

Good Samaritans Inc.

*“About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters, how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or
Just walking dully along.”*

-W.H.Auden
(*Musse des Beaux Arts*)

Today the sound of fire, fury and hunger can be heard from every part of the country. Yet we decide to sit in the cosy comforts of our rooms with a notice outside our doors- DO NOT DISTURB- and wait for that lucrative job in the modern Garden of Eden, hoping to leave this country once and for all. Sometimes we wake up and protest in our living rooms about the futility of Bush's actions against Saddam.

- Ever imagined a girl from a sweeper's family dreaming of becoming a doctor someday?
- She claims herself to be 17 (but looks years younger) and is about to get married. What future does she see for herself?
- How would you like to be the sole breadwinner for your family of five?

These are just stark realities. I have always felt that nothing would ever be done to clean up and rebuild this country because that was always and would always be someone else's job. Nobody is ready to take any responsibility. The intelligentsia lives in a cloud of glorious rhetoric where problems are the faults of others. *Anbesivam* seemed to be a concept fit for the movies. In BITS, however there seems to be a faint glimmer of hope. The **National Service Scheme**.

Give me a reason...

The NSS has adopted two villages close to Pilani- Jherli and Basgaon.

You might be wondering, “Why print an article on the NSS?” Apart from the fliers that sometimes pop up in the mess notice boards, informing us about few of their programmes, our knowledge of how they function is zilch. One NSS member opined that awareness of the existence of such a society is more among the female section of the BITSian populace. Frankly speaking, most of us in the CF team knew precious little about the NSS. If it had not been for this assignment, we would never have got such an eye-opening opportunity of watching them perform their deeds. Most departments and



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clubs are busy only during specific parts of the academic year, or more precisely, BOSM, OASIS and APOGEE. NSS carries out its act right through. The reason? Simple. Humanitarian gestures need not (in fact, should not) be seasonal, as it were. Their impressive efficiency can be attributed to the interest and willingness of its members, who carry out all their tasks not because they are bound by duty, but due to the fact that they *want* to do them. We are not taking up the role of a moral priest out here. We just want you to spare a moment and read about these silent workers.

The Return to Innocence...

NSS was evolved and introduced by the Indian Government in 1969. It aims at developing amongst students, a sense of participation in nation building through social work. The BITSian version of this nationwide organisation commenced activities around seven years ago. The Co-ordinator of this crew of around 60 is Prof. Motilal Dash, while the current president is Poonam Agarwal. NSS volunteers from BITS have worked in the surrounding villages and helped the villagers in levelling roads, establishing medical camps and distribution of clothes. Among the people in this select group, some were involved in related activities right from their school days, while others had no prior experience in social service. What motivates these guys to attain such heights of altruism? Perhaps, it is the realization that “No race can prosper till it realizes that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”

Funds and Concessions

- Monetary support from the government.
- Revenue generated from the Oasis Stall - **No donations taken from BITSian students.**
- Free photocopies, phone calls, faxes and stationery.
- Biscuits for the NSS School provided by *Akshay*.

Blood Brothers...

The **Blood Donation Camp** is held once a year, during the month of March. The NSS collaborates with the New Delhi chapter of the **Indian Red Cross Society** in conducting this crucial activity. It had even carried out this exercise in conjunction with the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)** sometime ago. The blood collected from BITSian donors is stored under refrigerated conditions in the Biology Laboratory until the time for transporting it comes. According to records kept by the NSS, the average donation of blood regularly crosses 700 units, in a period of just two days, which is a record-clincher by South Asian standards. In 2002, the units of blood collected totalled 780. Consequently, NSS – BITS, Pilani has been honoured with the **Rolling Shield** for the last three years. BITS enjoys the unique distinction of sending



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more units of blood than any other academic institution. Indeed, we seem to have a healthy dose of the “stuff that life is made of”.

Where the streets have no name...

A short walk through the uncharted territory behind FD-I would thrust the unsuspecting stroller into a world quite unlike our own. It is a secluded ghetto; a row of one-room quarters, which are in actuality, glorified chicken coops, containing families of five or six. The street (if you can call it that) is merely a pathway with the set of rooms on one side and a wall on the other. You may have to duck under the odd clothesline that is strung right across the breadth of this alley. The acrid smell of cooking fires pervades the air. Welcome to the site of the **NSS Health Camp**.

Does anyone know the geographic location of “Sweeper’s Colony”, or the *juggis* that are a stone’s throw away from the frequently visited IPC?

The Health Camp is a weekly affair. The volunteers congregate outside FD-1 at 5pm on Saturdays and move on from there to the aforementioned ‘colony’. They carry medicines such as *Paracetamol* and Iron tablets, which are provided by the Chief Medical Health Officer (CMHO), Jhunjhunu. A nurse from the CMHO’s office accompanies them to the site. The effectiveness of this weekly soiree hinges on the willingness of the nurse to make herself available at the stipulated time. The NSS

members had a thoroughly forgettable association with a nurse who frequently shied away from her Saturday duties. People who live in this area are quite familiar with the NSS members and don’t hesitate in conversing with them. The children mingle quite freely with the volunteers, addressing them as *bhaiyya* or *didi*. What follows is nothing short of a mobile clinic. The nurse-NSS combine looks into the health affairs of each family. Complaints range from common colds and allergies to earaches. The patient could be anyone from a toddler to an adult man. The ‘health officials’ take a personal interest in each and every person. For minor ailments, the drugs are distributed on the spot or else the patient is asked to visit the Medical Centre to get professional help. On the anvil, is the establishment of a “Drug Bank”, where donated medicines will be stored. They will be sorted with the help of BITSian M.Pharm students. Quite often, the volunteers utilise the “Placebo Technique” to mitigate illnesses. Chatting with an ill person can work wonders. After all, aren’t most health disorders psychological?

Somebody for Someone...

Steven Waugh’s magnanimous gesture of supporting *Udayan*, a centre for children victims of leprosy near Kolkata, has been quite well documented. NSS has attempted something on similar lines with *Udhavam Karangal*, which is an institution for mentally unwell children, located in Chennai. They have decided to financially back the upbringing of two inmates. An amount of Rs. 1200 will be sent to each child every year. Chennai



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was chosen as the “theatre of operation” so that the NSS volunteers would be able to personally keep track of the progress of the two fortunate young individuals and also interact with them during the vacations.

TNT for the Brain...

Tutelage at Night Time – this aptly describes the nocturnal rendezvous that takes place in the same site as the Health Camp, seven days a week, from 7:30pm to 8:30pm. The programme may go under the name of “Adult Education”, but children are more than welcome. With NSS workers acting as instructors, tutoring is done on a “man to man” and “woman to woman” basis, literally. They are taught to read, write and perform seemingly mundane chores such as filling out money order forms or penning letters. Homework is given regularly so that the pupils do not lose touch with whatever they have learnt on any given day. The “Course Structure” also includes basic awareness about AIDS, family planning, nutrition and sanitation. The greatest *gurudakshina* that the adult student can give is imparting whatever he has learnt, to his own progeny. The zest that the workers and their children have for learning concepts hitherto unknown is mind-boggling. We, the supposedly privileged class, take a multitude of things for granted. Here they have to fight for it...

WonderVol...

The Oasis Stall was quite a successful venture during the 2002 edition. The Stall featured items (candles, paintings) made by the students of **Amala Vidya Kendra**, which is a school for mentally challenged children in Pilani, and handicrafts which originated from the slums of New Delhi. Proceeds from the sales of these objects were sent to the respective artisans. They also had pottery and *mehendi* sections that were highly appreciated and were great crowd pullers. The NSS also aids the World Wildlife Fund by selling WWF paraphernalia during Oasis. This of course brings to mind the wildly popular line, which has been suitably paraphrased:

<p>Rs. 26,110.50 was collected as part of the “Go Mata” campaign.</p>
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*Coz maybe... you're gonna be the one that saves me.
And after all, you're my WonderVol.*

Boston Public...Pilani Ishtyle

A three-roomed house is what it is, for an outsider. However, for an NSS volunteer, it is an abode of happiness. For each child who studies there, it is a Paradise. Situated in the Sweepers' colony, a little beyond C'not, this small school is the centre of activity for many less privileged children. Children from the Sweepers' Colony, the colony near the



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Gliding Club and the Construction Workers' Colony, gather every morning at the school for a learning session from 9 to 11. Here, they are taught some simple basics by a couple of trained teachers. In the evenings, NSS volunteers help these children with their studies. Now, this seems like a boring old pattern of teaching, and many would swear that if they were in the place of these children, they would prefer to enjoy a life without studies. But a peep into the school would definitely prove that this is nowhere close to these children's views about educational pursuits.

At around 5 every evening, the attention of any person in the vicinity of the school, would be drawn towards the elated voices greeting their *didis* and *bhaiyyas*. These little

The volunteers converse with the colony dwellers on general topics. Thus begins "Operation Trust".

"bundles of enthusiasm" swarm around the volunteers with their numerous queries, complaints and accomplishments. From then on begins a lovely hour, with a little study, a little fun, a little *laccha* and a 'little' mischief. Before leaving, each of these tiny tots is given biscuits, courtesy, the COOP. And we must mention 'whole' biscuits, because among the kids was a sweet little girl who refused to take her share of biscuits, as one of them was broken. Few of us would look forward to school on Sunday. Of course, most of us would not even dream of altering our present schedule. The BITSian Sabbath is characterized by waking up a few minutes before lunch, engaging in stimulating gossip sessions and finally crawling into bed, thoroughly exhausted by the day's exertions. Sunday School is welcomed, even relished, by these children.

At the stroke of 9 in the morning, one would find the entire battalion ready to charge through the school gate. Twice, we had arrived before the NSS volunteers. The children willed us to somehow open the school door so that they could get into the world where the real meaning of childhood was shown to them. On the first occasion, the school had remained closed on account of dense fog. The disappointment writ large on their faces had to be seen to be believed. After a week's hard work, Sunday School holds the promise of fun and frolic. No self-respecting young lady or gent would want to miss out on two hours of quality time with toys. Gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "taking a Sabbatical", doesn't it?

It's truly amazing to see the amount of devotion the volunteers possess towards their work. One of them learnt Hindi just for the sake of interacting better with the children. The bond they share with the kids is not of duty, responsibility, or dedication. It is just love, pure love. And love is what they get in return. The only thing that keeps them going is the reward they get - n reasons to smile at the end of the day, where n is directly proportional to the number of kids they have had to deal with.

And finally, from our visit to the school, even we gained many fond memories and a bunch of wonderful friends. A quiet Pooja, who aims to become a doctor, a shy, yet



loving, Kiran, a naughty monkey-like Mohan (who kept climbing up our backs), and Bipul, without whom we would never have learnt “car-driving”. These are a few of our huge group of friends. Friends they definitely are, but not while taking photographs. There was no chance of capturing them on film while at work, because each one was adamant at modelling solo. And they did make sure of that by placing themselves right in front of the camera lens, or by clinging to the photographer’s legs. We were amazed at the level of patience of the NSS volunteers while handling these active characters. It was a Herculean task to get a decent shot of the tiny blokes. Just imagine the perseverance required to raise one of them! Moral of the story: NSS Volunteers would make ideal Moms and Pops. For the less courageous (we definitely are included), there is always the tried and tested concept of “Bachelorhood or Spinsterhood for life”!

After all we never really cared. Did we?



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