



Hats Off! First Convocation At IISER Pune

The fourth morning of August 2012 dawned like any other rainy morning before it. However, the bright and expectant faces across the IISER corridors helped dispel the gloom of the monsoons. These were the faces of the Batch of 2006 and Batch of 2007 looking forward to one of the most important milestones of their lives, and also the faces of other IISER-folk looking forward to the First Convocation of IISER Pune! Before this happy event, the lives of the students, who had passed out without a formal degree, seemed to be in a state of perpetual limbo. A state similar to that of the NIT (Amendment) Bill lying in the shackles of bureaucracy for nearly two years, waiting to be passed so that all five IISERs could award degrees to students passing out and guarantee some degree (no pun intended) of security to their future.

What force of nature pushed the Bill through all those offices and into action, nobody can tell. However, here was IISER Pune all prepared for its first ever Convocation. The vast



Shri Sam Pitroda delivering the Convocation address

area of land opposite HR4 was alive with workers and their tools and, for a fortnight, much work was done to put in place a 500+ seater pandal with full rain-protection along with a decorated dais flanked by projector screens. The aisles also had LCD screens placed at regular intervals, and high-tech security systems were placed at the entrance. The ambience had a certain grandeur and charm

which was only enhanced by beautiful blue satin decorations and hanging ceiling lights that dimly lit the auditorium. Eighty-eight students of the first two batches of undergraduates and one PhD were dressed in satiny graduation robes and tasselled caps to receive those much longed for degrees!

Before the official ceremony began,
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Updates On The Rising IISER Pune

The dawn of August 1st brought forth with it a new chapter in the lives of all IISERites – Fall 2012. As the campus welcomed, with open arms, the roughly 150-strong batch of newbies (Int. PhDs and BS-MS students) who spared no time in exploring and familiarising themselves with every nook and cranny of the campus, the oldies decided to investigate what three months of vacation had done to their campus. Their findings

were heartening indeed.

The most important and significant addition to the campus would be the new hostel building, which has been completely furnished and made ready for occupation. The inauguration of the building on 4th August by Prof. Sourav Pal, Director of NCL, was rightly taken to mean that the PhDs and Int PhDs being housed outside IISER would now get to live within the campus. Undergrads would also be

accommodated there, beginning with the freshers.

The h block, our very own Physics research hub, which saw very little action in the previous semester, is now brimming with life. There seems to be a bit of competition between the h block and its older sibling, Mendeleev block, as to which of them is 'cooler'. Currently, the h block seems to have the upper hand, thanks to
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a short documentary of IISER Pune was screened. It covered the history of IISER and how much it has grown as an institute over the past six years.

At 2 pm, the Senators and the Board of Governors assembled in the Faculty lounge. The chief guest for the occasion, *Shri* Sam Pitroda, was received by the Director and was 'ushered for robing'. The ceremony started with the academic procession marching into the Convocation hall and welcomed by traditional trumpets, and an auditorium packed with students, parents, and Faculty. The Chairman of the Board of Governors, Prof. T V Ramakrishnan, then declared the Convocation open. This was followed by the much-anticipated distribution of degrees - students came up to the stage to receive their degrees, some with distinction, some without; some with beaming, confident faces, some with nervous smiles; but all with a sense of accomplishment, even relief perhaps. Quite a few students received medals and awards in addition to their degrees. C B Ajit, Class of 2011, was awarded a Gold Medal for maintaining a consistent CGPA of 10. Surojit Sural and Mohammed Zuhair M M from the Class of 2012 were also bestowed with the same honour. Resmi V became the first IISERite to be awarded a PhD degree for her work and thesis under the guidance of Prof. G Ambika.

The award of degrees was followed by the Exhortation to graduating students by the Director. It was followed by the Director's Report. Prof. K N Ganesh humbly addressed the gathering and emphasised on the immense happiness this event brought him, both personally and professionally. He thanked all the Faculty, parents, and most importantly the Batch of 2006 who believed in him and joined the institute as its very



Students of the Class of 2012 with their degrees

first guinea pigs, at a time when it was only him with 98 acres of barren land, as he had nothing concrete to offer them. It was heart-warming to see the affection he showed to the batches passing out and he wished them luck for their roles as pioneers of a new kind of science.

Then followed the Convocation Address by *Shri* Sam Pitroda, a household name needing no introduction. But for unenlightened souls - he is Advisor to the Prime Minister of India on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovations, and Chairman of the National Innovation Council. He gave an inspirational speech on the importance of realising how much and in what way we can contribute to the society as scientists, and he praised the institute for its growth in leaps and bounds in the past few years, truly making it a place where tomorrow's science begins today!

This was followed by a beautiful instrumental rendition of the National Anthem, and finally the academic procession gradually walked out of the auditorium with great poise and grace and the audience stood and watched, with most members restraining the urge to run out of the hall to catch a glimpse of the 'gradua-

tion-cap-tossing'. And for those who didn't, it was a truly joyous moment. The graduation caps were flung high up in air and truly this bunch had made an achievement! Relief came to their degree-less lives like light showers of rain on a drought-ridden desert. Proud parents took photos with their all-grown-up children, and members of the Faculty and juniors congratulated the graduates.

The highlight of the entire ceremony was the unexpected surprise in the form of High Tea, or rather the quality of it. It elicited showers of praise from the stumped students and Faculty, and left parents completely impressed (and misled.) Crowds jostled for multiple helpings of ice-cream and corn *samosas*.

A report about an event that has been nothing but good news should end on a brighter note. But here, Sentience must illumine the plight of one of its celebrated subjects - the (once) New Bathroom. Immaculately dressed guests, wanting to adjust their hair or relieve themselves, were treated to dirty, wet floors with tissue paper strewn all over. Sentience mourns the decay of this once-resplendent incarnation of architectural beauty.

Updates On The Rising IISER Pune



Prof. Sourav Pal inaugurates the New Hostel Block

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its awesome vending machine.

The accelerated construction - of the lecture-theatre and academic blocks, Faculty housing, the second students' hostel, as well as the Director's bungalow - through the vacation hopefully means that they will be ready for use faster than we had expected them to be.

Just as IISER has grown in stature and repute, so has its impressive list of Faculty. With Dr. Mukul Kabir, Dr. Suhita Nadkarni and Dr. Steven Spallone joining IISER Pune during

the vacation, the list looks stronger and more formidable than ever before. Also joining IISER Pune, this August, is Dr. Collins Assisi.

In the awards and honours section, we are thrilled to inform that Dr. Sujit K Ghosh and Dr. M Jegannathan have been selected as Young Associates of the Indian Academy of Science, Bangalore in recognition of their original research work. Dr. Sujit K Ghosh has also been selected for the 'NASI-Young Scientist Platinum Jubilee Award'.

New Faces At IISER Pune



Steven Spallone
Associate Professor
Mathematics



Collins Assisi
Assistant Professor
Biology



Mukul Kabir
Assistant Professor
Physics



Suhita Nadkarni
IISER Fellow
Biology

Academic Buzz

SIDDHARTHA DAS

1. University of Queensland's Summer Research Programme, Brisbane, Australia

Duration: November 2012-February 2013 (6-8 weeks)

Link: <http://goo.gl/m7O37>

Deadline: 30th August

2. Radio Astronomy Winter School (RAWS) 2012, NCRA-TIFR, Pune, India

Duration: 19th-28th December

Link: <http://goo.gl/MBk1d>

Deadline: 31st August

3. National Workshop on Mathematical Modelling & Analysis of Financial Data, Department of Statistics, University of Pune, India

Duration: 24th-29th September

Link: <http://goo.gl/WUgEu>

Deadline: 3rd September

4. 5th Science Conclave, IIT Allahabad, India

Duration: 8th -14th December

Link: <http://goo.gl/mSSKb>

Deadline: 10th September

5. Conference on Matrices and Operators, Department of Mathematics, IISc Bangalore, India

Duration: 27th-30th December

Link: <http://goo.gl/2oHBY>

Deadline: 15th September

6. National Conference on Nanomaterials, Karunya University, Coimbatore, India

Duration: 3rd-4th December

Link: <http://goo.gl/JANB2>

Deadline: 15th October

7. School-cum-workshop on Low Energy Nuclear Astrophysics (SLENA) 2012, SINP, Kolkata, India

Duration: 26th-29th November

Link: <http://goo.gl/hkMQk>

Deadline: 20th October

But Why?

Less than a year ago, IISER was throbbing with activity. The lawns were splattered with paint, the halls were echoing with harmonious notes, and the battlegrounds of IISER were bloodied by the gladiators armed formidably with Paint Balls. Hair was let loose, and all and sundry at IISER went into a frenzy of head-banging as wars were waged in other arenas too – with rock bands howling, growling and prowling on the stage. The drab cream walls of IISER came alive in a shock of colour with posters, streamers, and decorations. The DJ ruled the night with foot-tapping mixes, which dragged even the nerdiest of nerds onto the dance floor. In reminiscence, for anyone other than the K-Team, *Karavaan* was phenomenal. Sure, there were glitches and flaws, a few significant ones, but this was only because

of a time crunch in the initial planning phase. So one would expect us to learn from our mistakes and begin early and work towards a bigger or at least better *Karavaan*.

In spite of this, in the deafening din of the crowded mess, the corridors, and even the new bathrooms on the ground floor, the few whispers about *Karavaan* 2012 - drown to oblivion. Like an abandoned child, *Karavaan* has been waiting in vain for adoption by an enthusiastic and responsible batch of IISER students who are willing to keep alive this meagre heirloom passed on by the seniors. However, the second and third years seem to be in denial of their responsibilities as the perpetrators of the tradition. There have been no meetings, no posters, and no useless motivational talks; in short, none of the usual indicators of ongoing work

at IISER. Given that there is a fresh trickle of enthusiastic youngsters bustling around as if they own the place, nothing explains why potential organisers aren't out there with their snaps and snares! Until this Monday, the only news about the reluctantly proposed meeting had been its postponement. The long delayed meeting turned out to be anticlimactic as no conclusion about *Karavaan* was eventually reached. The status of *Karavaan* can still be summarised only in the words of Gosciny and Uderzo, "could be, could be not, couldn't say for sure one way or the other."

We urge the fresher batches of IISER to conquer their inertia and get the wheels of the IISER 'caravan' turning at the earliest.

Scenes from *Janmashtami*



The Beginning!

PAPIA BERA and S HARINI

Out of school, to a totally new world, to IISER! What'll it be like? How will our seniors be? So many things on our minds! The first day, the hostel was buzzing with news about the freshers' party. Sneaky first years overheard seniors discussing the surprise party, and by evening everyone knew. There were notices all over the place announcing *Halla Bol*, an event welcoming the *facchas* (first year *bacchas*, according to seniors.)

Post dinner, the hostel was full of frantic people discussing the possible colours of their T-shirts and about who were in the same group as them. These discussions continued even the next day. We spent hours meeting up, planning skits, adzaps and dances. No first years slept on their first weekend at IISER. Many took the challenge to heart and went shopping for their favourite colours. After hours of practice and choreography, we felt brave enough to face our seniors and make total fools of ourselves.

Rushing into the lecture hall after a hurried lunch, we found music blaring from the speakers, and more seniors than we thought we could handle. It started off with a melodious Mohammed Rafi song by a senior. Then we had a funny dance on the song 'No life without wife'.



The first years having fun during *Halla Bol*

Spoofs of DDLJ (*Dilwale* fifth year project complete *kar payenge?*) and *Sholay* (*Cholay*) followed, along with adzaps on Rajni foot spray and Mor-tein teacher/senior repellent.

After every performance, group members introduced themselves and justified their T-shirt choices. Those wearing red ("I will do anything on stage!") had a lot of consequences to face. They had to dance, sing item numbers, or imitate movie stars. Towards the end, the seniors sang '*Koi kahe, kehta rahe*' - appropriate for the start of our college life.

When we thought everyone had embarrassed themselves enough

for the rest of their IISER lives, red T-shirts were called onstage again. Nervously, fifteen freshers stumbled onto the stage. They were asked to propose to any senior of the opposite gender in a creative way.

After a day of fun, embarrassment, and tons of laughter, we could finally relax and enjoy the snacks while getting to know our seniors. None of us had expected such an amazing start to our lives in IISER.

We returned to our hostels tired, but we couldn't stop chattering about the party which provided us with at least a year's worth of teasing material.

The End!

Wasn't it just yesterday that we were freshers, that I was writing this article from a fresher's perspective, when I was reading the seniors' version about how we had invaded their mess and their libraries, and their lives in general? Now I stand on the other side, amazed at how accurately that description fits these new first year *bacchas* (or *facchas*, as we call them).

After long discussions, where the salient features were the arguments and disagreements, we realised more organisation was needed. A core committee was formed, and things started falling into place. *Halla Bol* was born, the new kids were divided into batches, and each batch was asked to put up either a spoof, a weird ad, or a dance.

While we took care of the overall

planning (the food, our performances, etc.), we also picked out a cool dress code - where the T-shirt's colour stood for things like - green for "I'll punch the first senior who hits on me.", red for "I will do anything on stage!", and so on.

Finally, *Halla Bol* arrived! The party was kick-started by a lovely song by Jensheer and some wacky

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NIVEDITA RANGARAJAN

Give Blood, Give Life

The Sentience Team is taking the initiative to organise a blood donation camp here at IISER Pune. In association with a well-known blood bank, we are setting up a camp within the premises where students, Faculty and staff to donate blood.

After hours of discussion, the Sentience Team decided it was time we supported social causes and extended all possible help towards them, be it through our writing, the new SentInfo, or manpower. Healthy donors are in great demand at blood banks all over India, as the number of donors is far less than the number of people in need. People with rare blood groups such as O- are especially requested to volunteer for the blood donation drive.

To donate blood, the donor has to

fulfill certain prerequisites. The donor must be above eighteen years of age and must have a haemoglobin level of above 12.5 g/dL. The blood pressure and body weight of the donor will be taken first. Following this, the donor's blood will be screened for Hepatitis B & C, HIV, Malaria, and Syphilis. No donations will be taken from donors found to be anaemic or donors testing positive for any of the above diseases.

In India, normally 350 ml of blood is taken at a time. One of the major advantages of blood donation is that due to loss of blood cells, the marrow immediately produces new cells and the blood gets refreshed this way. It also helps reduce the risk of heart disease and haemochromatosis (iron overload).

Typically, donors are made to wait for a few minutes in the donation camp, just after donation, as slight side-effects (if any) take place during this time. Light refreshments will be offered to help donors recover better!

The blood donation camp will take place around the last week of August or the first week of September. The SentInfo will keep you updated on the time and the venue. So, do come forward and participate in this social cause!

Sources

<http://goo.gl/GIAAd>
'WHO Blood Safety and Donation'
World Health Organization.

The Last Laugh

On International Women's Day, in March 2012, IISER made a strong statement against sexual harassment in all forms. The Women's Cell took shape with a concrete structure, held a meeting, and served everyone tea and refreshments. Lured by the prospect of free tea and biscuits (which come for a price just fifteen metres away, in the canteen), many women dared to attend this much-talked about event. To the rest of IISER, this might have looked like some extremist feminist cult ritual; in reality it was merely a formality preceding the tea ceremony.

However, this Cell, and the document attached, remained in everyone's inboxes until a recent incident forced the committee to spring into action. This was the Women's Cell's first public dealing with an issue of so-called harassment. Unfortunately, it was a false alarm as it failed to qualify with the committee's job description and remained a blemish on

their reputations as overeager feminist messiahs. Damsels in distress at IISER are still in search of Batmen to save them from the falsettos of Jokers. Physicists at IISER used all their existing knowledge of Physics to blow this issue up to inhuman proportions that it ended up looking like the televised Ramayana.

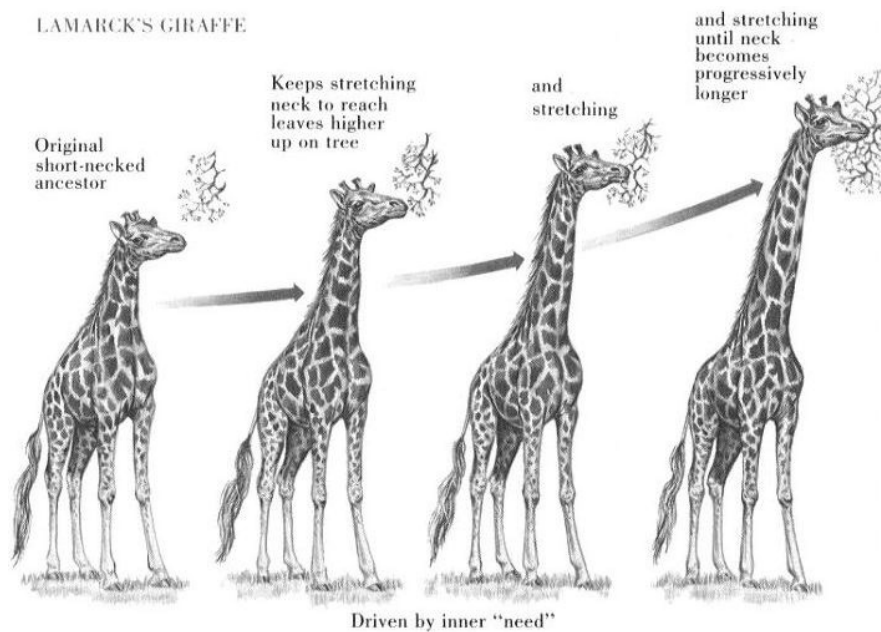
It has come to light that the true purpose of the Women's Cell lies buried deep under misconceptions. The Cell cannot remain a forum where men are victimised in the name of equality of the sexes. This sort of approach is, contrary to the aim of the Cell, sexist and female chauvinistic. The Jokers had been dealt a bad hand as the Queen of Hearts catwalked away with the winning hand. Whispers demanding a Men's Cell have, by now, turned into shouts and war cries. We urge the battalions to save their breaths and take a moment to read the document describing the jurisdiction of

the Women's Cell. Sentience saves you the trouble of waiting in vain for a snail-paced download by providing you excerpts from this document. The Cell takes action on 'sexual harassment against any individual of either sex.' And anything ranging from talking, to gestures, to showing pornography is classified as harassment.

To this day, men have been reluctant to register their complaints with the Cell for fear of being called sissies, pansies, and for losing their manhood. On the contrary, any man may now seek revenge against a runaway girlfriend by registering a complaint under the provision of 'demanding sexual favours'. The generously ambiguous provisions of the act enable the transformation of mundane everyday acts into heinous crimes against the opposite sex. All genders at IISER, arm yourselves with the clauses of this weapon of mass destruction and wage gory wars! Let anarchy rule.

The Kayan Giraffe?

ABHISHEK SHUKLA



paper in *Nature* on 'The Origin of Mutants'. It showed that bacteria can mutate in environments with selective pressure to give rise to resistants. Although Foster and Cairns pointed out that the mutation rate increases, which in turn increases the probability of hitting the so-called 'right' mutation, other experiments have shown that the mutation rate increase is not generic and is only directed to a particular site, which is an argument for the existence of adaptive mutants. The very idea of bacteria (or any other living system) being capable of directed mutation is frightening. It is what is called neo-Lamarckism - the ability to direct changes in one's genes to survive in an oppressive environment.

It is similar to the idea in Rosenberg's review on adaptive mutation, which he borrows from the Douglas Adams book 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy' about certain creatures called 'Haggunenons of Vicissitus Three', who could mutate themselves so fast as to overcome any local problems. For example, if a coffee cup is too far, a Haggunenon could mutate its arm to become longer so that the cup was reachable - of course, then they would become incapable of lifting the cup!

The idea of the ability to direct changes in one's body, through a change in genes, was rejected long back by Charles Darwin. His ingenuity combined with solid evidence (fossils) suggested that mutations are random and those which are best suited for the given environment are selected and propagated through the population. However, Lamarck asserted that changes are directed in one's body when their need arises in the immediate environment.

A tenet of neo-Darwinism says that mutations are random and selection acts upon them to choose the ones that are propagated in a population.

This had been believed for a long time and supported by the Luria-Delbruck fluctuation test in 1943, when the said people showed, in a beautiful experiment, that mutants which arose in a bacterial population were already present in the culture. In other words, some bacteria which occurred as resistant to viruses were already resistant even before encountering those viruses. The logical grounds set by Luria and Delbruck along with the Darwinian-selection-mentality of the scientific community, were such that they advocated neo-Darwinism.

Cairns, in the 1980s, published a

The End!

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compering by Sharvaree and Nihal. Then it was the juniors' turn! The dances, the spoofs, and the ads were pretty good, given the short notice. Many top-notch performances later, their show ended with a brilliant much-encored dance number. Another highlight was the juniors explaining their shirt colours, and their odd tendency to get them wrong. An amusing part was the red-shirts liv-

ing up to their shirts' name by singing funny songs and dancing.

With the second years singing 'Koi Kahe Kehta Rahe', the party ended. Or so we thought. The red-shirts were suddenly requested to come on stage for one last time, where they were given the daunting task of calling a senior of the opposite sex onto the stage, and then proposing to them. The seniors agreed to this sportively. Some proposals were

sweet and some truly hilarious; some were accepted and some were rejected. It was after this that *Halla Bol* truly ended, and the juniors were corralled into the balcony where they were given snacks and drinks.

It was an amazing day and we were pretty proud of the way it turned out. We hope everyone had as great a time as us! *Halla Bol!*

NIVEDITA RANGARAJAN

The *Firangi* Teacher's Perspective

ANDREAS WIEBEL



The German teacher on what might not be a Penny Farthing?

Before I came to Pune in summer 2011, to work for one year as a German lecturer at the Foreign Language Department of Pune University (Ranade Institute), I had neither knowledge nor any imagination about what could lie behind the short form I-I-S-E-R. So when I first was brought to the outskirts of Pashan, for the additional once a week language course over there, everything was new to me. And it remained quite a difference to the day-to-day-job at the University during the whole year. A difference, regarding duty, facilities, atmosphere and personnel. Working at IISER meant not only working with friendly staff, air conditioning, cleaned boards and no power cuts, but most importantly - prepared, interested and rested students.

In contrast, if you are coming from overcrowded F C Road around super-busy 6 pm rush hour, the IISER Campus appears even more like an oasis and always has been a shelter of education-friendly environment, to me. The variety of optional pro-

grammes adding to the obligatory studies (like international guests, traditional concerts, other leisure time opportunities, and even such exotic things as a German language class) provide everything that an educational institution needs - relaxed learning conditions, exciting curricula, motivated participants, and most important - time.

And so passed our German classes by. There was no pressure and no necessity to learn these strong and hard Germanic tunes, which most Indians these days are familiar with, through the art of omnipresent branding; like Bee-Em-Doubleyou, Mercedes-Benz, or just "Das Auto";

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So from my side I can say: It has been amusement and knowledge transfer at the same time, which even had private running gags: **“Frau Dincy muss immer das letzte Wort haben!”**”

as German products glance from every second street-corner – especially in Pune.

From approximately 100 students – literally the whole batch was attending at the very beginning – remained about 10 students till the very end; although with grammar, vocabulary and articulation exercises there has been quite a long way to cover in between. But all these challenges got apprehended without difficulty, due to the fact of intrinsic attendance and a pleasant student-teacher climate. So from my side I can say: It has been amusement and knowledge transfer at the same time, which even developed its private running gags: “Frau Dincy muss immer das letzte Wort haben!”

At the end, all the remaining students had some basic German language knowledge and even a private field of socio-cultural interests; be it German history, Berlin's tourist spots, regional difference of sausage naming, or the contemporary unemployment rates.

That the IISER students are studying under privileged conditions, with solvent interests in the background, that's a common fact, I guess. And that most of them are coming from, or at least becoming the so called new Indian middle class, is another fact, I guess. Hence, as a famous German philosopher once said “Das Seinbestimmt das Bewusstsein” (existence determines consciousness (Karl Marx: MEW 13,9)) – one could suppose, that middle class living becomes middle class thinking. My appeal in that case would be that the graduates should keep the mentioned facts in mind, which are facts of history and not nature. Do not forget the other parts of Indian society, without scholarship, exciting curricula, or Bee-Em-Doubleyou.

Bachpan Banao

This season, Disha has started moving in a new direction, adding another dimension to its programme. This time, it's not just the children of the construction-site workers, the kids of Someshwar Wadi or Laman Vasti, or the school kids of villages around Pune. The new Disha will now also reach Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh, to extend a helping hand to the students there. One of the founding members of Disha, Pranith Simha Mulamreddy, has already set off for Dantewada district and has various ideas in mind.

Dantewada district might be familiar to most of the people reading this article. For those unfamiliar with it, this district was among the most Naxalite-affected districts in the whole of Chhattisgarh. It still remains one of the most critical Naxalite areas. *Adivasis* form two-thirds of the population and the literacy rate is as low as 42.67%. A major problem for the teachers in government schools is the lack of exposure to various effective teaching practices available today.

The district administration and the Chhattisgarh state Government have set up 'Pota Cabin Schools' [*sic*] - completely residential schools for students - in the interiors. Due to the lack of qualified teachers in these schools, the quality of education is not as good as it should be. This leads to the idea behind Bachpan Banao. It is a month-long fellowship



Kusgaon kids with their rain water harvesting model



Disha General Coordinator in action

programme to improve the quality of learning in these government schools. The main aim of Bachpan Banao is to train local teachers. It will include not only detailed teaching plans but also different interactive ways to make learning more interesting for the students. The students will not only do coursework but extra-curricular activities too.

A Fellow can stay for a month or more between September 2012 and April 2013. During his or her stay, the Fellow can mentor a whole school and train teachers - once this programme is implemented at the 'Pota Cabin Schools' of Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh.

The fellowship programme is open for all interested students and working professionals who wish to give back to the society. Students who want to volunteer for Bachpan Banao can be part of this programme for ten days, with all of their travel expenses being covered.

Currently, Bachpan Banao is completely under Disha, IISER Pune, with the support of the Zilla Panchayat of the Dantewada District.

To contribute to Bachpan Banao or to know more about it, visit bachpanbanao.wordpress.com or write to bachpanbanao@gmail.com.

Turning Over A New Leaf

ARYA and KRITHIKA

The plant community of IISER is getting a new batch of freshers! They are being recruited with the hope that they will remain strong-rooted and add some aesthetic value to this concrete manifestation of sophistication, which we call - our campus.

Two years ago, Prof. Milind Watve, together with a few other scientists, had drafted a plan which proposed the creation of an ecological gradient similar to the one existing from coastal to central Maharashtra, which would run almost a kilometre across the campus. This implies that there will be plants from various ecosystems such as coastal, evergreen, deciduous, and dry-deciduous forests forming individual communities. Meanwhile, the Forest officials, in the name of *Van mahotsav*, had planted trees in a random fashion, which we are forbidden to disturb. However, a lot has changed over the past two years and a new plan drafted by the landscape engineer emphasises more on artificial rather than natural beauty. The actual plan is still under debate.

The team that is currently working under the nametag of Paper Waste Management is taking the initiative for this movement. Being a completely student-run movement, it is hoped that students actively participate (in digging and planting) and make this campus a greener place in the years to come.

Watch the notice boards for further information on the date, time, and other details.

Visit us online at:

tiny.cc/sentience



Jaya

DARSHINI RAVISHANKAR

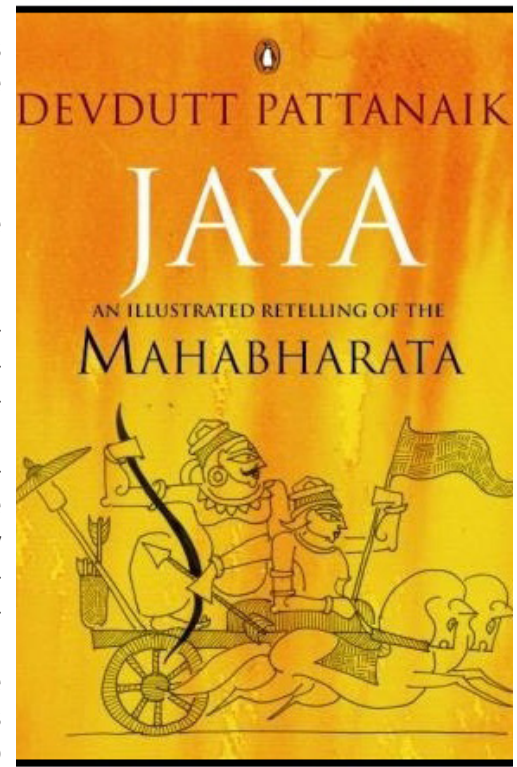
We have all heard stories from our parents and grandparents narrating episodes from the Mahabharata. They were fantastic stories that could inspire all sorts of emotions - awe at Bhishma's resolve, amusement at the young Pandavas' sparring with the Kauravas, horror at what happened to Draupadi, anger at the blindness (both literal and figurative) of Dhritarashtra's actions. We know and love these stories, but their deeper significance is often lost on us.

'Jaya' is 'an illustrated retelling of the Mahabharata' that takes the most prominent chapters of the epic poem and explains them in the context of Hindu philosophy. The author gives us the original narrative in colourful, descriptive prose, adding notes and comments meant to deepen our insight into what these old stories are really trying

to teach. The story flows naturally, and the small Madhubani pictures accompanying the text add to the book's style.

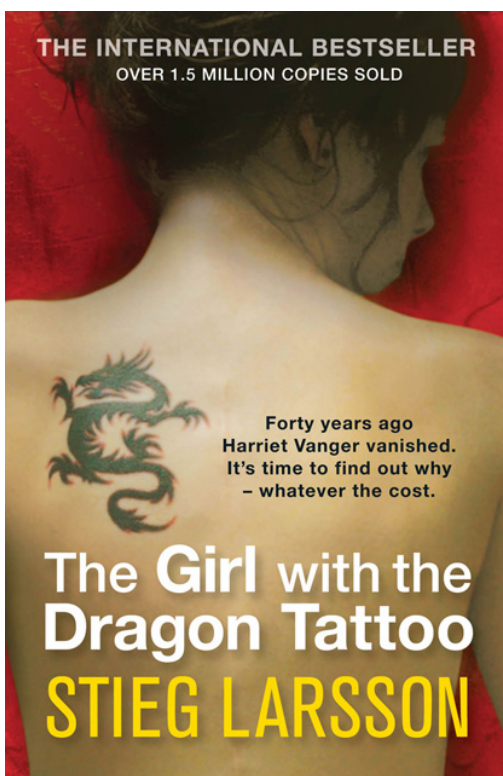
Pandavas, though heroic, had shortcomings, and several of them. They were only human, albeit more powerful and virtuous than most. The Kauravas, on the other hand, have quite a few redeeming qualities, with a few of them even leaning towards being victims of circumstance.

The author has done a wonderful job linking tiny actions to the underlying theme and is constantly reminding us of how utterly relevant the epic is today. I urge everyone with even a fleeting interest in Indian mythology to read it. Those who have an interest will find this book fascinating and for those who haven't been exposed to much mythology, it is a great place to start.



SAHANA SRIVATSA

The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo



This bestselling novel was translated into English from *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor* which, in Swedish, literally means 'Men who Hate Women'. This crime novel describes the journey of the investigation of the forty-two year old disappearance of a girl.

Mikael Blomkvist, the forty-three year old male protagonist, is a well-known and respected investigative financial journalist and co-founder of the popular magazine, *Millennium*. His reputation is destroyed when he loses a court case against Wennerström - a prominent businessman, is charged of slander, and faces a three month prison sentence and a huge fine. At this point, he is approached by Henrik Vanger, retired CEO of the multinational Vanger Cooperation, to investigate the murder of his favourite niece, Harriet, who had disappeared from

an island during a crisis where all transport, to and from the island, was cut off. In exchange, he offers Blomkvist information on Wennerström.

Lisbeth Salander, an eccentrically beautiful, accomplished young hacker with a damaged past that has left her with a lack of social graces, assists him. The two of them dig deep into the Vanger family history, unearthing unpleasant and shocking details and running into frustrating dead ends, while simultaneously trying to resolve their own relationship. It is a fascinating thriller criticising the modern day Swedish society where corrupt businessmen and violence towards women are prevalent.

In all, it is a well-paced novel which has you hooked from the start and has a stunning and disturbing ending.

That fateful day, some time in the distant past (precisely six years and two weeks ago), a handful (precisely forty-four) of students registered themselves and handed over their fates to a director when he was armed with little more than 98 acres of barren land. Many of them, disappointed at their fates in JEE, decided to sign up for what was a poorly disguised scientific experiment. After an arduous five years of experimental course design and professors over a large matrix of accomplishments and teaching skills, and an extra year of tortuous waiting, this courageous batch of students was awarded their dual degrees. Sadly, they wouldn't receive the honorary mention, at the Bravery Awards, that they deserve.

However, IISER's largest research question is still in its experimental stage as plenty more students teleport themselves to IISER grounds on registration day each year. For the first couple of weeks, this bunch of freshers, in elevated levels of excitement, throng the corridors, the library and the mess usurping seats and inviting hostility. Little do they know, during their guided tours of labs and the reassurances of the orientation days, that they would be the objects of study in perfecting the course design and normalising the instructor! No one can complain, however, as they had all signed up with the full knowledge of the fact that the institute is still in its formative years and compromises would have to be made.

Compromise is the least of what has been demanded of many aspiring physicists as the course structure has been chopped, spiced up, and made curry out of. Many fourth years are left with goulash to sort through. Many of the delicacies have been either postponed to the Spring semester or to the next Fall semester without any prior notice. The frequency of these courses changes from once a year to once every two years at the

slightest perturbation. Fourth years have been rendered unable to credit a lot of relevant courses like Quantum Computing, Computational Physics and Gravitation&Cosmology. The world will now mourn the loss of an ample number of quantum computers and cosmologists, not to mention the massive loss to Gravitational Physics. On a serious note, misfortune has struck them lethally and they fall short of useful credits this semester while awaiting a large number of courses that can't even be credited in the following semester. Owing to this, Mathematicians and Theoretical Physicists have surfaced in Life Science courses, an awkward situation for all involved. Spectators of the misfortune that has befallen their seniors, the third years reluctantly submit their destinies to stochasticities and other such metropolises.

From the ashes of such misery, rises the Phoenician Mathematics department, resplendent with its fiery course structure, spreading its wings over the IISERian horizon with new offerings like Elementary Geometry, Combinatorics and Number Theory, and Statistics. Dying along with the embers are courses like Stochastic Processes and Coding Theory. Hopefully, this revamp is the newly staffed Math Department's comeback to the ridicule it has suffered.

It isn't just the senior years that suffer from chaotic course structures. Joining IISER after two years of grilling for the various entrance examinations, the first couple of years seem elementary to the freshers. They settle into a state of inertia and end up learning little in the introductory courses. In two years, the momentum gained is completely wasted and even their prior knowledge starts to fade away. In comparison with a Basic Science student at any other institute, an IISER student will certainly be far behind at the end of two years. The content is more wide

than deep and focuses more on superficial information. Then they find themselves in the third year, having to face an unprecedented load, quite ignorant and at a disadvantage when lecturers of specialised courses end up having to teach basics to make their courses understood.

Part of IISER's experiment on students involves interaction and student feedback. Being the most democratic of all of IISER's rules and a sufficiently anonymous platform, almost every student participates in this, using it to air their thinly veiled contempt at the professors. Many a thoughtless feedback, mostly used as a relief to exam stress, has caused changes in instructors and course details unnecessarily. At other times, one even wonders if the feedback is taken seriously as a few lecturers continue with the same courses even after tons of genuine negative feedback. With anonymity does follow opacity! Professors and students are of the opinion that for effective feedback, the forms should be made available twice during a semester, once in the middle of the semester and again at the end to evaluate the implementation of suggestions. A comprehensive and useful questionnaire should also be prepared for the feedback to prove effective.

A course list with a negligible rate of mutation would do wonders to improve the quality of a student's life. Much more, in fact, than a multi-cuisine mess, corridors with motion sensor lamps, or a quasi-functional snack vending machine that is always short of change. The number of concrete buildings built every year, or the number of students sent on foreign exchange programmes per semester do not matter as significantly in an institute's development as its students do.

It would be a shame, if years down the line, all that stands between you and enlightenment is the course not taken.

gene EXPRESSION



the students' corner

Who's How?

As this reporter furiously begins to pen down this article to meet yet another deadline, a million different things rush into her mind all at once. All of them have one central theme - what's changed this summer, and how?

Everyone at IISER was in for a shock when they set foot on campus and realised that absolutely nothing looked drastically different. Everyone seemed to look the same, dress the same, and act the same. But there were subtle changes that have not escaped this reporter's eyes even if they have escaped yours.

IISER does score some points when it comes to the brand new hostel block which looks rather dashing from the inside and the outside. The large storage space that everyone has been dreaming of, is finally a reality in the new rooms, but ultimately the coolest feature of the new hostel (other than the smooth woodwork, spacious rooms, clean bathrooms, and breakable beds) is the motion sensor lights! Many a time, one has run down those dark corridors simply to make them automatically light up and give oneself a wonderful 'Bruce Almighty' feeling.

The lovebirds of IISER, especially, were in for a HUGE shock when they first arrived. The room for reading had no door. Without this valuable asset, the usual nocturnal shenanigans seemed impossible. Then again - where there's a will, there's a way.

The music nuts were treated to a terribly wrecked music room with random cots and blackboard stands lying in the middle. Not to men-

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tion, missing *tablas* and guitars that sounded so bad that even the good guitarists ended up sounding like me.

The overflowing mess goes unnoticed by none. As queues meander around the mess, some of us, being too lazy to participate, simply skip meals. Others pull strings and make it clear that queues are not their thing, leaving the onlookers asking "Q?"

The ginormous budget of IISER's first convocation led everyone to the same conclusion - no money for *Karavaan* this year! And to quote a certain second year, "When BlaKc performed for *Karavaan* last year, they left a hole where the new mess is being built - the 'BlaKc hole'". This again planted a seed of doubt in everyone's mind. Even if *Karavaan* were to happen, where would it happen? (Yes, alright. That wasn't a change but I wanted to say it so cut me some slack!)

A week ago, a real tall and hulking bunch of people joined IISER - the first years. Other than an alarmingly high average height for an academic population, the first years also have a decent number of cool people. Looks like the standards of nerdy geeks out here are falling rapidly!

Another extremely noticeable change in IISER is the well-dressed male population. There are cool T-shirts and ironed underpants aplenty since the first years arrived a week ago. This can mean only one thing - first year girls watch out! These guys mean business.

This is most definitely not all that this reporter has to say, but deadlines are deadlines!

Foodie Corner

AASHAY PATIL

It's the last Saturday of the month. Your gluttonous habits have depleted your bank account and you are in search of a place that can fill your stomach with the last *chillar* remaining in your wallet. It is common experience that roadside *tapris* have the tastiest of foods on this planet. One such *tapri* is the *Loni Sponge Dosa* stall on J M Road. It's one of those rare *dosa* places in Pune which South Indians don't curse.

The *Loni* (Butter) *Sponge dosa* is simply awesome. As the name suggests, it's very soft and spongy. Served piping hot with judicious amounts of butter, a potato *subzi*, and a *chutney* - all of which are unlimited - it is a great snack to have. And three small-sized *dosas* at ₹20 is not a bad deal at all, if not extremely cheap. Two plates are sufficient for a person with a normal appetite and above average amount of hunger. To add icing to the cake, you can try the awesome cold coffee, at the stall just opposite to this *dosa* stall, for just ₹20. So you can have a two course meal for less than hundred bucks!

SentInfo

The Sentience Team plans to start an active *SentInfo* which posts latest information about various exciting activities happening in IISER as well as in Pune. So keep looking at the notice boards!