

IIT Kanpur Visit (August 19-21, 2011)

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I spent very pleasant two days in IITK campus. I had gone there to deliver a lecture at the invitation of Student Gymkhana.

On 19th August evening I was invited by Dr. Sanjay Dhande to attend the Institute Fellow ceremony in the auditorium of the new swanky building of Industrial and Management Engineering. Two professors of our times Dr. S. K. Gupta of Mathematics and Dr. G. K. Lal of Mechanical Engineering were honored. I also met Dr. M. Anandkrishnan (Chairman BOG) who was the chief guest of the ceremony and our civil engineering professor.

Ravi Tandon (Mote) and Dilip Dheer were kind enough to come to IIT GH on 20th August evening and we spent lovely couple of hours together. All three of us were meeting after almost five years (after our 35th reunion in 2006).



On Saturday night the students had arranged for a bull session in Hall II. Thus in the TT room of Hall II, about 100 students of 1st and 2nd year and I had a very lively interaction on all different of issues. Since there were no professors present the interaction was very open and honest. Most of them said that somehow they are not inspired or challenged. Obviously the fault lies both with the students and faculty. Students do not read very much, are mostly interested in watching movies

on internet in their rooms and hardly interact with each other. On the other hand quite a large number of faculty are mediocre and do not do their homework to challenge and inspire the students.

The discussion also took place on corruption, why I left US and came back, how the life was in Hall II during my days etc. etc. The whole thing lasted for two hours and ended since I felt extremely sleepy at 11 p.m.!

I was taken around by students to show the Hall II rooms. I was impressed by the cleanliness of the bathrooms and well-groomed lawns. I was also surprised to see that nowadays three students (1st year only) share a room. My question on how do they maintain their privacy during their nefarious activities elicited tremendous clapping and cheer! Various other non-veg things were discussed which somehow was more enjoyable to the 18-19 year old kids than the serious stuff!

The next day in the morning I spent almost half a day with Dr. Vyas in his lab. Dr Nalinaksh Vyas is an old friend of mine and recently retired as the HOD of Mechanical Engineering Department. For the last three years he has been spearheading the famous “Jugnu” (micro satellite) project. The satellite is supposed to take the IR, visible and water vapour images over Indian subcontinent. Around 35-40 undergraduate students under the guidance of 2-3 faculty members led by Dr. Vyas have developed the “Jugnu” micro satellite. Both the hardware and the software have been developed by these students and is a shining example of what they are capable of doing if inspired and challenged. In my discussions with them I found them to be at par with the scientists in top labs anywhere in the world. Their grasp of technical details was wonderful.

The atmosphere of the “Jugnu” lab reminded me of my 1995 visit with a top honcho in Microsoft Corporation in Seattle, Washington. He showed me how Microsoft engineers work 24/7 since they sleep and eat in their offices. With an attached kitchen which is stocked with all the eatables and makeshift beds the focus was only work. Thus the “Jugnu” lab had mattresses and bean bags (which also doubled as beds), refrigerator, microwave oven etc. etc. It really made me long to go back to research! It was also heartening to see that there were girls in the projects. On the 21st evening “Jugnu” was supposed to have been shipped to ISRO for launch which will take place sometime in September.

I requested Dr. Vyas that after the “Space project”, the methodology and the “technology” of bright undergraduate students working together may be used for rural development. We have discussed some projects and hopefully should be able to do something together on this with our two Institutes in near future.

My lecture in L7 entitled [“Social Entrepreneurship, IITians and Happiness”](#) was well received though the attendance could have been better.



The Institute looked very clean with lush and green grounds but very hot since the humidity was high and the sun was merciless. I also had long and separate meetings with Dr. Sanjay Dhande (the Director of IITK) and Dr. Manindra Agarwal (Dean RPG). With Sanjay it was a

social visit since we have known each other since late 1970s. With Dr. Agarwal (who was kind enough to come to my room in GH) I discussed how students can be motivated to do internship in rural development and the issue of creating a social entrepreneurship program in IITK.

There has been huge construction activity on the campus and the landscape has changed since I visited it last in 2006. Hence some areas are not recognizable. The state-of the-art student recreation facility (in front of swimming pool) is something else. I had a long meeting with the student gymkhana President and some of his friends. They bemoaned the fact that not too many undergraduates use these facilities but told me that slowly things are changing.

These young kids are very organized and far better managers and event organizers then we ever were. There are dozens of clubs and managing them and hundreds of their activities is quite a task and when Sanchit Singhal (Gymkhana President) explained to me in detail about how they go about doing them, I felt tremendous admiration for these young people.

My visit to IITK reinforced my long-held belief that the young citizens of this country are very sharp, talented and want to do something meaningful with their life. They are focused and have many choices. If properly guided, inspired and challenged they can change India for better.

August 27, 2011

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