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BITSIANS IN MEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

Its not often we pick up a book or an article in a magazine and see 'BITS, Pilani' in the author's profile, but there are those moments when even us eenjeeneur types are also doing the writings for such type of the things. We spoke with Shashi, Sukumar and Dilip, BITS Pilani alumni who've published several books, articles and other works of literary delight, even blogs.

Shashi **Warrier** is the author of 6 books including two for children and the intense 'Hangman's Journal'. He did his MA in Economics from 1976-1981 and is now a full time author. "Writing is something that just happened and I'm glad it did" he says. "I don't know what I would be doing otherwise". More than a decade ago, while at his parents' house in Kerala, Shashi typed out 'Suzy's gift' on his typewriter and sent it to Penguin. They agreed to publish it and before long his first book had hit the shelves. "It was as easy as that".

R.Sukumar also believes this line of work just happened. He held the BITS ID 86B4A1426 (Math with Chemical for those who don't remember) and passed out in 1991. "I had no family influences whatsoever to



Shashi Warrier ('76 Eco)

take this career, but I think my reading habit contributed to some measure". Currently Sukumar is the Executive Editor of Business Today. He enjoys editing & writing for the popular magazine and lives in New Delhi. But his parents, he says, were initially quite dismayed that he didn't go the typical way of BITS-US-etc.

Enter Dilip D'Souza who did just that... initially, anyway. After EEE in BITS ('76 to '81) Dilip did an MS in Computer Science at Brown University in the US. He lived in the States for ten years, working for different software firms in Texas. Though he harbored no dislike for the country, he soon began feeling vaguely uneasy with his comfortable life there. Dilip eventually moved back to India in 1992 and has lived in Bombay ever since. He is a regular columnist on Rediff and is the author of two books - 'Narmada Damned' and



Dilip D' Souza ('76 EEE)

'Branded by law'.

Writing, though, never starts right after Pilani. While Dilip dabbled in software before jumping to column writing, Shashi worked with consultancy firms and handled contracts for a few years before wielding the pen. Sukumar had a more natural path. After a year with a market intelligence consultancy, he got an MBA from BIM, Trichy and worked with an ad agency in Bangalore. He then reported for Hindu Business Line and went on to become in-charge of all its business features. The shift to Business Today happened in 1997 and Sukumar has been with them ever since.

So what really inspires them to write? "Things around me! I feel like there are stories waiting to be told every time I step out on the road" says Dilip. Traveling, meeting a variety of people and personal experiences

give plenty of fodder to both Dilip's and Shashi's writing.

Travels and research in Kashmir forms the basis of Shashi's yet-unpublished book on Sufism while his army background came of good use in 'Sniper'. What about his children's books? "I think I'm a little kid inside" laughs Shashi. "I love fairy tales and cartoons and I guess that may be the inspiration!"

The magazine business is a very different animal. "You are only as good as your next issue, so you can imagine the number of fun and challenging moments there are" says Sukumar.

He has been involved with 26 surveys which is done every year, the 'Best companies to work for' being among the more popular ones.

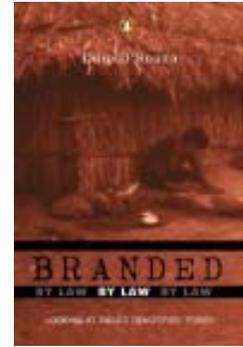
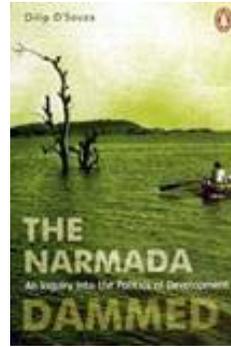
So how does one go about something as involved as that? "The survey itself is very simple although we, and all the imitators we have attracted over the years, make it look exceedingly complex" Sukumar confesses. "At the core of all such surveys is the simple measure of employee satisfaction". But editing a magazine, he feels, has definitely made him a better writer.

According to Shashi, it's not very difficult to reach the publishers. You don't need any 'contacts', just a 10,000-word synopsis of what the book will be about and a sample of your writing (which could be the first two chapters). "Pass the word around" says Shashi, passionately.

Even if there are a lot of edits later, if you possess a good idea and nice language the publishers will soon nod their acceptance.

For Dilip, his first time in print was a light piece that got published in The Independent (a now defunct paper). Soon column writing with Sunday Observer and Rediff followed. In 1998 he got a media fellowship to write about denotified tribes. Since it was the first time there was so much of focus on a single subject, Dilip turned out a substantial body of writing on it. The next year he wrote to Penguin and asked them if they'd be interested in a book on these tribes. The answer was yes and after some more research and travel, 'Branded by Law' was published in mid-2001.

Shashi's second book happened after he met David Davidar who wanted to publish a thriller and



Shashi was only too keen to write one. 'Night of the Krait' was soon on the shelves.

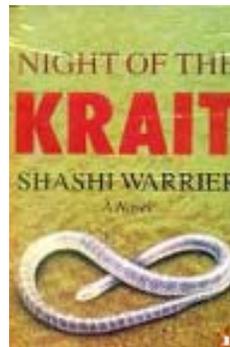
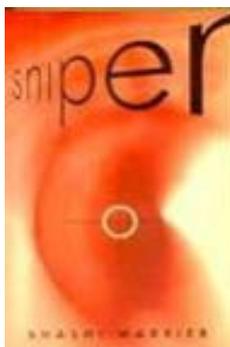
The upside of the writing industry seems to be all the traveling, the meeting of people and the plethora of experiences. The downside, according to Shashi is that it could be years from the conception of a book to its sale. Shashi has several unpublished books including one which is a political comedy. He says that when you feel that all is not right with a book, you can just get stuck. And the book gathers dust.

For Dilip, this career has given him a lot of time with his children and that is what he misses when he has to be away for a few days chasing stories.

So what does the future hold in store?

"I really don't know, but I'd like it to include my wife, my son, my dog, enough Irish malt, hand-rolled Cubans and all the graphic novels money can buy!" says Sukumar. "As you can see work doesn't figure" he adds.

Dilip plans to just write. "Write books, but also essays and articles. I see myself as an essayist/author, and I feel I'm at a stage in my life where I have to make that count." His future book would revolve around the



patriotism theme, he says. An essay on those lines won him the Outlook Picador Non Fiction Competition recently.

Shashi plans to do one or all of the following three - a travelogue, short stories and a book on what makes an Indian. He is also working on translating the Bhagwad Gita into English. His version, he informs, would be minus all the confusing pseudonyms and repetitions which he thinks usually make it a difficult read. Sure sounds like something which would be attractive and useful for today's generation.

Just as we wonder if the BITS influence had a role, Shashi says "BITS sure helped- With it's lack of minimum attendance!". The unique structure and various flexibilities help the BITSian develop his personality in a variety of ways - the freedom and independence being an important factor.

Dilip heartily agrees."I think BITS deliberately exposes you to more than just your engineering (or whatever) discipline. It teaches you the value of that wider focus. I think that at least attuned me to looking outside my field, finding interests there. That is the foundation of my attempts at writing."

Sukumar ('84 Math Chemical)

Sukumar refused to be photographed saying "Journalists should be read, not seen."

Sukumar did a bit of writing in his BITSian days. He edited Apogee and Oasis magazines in his second and third years and Cactus Flower in his fifth. The BITSian world had quite some hints of his future career. When asked him his favorite moments in BITS he replies "too many; besides several of them would make me sound like Ginsberg to what I am told are sanitized sensibilities on campus."

Dilip D'Souza wrote the essay which inspired Ashutosh Gowarikar to make 'Swades'.

Dilip's freshest memories seem to be of waiting outside Meera Bhawan and all the women he met then. He quickly adds "But marrying my wife is the best thing I've ever done in my life, the next being moving to India". His wife Vibha Kamat teaches French at Alliance Francaise and they have two children – Sahir and Surabhi.

Shashi is a serious bike freak, his wife Prita says. He has traveled across the country several times and music is something they both enjoy. They live in Coimbatore with their adorable daschunds- Ben and Celine.

One thing that all the three would love to do is visit Pilani. "It would be great fun to go back if I had the right company" says Sukumar.

Dilip is looking forward to going back for an Oasis - "Speaking to alert

and interested students is very stimulating". He has been to BITS twice after passing out- in 1988 to meet a cousin and in March 2004 for the inauguration of BITSCONnect.

Shashi has dropped by once too, in 2004 while passing by Delhi. He regrets that he didn't really have much time to spend but is thrilled to tell us that VK redi owner Mahaveer recognized him after all these years. We suspect that his snacks that day were on the house.

According to Dilip, BITS now feels a little less cosmopolitan than in his time. "There seemed to be a narrower cross-section of Indians represented in the student body. I could be mistaken, but this was the impression."

"When I was in BITS it was one of those places which attracted the finest minds from all over the country. These were the people who weren't just into academics but into everything else as well - books, writing, dramatics, sports music. That helped shape several of our psyches" remembers Sukumar.

Shashi did the screenplay for the movie 'Bokshu' although he says he won't do anymore screenplays – unless his life depended on it.

So there, dear reader, you have it. Three incredible people and three more reasons for us to celebrate the wonderfully eclectic BITS Pilani community we're privileged to be a part of.

