromptu speeches.

The programmes were followed by the glittering prize distribution. That was the formal end of the festival and the teams started returning. By next morning all had left but Mr. Abbas, who had stayed back on our insistence for another day. He gave one talk to Le Montage and another one to an audience of students. It was indeed a pleasure to meet him and come close to him. Frank and forthright, he had all the sarcasm and pungency in his speech.

And with that, it was time enough to return to studies.

Source: Under the Cover, Anil K. Agarwal, 1968



Anil Agarwal (1947-2002) completed his BTech (ME) from IITK in 1970. He worked for a few years as a science correspondent for Hindustan Times; during this time he discovered India's most evocative environmental movement – Chipko. In 1980, he founded the Centre for Science and Environment, one of India's first environmental NGOs to analyse and study the relationship between environment and development, and create public consciousness about the need for sustainable development.

In 1987, the United Nations Environment Programme elected him to its Global 500 Roll of Honour for his work in the national and international arena. The Indian Government also honoured him with Padma Shri (1986) and Padma Bhushan (2002) for his work in environment and development. IIT Kanpur recognized him as a Distinguished Alumnus in 1991, thus making him the second graduate (after Satish Kaura in 1989) to be conferred this honor.

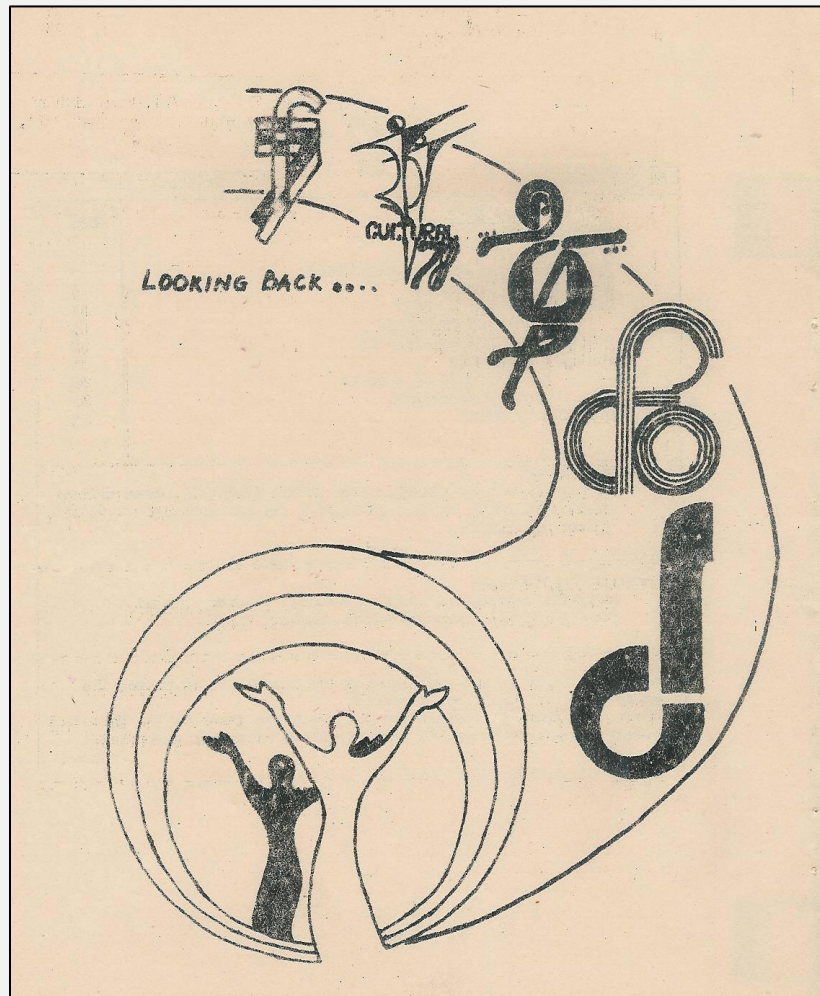
At IITK, Anil had been a very active member in the student community. In addition to the role he played in organizing the First All India Cultural Festival, he had been actively involved in drafting the new Constitution of the Gymkhana. This led to the establishment of the Student Senate and the creation of a student elected President in 1971 (in the earlier years, a Faculty Member appointed by the Director had served as the head of the student body). <https://www.cseindia.org/page/anil-agarwal>

There'll be a debate. You'll be specially there to listen. It'll be a special occasion. Then there's a magazine being sold. You'll read it with care. Another special occasion. As if good things are said and written only on special occasions, the rest of our lives being lost in trivialities.

The Spark Esq., c. 1976

*Freedom
to be ourselves
to escape from programmed courses and objectives
to exchange ideas, probably incomplete but
a start towards solving those many questions.*

This Bit of That India, photo yearbook, 1975



The logos of Festivals '77 through '82.

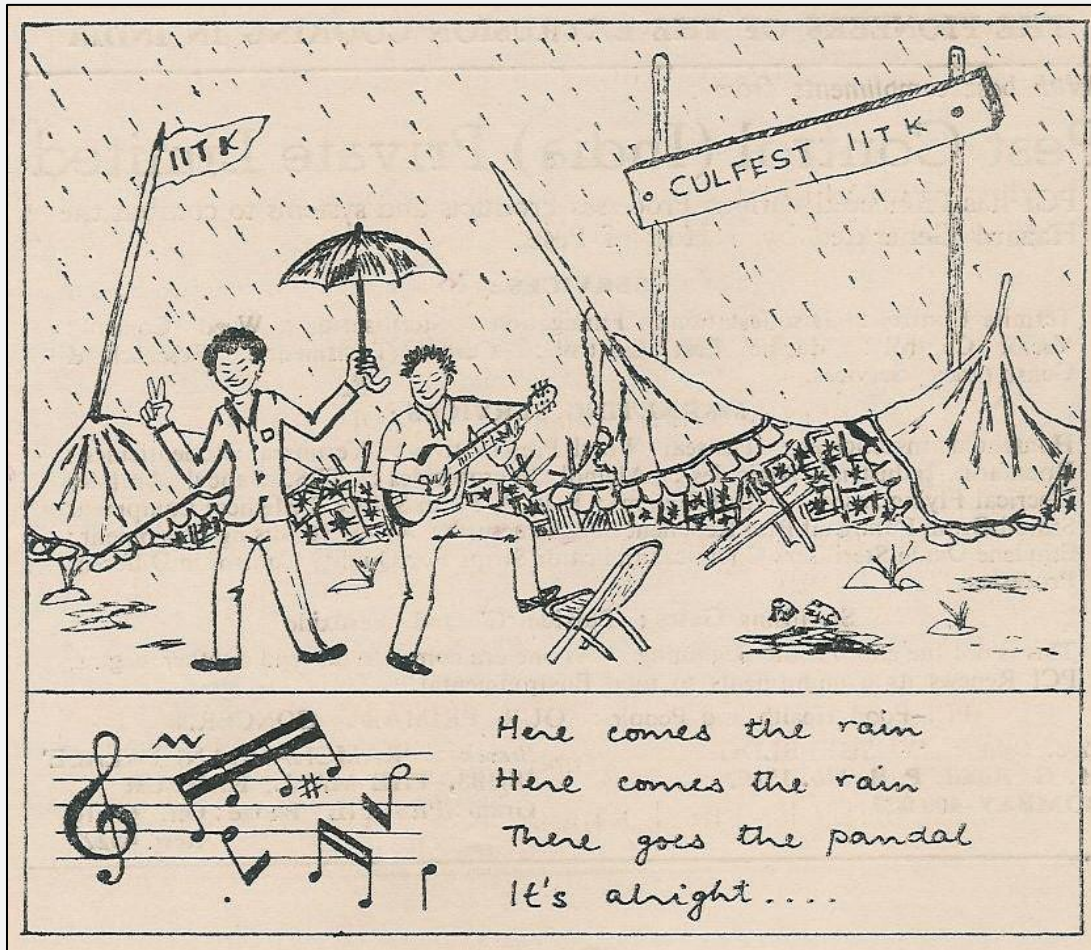
From the Spark, October 1982, sketched by Sukanta Kundu (1980-85)

The story of the early Festivals has been well documented in the Spark and other campus publications. Articles themed 'Looking Back...' appeared in the Souvenirs of Festivals '76 and '81, and then in the Spark of October 1982. Subsequent contributions updated the story through 1984.

But this is where the trail ends. The Spark would love to do a series of issues on the evolution of the Festival through the current Antaragni and is reaching out to its readers to help us put it together. We look forward to your responses. Write back to us at spark@iitk.ac.in with your memories.

Meanwhile, here are a few stories from some of the defining events.

1980: Here Comes the Rain!



Credit: Sukanta Kundu (1980-85) and Aseem Shukla, Festival Souvenir, 1983

Festival '80 was a sterner challenge amongst those early years. A late monsoon burst led to heavy rains starting on campus on Wednesday evening with the Culfest due to start on Friday. The continuous rain did not relent on Thursday; by Friday morning, the pandal had collapsed in a heap, and was lying in a very large pool of water in front of the Library. We stared at the situation in dismay, wondering where to go next...

Meanwhile, in an unfortunate accident on Thursday afternoon, an employee lost his life at the Panki Power Plant. The plant was shut down and with insufficient grid backup, IITK was plunged into darkness.

At the same time, a strain of jaundice had afflicted several members of the organizing team, including the Cultural Secretary, and they were no longer available to help manage the show.

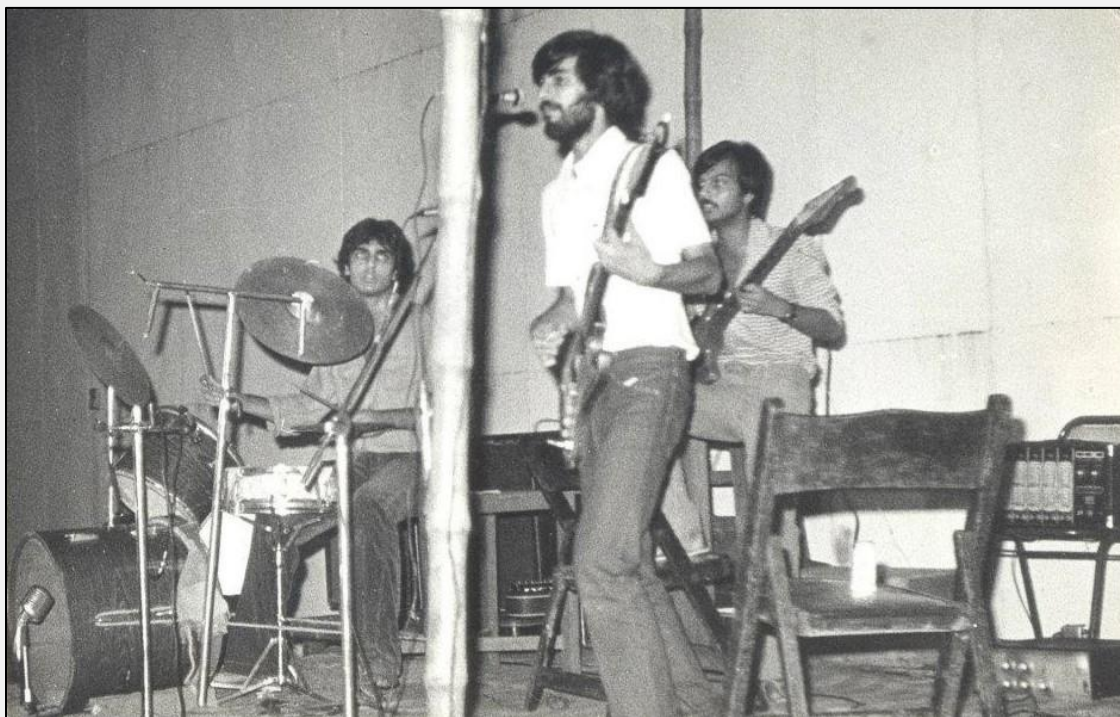
Could we have cancelled the event? In the pre-internet / cell phone days, there was no way to send a quick communication. And we knew that teams from Bombay (especially TNMC, who had excitedly written to us about wanting to participate), were already on the train to Kanpur.

The flooded lawn, the collapsed pandal, the 'jaundiced' Cultural Council, and the 48-hour power outage did not stop Festival '80 from proceeding. Meals were served with candles and Petromax lanterns in the messes while diesel generators ensured a power supply to the LHC. With limited alternative options, attendances soared, even the *maggus* had little tempo to open their books in the evenings. On darkened roads people trudged to the LHC with umbrellas, squishing through the water on the first two days, to see what was going on. Events like the English Elocution, which would otherwise be sparsely attended, offered standing room only in a packed L-2.

Fortunately, the rain stopped and power was restored by Day 3. The airstrip hangar was readied for the professional events. The gliders, with their wings removed, were parked like cars on the sides, chairs arranged in the vacated space to provide seating, and a stage constructed in the rear. The Debate was held there on the morning of Day 3 to check out the facilities. Later that evening, at peak rush-hour, buses plied every few minutes from H2 to the airstrip to ferry the crowds to the Sushma Shrestha / Manhar concert. The following night, the rock band The People performed on an open air stage outside the hangar on the airstrip.

The show carried on, leaving behind another cherished memory. Topiwala National Medical College (TNMC), Bombay were the best visiting team. Their leader, Johnny Rodriguez, was the most decorated participant.

Aseem Shukla (1978-83)



The IITK band performed as the opening act for the People concert, outside the airstrip hangar, on the final night of Festival '80. Visible are (L to R): Raman Bhatia (1977-82), Nitash Balsara (1977-82) and Deepak 'Cat' Sinha (1978-83) in the rear. The other band members, Alin Jayant, Krishna Bala and Rahul Sen are not visible in this side view. Picture: Raman Bhatia.

Over the years, among the ups and downs of the Culfests, 1983 hit a particularly low point, leaving us in serious doubt if the show would carry on. Then came 1984...

1984: Chitty Chitty Bang Bang!

In October 1984, we had one of the biggest adventures in organizing and hosting Culfest '84 at IITK. This was the most important event of my tenure (1984-85) as General Secretary (Cultural), Students' Gymkhana.

The immediately preceding Culfests were a mixed bag and we were determined to do something different, big and financially viable.

We were ambitious – We invited legendary Femina editor Vimla Patil to lead a panel, but the ticket did not reach her in time (no internet then!) so that did not work out.

But other things did work out and how!

- The amazing cartoonist Mario Miranda conducted a cartoon workshop and was practically our cartoonist-in-residence during the festival
- The biggest highlight was a mega concert by Ghazal maestro Pankaj Udhas. We had people from all over Kanpur city massed at the Institute gate hoping to listen to his melodious voice, but only a fraction managed to attend the concert because of capacity constraints.
- The participation levels from the other IITs, and more importantly, the girls colleges, hit the highest levels in eight years
- The Calcutta rock band, the Friends of Shiva, returned for their third show on campus in four years, (after skipping 1983), each better than the previous one, with a set list designed to match our earlier requests



We took a vow to run the festival events as per schedule, and managed that to a large extent.

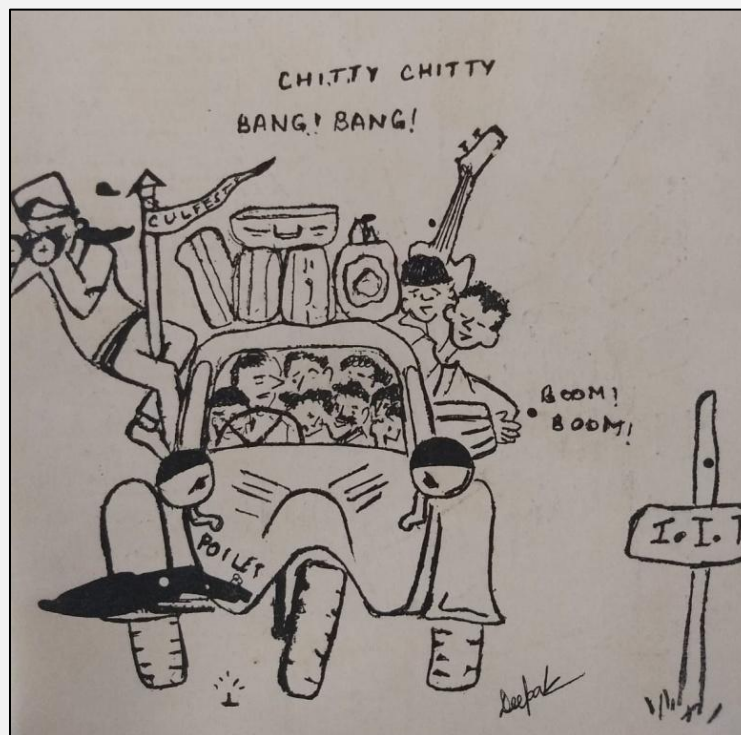
All this thanks to an amazing team:

- My close friend and wingmate, Rakesh Chandra (whom we tragically lost some years ago) was the Festival Coordinator
- Today, he is known as the academic entrepreneur with the golden touch (Indian School of Business, Ashoka University to name just two!), but back then Pramath Raj Sinha was the Festival Secretary
- Now Vice Chancellor of JK Lakshmipat University at Jaipur, but then keeping an eagle eye on the Finances was Dheeraj Sanghi
- Mohit Uberoi led the fund-raising effort (Rs 1,20,000, at that time a record)
- Many others played an important role – Sanjiva Prasad, Waheguru Pal Singh, Sudeshna Sinha, Bir Kapoor, Charanpreet Singh, Ashutosh Bijoor, and Arun Ayyangar...

Important folks were supporting us from the background including Sanjiv Puri now Chairman ITC Ltd., then President, Students' Gymkhana, IITK!

When I speak to student organisers at Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, I often remember these times.

Rishiksha T. Krishnan (MSc, Physics, 1981-86)



*Excited Festival participants arriving at IITK, in a very special chariot!
Sketched by Deepak Srinivasan (1980-85), Festival Souvenir, 1984*

Rishiksha T. Krishnan is currently Director IIM Bangalore, after having earlier served as the Director of IIM Indore (2014-19). At IITK, Rishi was an active member of the Spark, serving as the Editor in 1983-84, before taking on the role of General Secretary Cultural in 1984-85.

Pramath Raj Sinha and Sanjiv Puri were recognized as Distinguished Alumni of IITK in 2018.

Jan 1995: The Fire Within

We arrived in June 1991, starry-eyed, into the world of IIT Kanpur. Those days, Kanpur and Madras were considered to be the geeky colleges where the studious went, whilst fun resided more in Bombay and Delhi. Several of us had come from the larger metro areas of Calcutta and Delhi and had already been exposed to intellectual endeavours and creative energies in Cultural Festivals at our school levels. Cramming for JEE and trying to win literary events in these fests is where our life had been...

And then we all got to IIT Kanpur. Hall 2 – *the* Hall to be in, B-Top, *the* wing to be in! And there, in B-Top, were born friendships that have lasted till date, creating a team that travelled and saw more campuses and more rural parts of (North) India than probably anyone else – going to festivals in Delhi (IIT and others), BITS Pilani, IT-BHU, PEC and many others. Missing classes, copying notes and cramming before exams became the norm. We increasingly became more and more mercenarial – the more the prize money, the more distance we would travel (usually ticketless!) to try and win it all.

By 2nd year, some of us were core to the heart of the festival scene yet acknowledging that the “Culfest” at IIT Kanpur was, well ... Plainly, sad. How could someone take ‘seriously’ a college fest whose name is “Culfest”? With due respect to our seniors, we needed better branding. Hence, much before our first class in Marketing at MBA, and no thanks to Kotler, we did a rebranding exercise. We thought long and hard – intellectuals like V Ashwin, obviously enthu cutlets like Birla, Ashish, Mayank, Yogesh, folks like Mohit, Ramakant – it was a good eclectic lot of names (and apologies for names I have missed).

Earlier that year, we were at IT BHU and there were some interesting events there – that, too, in Hindi (e.g. JAM and extempore). One event, the fashion show literally set the stage on fire (thus *agni*) and the name had stuck with us. In fact we had won the Hindi debate there by extolling the virtues of the “fire within”. Recency has its own virtues, copyrights were not a big thing, and the phrase ‘social media’ had not yet been invented. I suggested the name ‘Antaragni’ to this ‘committee’ of sorts. Some like Ashwin, whose Hindi was passable, did not know what it meant; some of my more English speaking friends looked at me in disgust, and those from the ‘*gau* belt’ felt it did not have the same flavour of Hindi that the ‘family-related’ terms which adorned every spoken sentence did. But then there is a theme here, and this was a debate we won and the rebranding happened. Yogesh and Mayank decided to write it in a font that I still have not found in any version of Windows and “Antaragni” was born!!!



A publicity poster for the Antaragni Fashion Show, January 1995

Giving birth is one thing, and allowing it to grow is another.

The 1993 renaming of the Festival to "Antaragni" led to discussions about its purpose, including corporate sponsorships and a broader representation of India's diverse cultural landscape. This also led to "Spandan," a parallel festival showcasing talents from remote regions and young artisans nationwide. Though a one-time event, "Spandan" ran alongside "Antaragni," creating a vibrant cultural blend and leaving a lasting impact on all future Antaragnis.

In our final year, we planned Antaragni with the same spirit and included events such as a symposium featuring leading thinkers of our time, along with professional nights for the inauguration and closing ceremonies that embraced local traditions like Kathak, Kavi Sammelan, and Ghazals. But, things seemed to fall apart at the last minute. An outbreak of bubonic and pneumonic plague affected much of the country in September 1994. People were afraid to travel, trains were cancelled and obviously, there would be no Festival, whether it be a Culfest, a Spandan, or an Antaragni. Instead of cancelling the event altogether, we moved it to January 1995 (*with a second 1995 festival returning to the calendar in October*).

In retrospect, the delay was a blessing in disguise. We really wanted to have Jagjit Singh come over for our closing professional night but he was unavailable in October. Moving the festival to January allowed us to bring him to campus.

This was the year we changed the cost and funding of the festival on its head. It was the first college festival that crossed the budget of 10 lac rupees. The credit goes to Jagjit Singh's memorable closing night performance. That's what really got sponsors interested and had the whole city of Kanpur buzzing. We even bumped up the prize money for all the events and went from college to college inspiring their Cultural Secretaries to make the trek to Kanpur. And we raised money – from any and all sources. Landmark and T-Series came to our fore, Jagjit Singh's fans from Air India and Air Sahara fought to have their banners behind him on the stage, and both paid well, among others.



(L): The Shovna Narayan Kathak performance on opening night and (R) The Hasya Kavi Sammelan

We inaugurated the festival with Shovna Narayan and then added Hasya Kavi Sammelan on the opening night. We had a dozen of the best poets around, and Ashok Chakradhar kept the crowd rolling with laughter. While all these brought attention from local media, it also created a scene when a local journalist wanted to get a spot on the stage to recite his own poems. Ashok Chakradhar handled it like a pro, but it got interesting after the show when that gentleman demanded to get paid like other poets.

Since all the payments were already accounted for, we declined to pay him, and in return, all of our good publicity in local media took a nosedive for a few days. Ouch. DOSA was wondering what went wrong :-)

Jagjit Singh and his crew were fabulous. He was curious as to why we were not joining him for drinks that he brought all the way from his last show in Dubai. And he was puzzled why IIT didn't have an agriculture department. We were getting calls from bigwigs in Kanpur to pay any premium to get to his show. Talk about unexpected problems! The festival started and ended in 3 days with sleepless days and nights. The rest, they say, and cliched it may be, is history...



(L) Jagjit Singh performing at IITK; (R) with members of the organizing team at the VH. Ashish is visible in the front left corner; Rajiv (in glasses and partially hidden), is looking over Jagjit Singh's shoulder.

Even today as a 51-year old consultant, I look back at that moment in time and realise all the learnings of relaunching something that was not working and making it a marquee event – and I do believe that while there can be very many theories, the concept of a great team, of friends working together, having the confidence to fight and argue and yet have each other's back was something else. Needless to say one of my fondest memories ever of the fondest friendships formed ... ever.

Written by Rajiv Gupta and Ashish Singh, with assistance from Bal Krishn Birla (all from the batch of 1991-95). All pictures have been shared by Ashish Singh.

After graduating from IITK with BTech in EE, Rajiv went to IIM-Ahmedabad, where, among other subjects, he also studied Kotler's Marketing and the art of branding. Today, Rajiv is Managing Director and Senior Partner at Boston Consulting Group in Gurgaon. Bal completed his BTech in CSE from IITK. After stints at Infosys and Amazon, he founded and advised several startups, and currently is Chief Technology Officer at Concerto.ai in Bengaluru. Ashish (who was the Gen Secretary Cultural at IITK in 1994-95) also followed a career in software development and communication services. He is founder of Conexio, and is based in Dallas, TX.

The Control Room, (Old) SAC, Jan 1995



Images from Antaragni 1994-95. Bal Krishn Birla is visible standing on the front right in the top picture



Pictures: Ashish Singh (1991-95)

Antaragni 2024 – A Syncretic Jaunt

The annual cultural festival of IIT Kanpur, Antaragni was held from 17th to 20th Oct. This year, Antaragni presented an exciting new theme, 'A Syncretic Jaunt,' embarking on a global cultural journey celebrating the convergence of diverse traditions, art, and music from across continents.

Day One featured the Ritambhara prelims, offering a dazzling display of fashion, followed by the high-octane musical experience at Rock Night, featuring the band All India Permit.



Antaragni – Day One featuring the band 'All India Permit'

Day Two included the India Inspired motivational session, followed by a thought-provoking discussion titled "Cinema: Merely a Tool for Entertainment or One for Social Change?" These were followed by Comedy Night, Yusuf Nizami's Qawwali performance, EDM night, and Classical Night featuring Aniruddh Verma Collective's raga-filled performance.



Antaragni, Day 2: the Dance Competition, and Synchronicity, the rock music competition

Day Three began early with Roots at the auditorium, immersing attendees in India's classical music in the morning. The Poetry Slam was held in L3 and the Mono Act performances in L19 impressed with riveting solo theatrical displays. The long-awaited Stageplay Finale took place in L7. Fashion enthusiasts were in for a treat at the Fashion Geek event. The day carried on with Sangam at Outreach, and Nrityangna at L19 brought together some of the most talented dancers, who lit up the stage with traditional and contemporary moves.



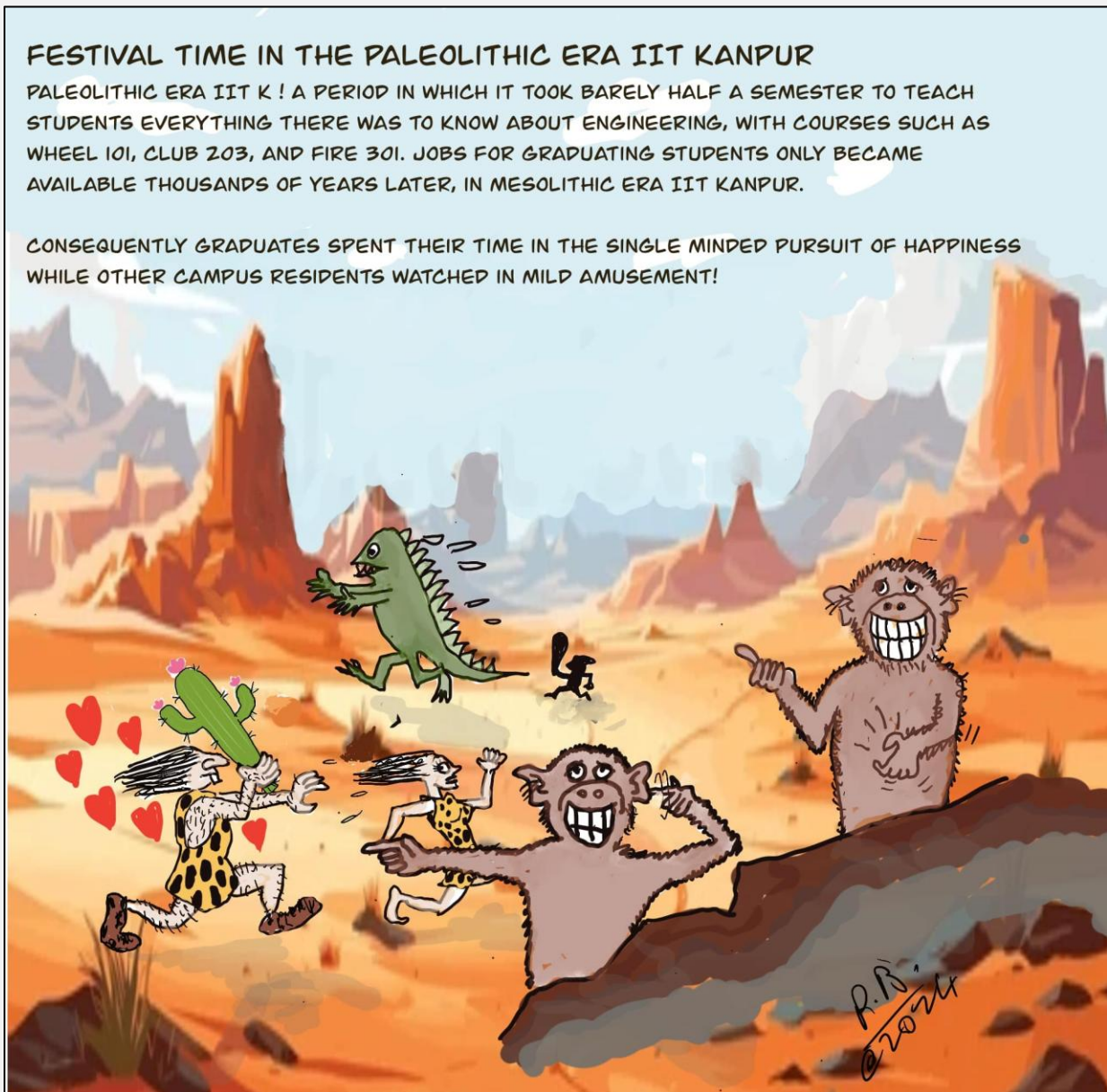
Day 3: the Stageplay Finale, Javed Ali's Fusion Night

The final day included the Jitterbug Finale dance performances, the Color Run at the Synchro Stage, BGMI gaming competition at L17, the pair on Stage (duo dance) Finale at Outreach and the the Mandala Art event at One and a Half, Acapella harmonies at L18 followed by Mimica (mime performances) at L7 and the Cycle Stunt Show. After dusk, all attention shifted to Bollywood Night featuring the iconic Badshah.



*Day 4: the Bollywood Night featuring Badshah
All pictures of Antaragni 2024 have been shared by Girish Pant (Info. Cell, IITK)*

And a Piece of Festival History...



The original version of this sketch, in the invite for Festival 1979, and then reprinted in the Spark of Oct 1982, is accessible in the albums of IITK Alumni Facebook groups.

Credit: Raman Bhatia (1977-82)

*Cover Pictures: Front: Squishing in the Rain; Back: The Winter Morning Marathon
Both images shared by Harshit Kant (BT, ME, 2020-25)*

Cover Design: Harshita and Khushi (Outreach Cell, IITK)



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