



**Years of
PING!**

Zubair Abid

Ping! is over ten years old now. Covering almost half of IIT's existence, these ten years have seen multiple articles, stories, and random snippets by students over the years. These pieces capture the zeitgeists over time for IIT, and so we decided to play historian and went to the archives.

We found in the archives stories of another IIT. Narratives of forgotten customs, mentions of still-familiar randirona, persistent concerns about "college life" over time. Hotly contested debates that are today foregone conclusions. The articles that were seemingly written as filler for pages have today gained significance, whereas popular topics of discussion at the time that are now dead; demonstrating how the Institute has, despite all apparent odds, moved on over time. Institutions (like Aarogya) that we take for granted (or not) have an origin story.

The archives talk of an "October Flakes" musical showcase, of an experimental half-semester C-Programming course, of

Snippets of Interest from a Different Time

The magazine began in the Monsoon semester of 2009, as a newsletter: "A monthly ping to all IITians!!", as the front cover claimed. This early version was far from the Ping! that is today, and much closer to its neanderthal-ish ancestor of early-2000s Echoes. The content was standard school newsletter fare; some news, an interview, and "recommendations". The design is a relic of the times; a hodgepodge of seven different font types, including the abominable Comic Sans MS.
Caption: The front-page of Volume I, Issue 1 (October 2009)

This was a template that would largely be followed for the following three years. Focusing entirely on reportage, recommendations, interviews, and MS Publisher-esque design, each academic year saw the publication of four-five issues.

Fun fact — it was originally Ping and became Ping! only after someone realized that Ping already existed and wished to prevent any lawsuits (just in case...).

From "The story of Ping!" - Volume II, Issue 4 (April 2011)

varying Student Governance issues, elections and election formats over the years. They refer to a singular successful campus Protest with questionable impact. Interviews with the odd faculty or staff reveals a previously unknown tidbit. Conspicuous - more in what they do not talk about - we can gauge correctly concerns that did not exist then: or perhaps, merely approaches that were not taken.

"IIT HAS A 'MEMENTO SYNDROME'"

But above all, when read between the lines, the records display an endless cycle: IIT has a 'Memento Syndrome'. Editorials refer specifically to this: where one is lamenting the state of apathy and indifference amongst students, the next is on how things were "getting better": only for the cycle to start all over again. Be it the Student Parliament, the Music Club, E-Cell, even Ping! itself - no student body on campus appears to have successfully escaped this cycle of incredible activity and stilling dormancy.

And so, our goal has pivoted since. This article is about a story of Ping!, but also about snippets of what IIT has been.

The articles, while mildly informative, feel vanilla, and there is a conspicuous lack of any conflict. This is despite the fact that Volume II, Issue 4 (April 2011) reports of a protest.

Ping! had a long way to go from being a passive reporter of events (and protests) to becoming an active reporter of student opinions (including dissent) and instigator of change.

The First Five Years

Even in its early formulaic format, Ping! was a faithful reporter of college events, and a plethora of information can be extrapolated from the rather dry articles. And not less than once did we exclaim déjà vu!

Zombie Events and Changing Names

Students who have been in the Institute for about three or more years might have noticed an interesting feature of IIT Events and Organisations, wherein they run strong for a couple of years (if that), and then they either get delayed, resulting in logistical changes (like name changes), or they die out and are revived anew years later by another still-enthusiastic batch.

A concrete example - of either one, or both of these acting in conjunction - would be the Music Club's flagship November Jam March Meltdown Meltdown event. Ping! Volume I Issue I (October 2009) talks of a suspiciously similar event: here, named October Flakes. It's very basic coverage; merely a list of performers and their performances.

The same issue mentions the other instance of event - one that died but was revived anew, without memory of what happened in the days past. An article entitled "First basketball premier league" (Vol. I Issue 1, October 2009) says: "The inaugural IIIT basketball premier league was conducted from October 5 till October 9." On the other hand, "Let's DriBBle" (Vol. IV Issue 2, February 2013) talks of an "an initiative for a 'Basketball Premier League' that all started with a mail from the organizers

for interested players". It's the same event, less than four years apart - but each time, it's begun afresh.

As an aside, the latter article goes on to describe the procedure for team selection by auction, something that current residents of Bakul will be very familiar with in light of the recent Bakul Volleyball League (BVL).

The record shows that it's not just events which have been revamped but clubs as well. The E-Cell, that was only recently established in 2016, has grown to one of the more successful student-run organizations on campus today. Yet, there seemed to exist an E-Cell on campus back in 2011 as evidenced by the article: "E Cell Updates" (Vol III Issue 3, early 2012).

Editor's Remark

It is particularly interesting (as past/current Editors of the magazine, anyway) to note the changes in the approaches to writing, and covering events over the years. Where Volume I is an incredibly safe, straightforward, non-controversial publication, Volume II changes things up a bit - still very safe, but taking just slightly more risks, and raising points of dissent to the traditional narrative (like reporting on the Protest). Volume III on the other hand goes back to the style of Volume I when it comes to safety, but the reportage here is more advanced - giving context, covering more. IV and V are where the vision begins to take maturity, with fairly balanced content and context; but even here there's evident restraint with the rare outburst.

Interviewing an alum (who was an Editor of the Newsletter) revealed the background to the story. The team at the time would be by a large stay within a line - not asked to by the Institute, but more a form of self-censorship, as funds for printing came from the clubs budget (that was much smaller at the time). So articles like "On Hierarchies in IIIT" (Vol V Issue 1), which would not be much extra consideration in current day, were groundbreaking in their own right at the time.

It is also worth noting that Ping! remained funded by the Institute in 2016-2018, years in which such restraint was not exercised. Does that make this a case of over-cautiousness by the students, or a reflection of changing attitudes from the admin's side of things? We are unable to verify such a statement due to its subjectivity, but it is a factor worth keeping in mind.

10 YEARS
LATER

Drawing Parallels to Current Day

The current UG-1 and UG-2 are only too familiar with the pains that come with compressing the contents of ITWS-1 and 2 into a half-semester ISS course (as are the rest of the college, thanks to UG-1's control of the meme economy). Incidentally, it is not the college's first time shortening courses after a major syllabus change. "Change in Syllabus of Computer Programming" (Vol II Issue 2, September 2010) reports a similar change for the famed Introductory C-Pro course - "as a half-semester course which is to be started after the first mid-

semester

examinations". It appears the move was unpopular enough to call for (successful) regression; unfortunately that is the extent of the records available to us.

DLF first finds mention in a Ping! Poll from April 2011. It is from a time when Dominos got higher maximal footfall than DLF, polling at 30% and 23% respectively. The franchise fast food culture was hip and in during those days, while there is also the possibility that DLF food stalls offered much less variety back then.

Among the more popular narratives on campus is that of a "Dying Campus Culture". Editorials in recent times have mentioned it, articles have alluded to it, people on Life@IIIT

have complained about it. Every time, these are followed by a flurry of increased activity and hope, with incoming freshers' batches doing their level best to build said culture. And well, things evidently weren't too different a decade ago: with at least one editorial and one article directly referring to said indifference, over a three-year gap. In the middle, there is also an editorial piece on "new clubs" and "improving cultures", furthering our belief in this pattern. Other articles from the time also refer to this phenomenon through proxy; some call it a lack of senior-junior interactions, and yet others apathy - but it is clear that the habit of cribbing of the campus' distinct lack of identity is a consistent theme over time.

"...THE HABIT OF CRIBBING OF CAMPUS' DISTINCT LACK OF IDENTITY IS A CONSISTENT THEME OVER TIME

AAROGYA

AN UNLIKELY ORIGIN STORY

While a vast populace on campus does not seem to have any faith in Aarogya, it has an origin story worth revisiting. No paraphrasing can do it justice, so here's the entire article:

TL;DR: Aarogya was a naturopathy center offering massages and mud baths, run by Yogachaarya Vinayak.

If you or anyone among your neighbors recently felt a need to seek a doctor's advice, you must be aware of the health center facility viz. Aarogya which has been functional for more than two months now. The word

aarogya literally means being 'disease-free'.

Providing a doctor for consultation when a person is sick is necessary but insufficient for being aarogya. Keeping this in mind, the health center has come to offer many Naturopathy services on a no-profit basis. Our yogachaarya Vinayak ji was visibly excited when we inquired about the health center. He told that the idea of dirt being the root cause of disease is the basis of naturopathy. Disease is caused by the dirt in our body, activities and mind.

"BODY MASSAGE, HAIR MASSAGE, SAUNA BATH, MUD BATH, STEAM BATH

Naturopathy cures through cleansing us off this dirt. Rejuvenation and treatment services that are currently offered include body massage, hair massage, sauna bath, mud bath, steam bath, etc. With the aim of gauging the quality of services being currently offered, I decided to try out a full body massage session. All you need to do is to tell your hostel guard and you can then fix an appointment for yourself at a time that suits you. One thing that I could tell after the massage is that it certainly feels good. Yuktahaar staff has undergone proper training for offering these therapies. Separate women employees are available for catering to the ladies. In addition to a full body massage, I was offered a partial mud-bath session as a complimentary service which was rejuvenating but messy for obvious reasons. A decent kitchen-garden is also being maintained at the back side of the health center. Homegrown and self prepared medicines from turmeric, jaggery, amla etc are prepared at the center. When asked about the infrastructure costs that were incurred in setting up this facility, Vinayak ji proudly said that he believed in the concept of Kabaad se Jugaad. I would encourage the readers to visit the health center and see for themselves what he actually meant by this.

MAGAZINES THROUGH THE YEARS



Volume 1
Issue 1
2009

Volume 2
Issue 1
2010

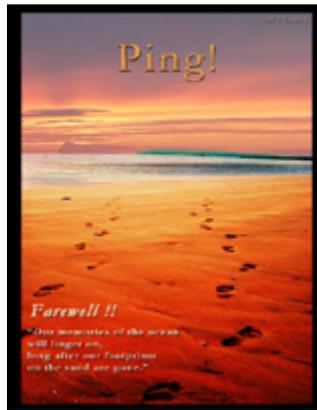
Volume 2
Issue 3
2011

Volume 3
Issue 2
2011

Volume 1
Issue 2
2009

Volume 2
Issue 2
2010

Volume 2
Issue 4
2011



*Volume 3
Issue 3
2011*

*Volume 3
Issue 5
2012*

*Volume 4
Issue 2
2012*

*Volume 3
Issue 4
2012*

*Volume 4
Issue 1
2012*

*Volume 4
Issue 3
2012*

The Interviews

The interviews. So many Interviews. One cannot write a retrospective on Ping! without noting how many interviews were done. Some were interesting, mostly for being slightly offbeat, such as those with the 'JC waale bhaiyya' (Volume III Issue 5, April 2012), or 'OBH-shop wali Aunty' (Volume IV Issue 3, 2013). Most were not.

The abundance of interviews was explained by a past Chief-Editor from 2014-15, in an interview we did with her to write this article. The most popular articles, apparently, were the interviews done with people around campus, like Appaji (Volume III Issue 4, 2012) - thereby explaining the excess.

Which is not to say all of them were useless, in fact, the interview with "OBH-shop waali Aunty" remains till date our most viewed article on the website. At their best, they told the populace more about those that were essential parts of our daily lives, but whom most of us are not very well acquainted with - professors, Appaji, those providing for us at the canteens every day. By and large, however, they were fillers that were not of any particular interest to anyone.

Recommended Interviews:

-- *Bhaiyya, Ek Watermelon!* (Volume III Issue 5, April 2012)

-- *OBH-shop wali Aunty* (Volume IV Issue 3, 2013)

-- *Ask Appaji* (Volume III Issue 4, 2012)

-- *Faculty Interview - Prof. Kannan Srinathan* (Volume III Issue 2, September 2011)

Representing Concerns in the First Five years

Reading through the first five years of archives does not tell one much about IIT. Sure, there's detail upon detail of the nth college event that happened for however many years running, but - that's it. Seen through this lens, IIT is just another college where regular college things™ sometimes happen on a somewhat irregular basis. It has no character. Beyond house events, there's little indication of any community - one that engages, discusses, argues, and furthers itself.

However, there are some early glimpses of the type of content Ping! would eventually grow to cover: reportage of 'non-trivial' campus events. There's some coverage of "these are debates happening on campus" that show the atmosphere around the place - essentially, the 'controversial' pieces of the time.

Student Parliament

Ribbing on whatever form of Student Governance existed at the time is not particularly uncommon in the archives, but it fits the definition, and is worth looking at. Whether we examine the articles on such in *Ping!*, or in its ancestor *Echoes*, one thing is abundantly clear: the students, who may or may not be actively participating in the system, tend not to have much faith in its internal workings and Institutions.

For some context, we shall temporarily go back to the short-lived *Interface*, from December 2002. Out of the Box - Student Parliament describes a sequence of events - the motivation behind the Parliament, initial interests, and an 'abrupt "break-up"', followed by a reconstitution. Likewise, in an interview in the original *Echoes*, back in September 2003, a member of the SLC of the time is quoted saying "The idea of the Student Parliament was from the SLC. But, of late, the parliament is not working as we hoped it would". Finally, a snippet from *Echoes*, August 2006 informs us:

"The new academic year heralded an era of 'selection' parliament over 'election'. For the first time, each house nominated its candidates for each council - Cultural, Campus Life and Sports - one each from the 2nd and 4th years, and 2 from 3rd year, a house captain and a council representative."

With this context in mind, we move on to the Ping! archives. The issue first finds mention in February 2011 (Volume II, Issue 3), in the aptly named "Parliament Blues". The article, that takes the form of a conversation between a (still nominated) Parliamentarian and a non-Parliamentarian, summarizes the issue as

"All of this signifies that there is an on going blame game being played out here. Parliamentarians blame the Majority IIT for being non-responsive and in the other case, Majority IIT doesn't feel the need of a Parliament."

The Editorial of the issue just after (April 2011) gives an update: a new system of governance, with elections to choose its members, with an "intra-batch, intra-house" election model. It also announces a new "Parliament Updates" section, a section that was hence seldom updated - be it due to incompetence on behalf of Ping! or Parliament, we cannot tell.

A second "Parliament Blues" about two years later (Volume IV, Issue 3, circa 2013) implies that it may have been the latter. In an article that comprises almost entirely quotes, what is interesting is how many of these sound

listed straight off of complaints from the last three years:

“In recent months it seems that the parliament’s say on important topics has reduced dramatically. It’s only purpose seems to be to convey student views to the faculty rather than express demands and fight for them (which was its original purpose)”

(paraphrased) ‘Parliament did not have a “visible” stand in any of the recent disciplinary actions. No proper justification was provided to the students on these sensitive issues. Also, the efforts of the Parliament are known only to them and not the rest of the student body, which should not be the case.’

Along with responses that, again, may as well be responses we’re all familiar with:

“A good student community directly translates into a good student parliament. If people are raising their voices responsibly, ... the student parliament will also get a boost ... Students have to come forward proactively to take up the responsibility and put efforts to sustain those interests. It is not just about raising issues, not just taking the students’ side always, it is about setting a good atmosphere in the student community...”

And the same observations, too:

“Regarding Parliament activities, the student community often tends to rush to conclusions and believe rumours. It is possible that the Parliament has actively been doing work, but it has not publicized the same. One must know all the facts before commenting on the issue”.

Some things, evidently, don’t change.



Felicity 2011

PROTEST

A Protest in IIIT

There has been a singular large-scale protest at IIIT, with questionable success. The protest was about a holiday the day after Felicity.

Volume II Issue 4’s “Campus Voice” (April 2011) is precisely about this protest. As it reports, “... on the gloomy morning of February 21, 2011, the day after Felicity ‘11 concluded, the students of IIIT-H too sat down (not cross-legged though!) along the road from the library to the NBH with the following thoughts in mind:

‘We are here, not because we are lawbreakers; we are here in our efforts to become law-makers.’ — Emmeline Pankhurst.

The students had unanimously decided to ask for a ‘well-deserved holiday’ by carrying out a ‘Gandhian’ protest, a ‘dharna’, for the first time in the history of the college.”

Like any other, this event had its share of supporters and naysayers, who invoke basically every argument any protest ever invokes in Indian circles and households. We shall save you the pain of going over those again and move to the question of - 9 years on, was this successful?

Well, long-term, no.

The Gender Issue

What we learnt from the article

The discussion was spurred, in part, by the 2012 Delhi gang rape. The central point of discussion was women's safety on campus, catalysed by the Delhi incident, but driven by cases of harassment girls on campus were facing. Specifically, about the "Need to act against harassment, discrimination, chauvanism".

Multiple FSISs were conducted, each seemingly as fruitless and rife with pointless sidetalk as the last. Some people on campus felt it was an "us vs them" debate, while the petitioners insisted it wasn't. As such, despite the seriousness of the matter, people appear to have taken it rather lightly, with some people believing some of the discussions did not have their place in a college.

A sentiment that was expressed by people interviewed in the article at the time was that there was no point of all the discussion - nothing would come of it, as nothing ever did on campus.

What we learnt from the interview

The debate and circumstances surrounding it were rather dramatic. Responses to it were of two types - first, those who believed it was being blown out of proportion; and second those that were glad that something was finally happening on campus.

What struck her most at the time was that it took time for people to understand the scope of harassment - that it's not just "Bollywood style whistling", but inclusive of behaviour like stalking, or online harassment. Both faculty and students took time to get this. She felt, however, that the discussions were helpful in the long run.

Overall, the discussion on campus seems to have been in line with debates outside of, albeit a bit advanced. Regardless, judging by some of the questions as popular sentiment on campus, it is particularly disturbing that some of them are particularly victim-blamey - questions like "why don't the victims speak up ... some responsibility is with them". One positive to be taken from such is that the Institute seems to have agreed on a consensus and moved on; despite all odds, it seems that the discussions did help progression.

(I'm honestly very surprised you're still reading, to be honest - Zubair)

This is not about reservations, or cross-entry, or any of the other issues that have been raised in recent times. Years before any of these topics were tackled (on record), a more fundamental problem existed concerning women's safety on campus. Again, records are scant - the only reason we know of it is due to "The Gender Issue", from Volume IV Issue 2, some time in early 2013. It's not entirely comprehensive, assuming some level of familiarity with the discussions on campus. So, we reached out to an alumni who was Editor-in-Chief of the newsletter around the time.



Campus Voice: "The Gender Issue"

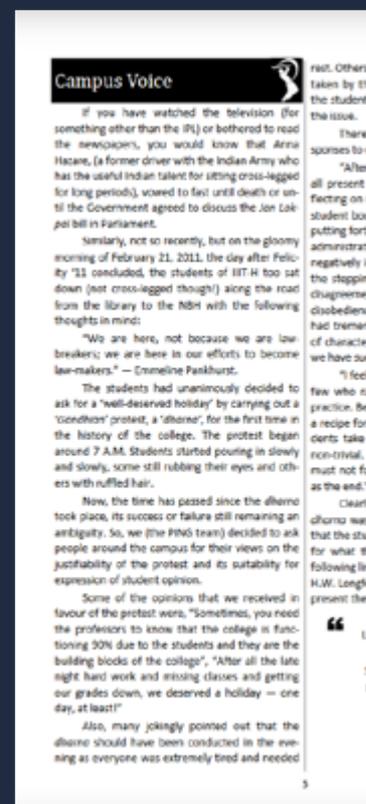
As a campus we are always in discussion- a lively, riveting cross between debate and gossip. In those breaks between assignments, or in large groups at the juice-awls, there's always an issue reigning through loud voices and strong opinions. This month we've heard, felt and seen them swirling around- what is being called 'the gender issue'.

It is the first time that this issue has been dealt with so seriously. Many found the exercise futile, and forced their way to SH2 due to attendance. Was it necessary? Did it make a difference?

As one student puts it, "The FSIS failed to get across to the people that we need to act against all sorts of harassment, discrimination and chauvanism. In its haste to galvanize people into action, it has ended up creating an even bigger gap between those who want something to be done, and those who feel this is only a phase during which everyone will blame the male half of the college. It didn't even come close to reaching towards and removing the inherent chauvinism rooted within many people. But while saying this, it must also be noted that the FSIS was timely, and it was a baby step for the movement against harassment."

Others were more outspoken in their displeasure regarding the FSIS: "I feel the FSIS didn't solve its purpose, rather; it left a bitter taste in the minds of few who think they were forced to attend and participate in stupid discussions on pornography and prostitution."

On the other hand, a good number of students also report a positive outcome of the FSIS: "We assume that our deeds will not hurt anybody. But in FSIS discussions my assumptions were challenged, and I finally understood how we are hurting and creating a bad environment in society which is making others insensitive ... We just need to know when and how it is going to hurt or make one uncomfortable."



Campus Voice

If you have watched the television (for something other than the IPL) or bothered to read the newspapers, you would know that Arnie Hazare, (a former driver with the Indian Army who has the useful Indian talent for sitting cross-legged for long periods), vowed to fast until death or until the Government agreed to discuss the Jan Lokpal bill in Parliament.

Similarly, not so recently, but on the gloomy morning of February 21, 2011, the day after Felicity '11 concluded, the students of IIT-H too sat down (not cross-legged though!) along the road from the library to the NBH with the following thoughts in mind:

"We are here, not because we are law-breakers; we are here in our efforts to become law-makers." — Emeline Paskhurst.

The students had unanimously decided to ask for a "well-deserved holiday" by carrying out a 'Yondhokar' protest, a 'dharma', for the first time in the history of the college. The protest began around 7 A.M. Students started pouring in slowly and slowly, some still rubbing their eyes and others with ruffled hair.

Now, the time has passed since the dharna took place, its success or failure still remaining an ambiguity. So, we (the PINS team) decided to ask people around the campus for their views on the justifiability of the protest and its suitability for expression of student opinion.

Some of the opinions that we received in favour of the protest were, "Sometimes, you need the professors to know that the college is functioning 50% due to the students and they are the building blocks of the college", "After all the late night hard work and missing classes and getting our grades down, we deserved a holiday — one day, at least!"

Also, many jokingly pointed out that the dharna should have been conducted in the evening as everyone was extremely tired and needed

Post 2014

In regard to the 'representing concerns of the college' bit of things, the next five years of the magazine (for it is now a magazine more than a newsletter) serve this role to a better capacity. Barring two years where an over-abundance of fiction and going online-only without fixed issues released seems to have transformed Ping! into a glorified blog. These years show IIIT as an elaborate ecosystem, with musings on Identity in college, debates and clarifications about the Institute committees, and impassioned almost-obituaries for beloved canteens. It shares concerns about the impact of students as future technocrats on an increasingly privacy-starved world. Editorials and articles alike question Institutions. And there are lighthearted articles too, but these, too, are largely campus related in some sense, indicating a running narrative.

2014 is also the year Ping! went online-only (sans Volume-Issues as well) for two years, effectively ditching the Volume-Issue numbering model - thus making it easier to choose this as the split date, alongside it lining up nicely with the first five - next five narrative.

As a lot of this is in recent memory, and the most noticeable change is in the increased themes represented by the non-reportive style of the magazine, we shall focus on those, skimming over the articles and stories themselves. While this is less a history of IIIT as the previous section was, and more history of Ping!, it tries to bring about a connection between sentiments on campus, and its corresponding expression in text.

Existential concerns; On Social and Personal Identity in College

Existential dread is rooted at the heart of IIITian culture, be it expressed through confessions, randirona, Life posts, or discussions at JC at 3 AM. What are we doing? What's the point of this degree? Will we even get a degree? What's the point of running whatever club, or focusing on extra-curriculars, when nobody cares about it? Getting rejected all over the spectrum is commonplace - research internships, placements, Master's Programs. Even when such barriers are surpassed, students are often left wondering if it was all worth it. Do we have any impact on anything substantive? Is the CV at the end of four years a definitive identity we have to bear?

Who are We? and Memento (October 2016) are two articles that tackle this problem, albeit from different perspectives. Where the former is concerned with an individual's identity in a resume-driven world, the latter explores a student's relationship with the college in terms of impact made, and is a broader exploration of the futility often experienced in a place that often feels like a rudderless ship going in circles.

Mental Health is a crucial part of this discussion. Imposter syndrome is a persistent problem in all major colleges across the world, and IIIT is no different. Keeping that in mind, Ping! has tried to raise awareness, with a coverage of three primary magazine articles:

-> *Depression Denied* (November 2017) talks of the importance of finding correct ways of dealing with depressed students, and not simply sweeping them under the misclassification rug of 'nihilistic outlook'

-> *Mental Health, or the Lack Thereof (January 2019)* gives a more comprehensive view of depression than is usually presented - tackling the “ugly side” of it as well. It also discusses the kind of changes that are needed, along with tips on functioning while depressed.

-> *The Healthiness of Depression (July 2019)* is atypical in that it reflects a personal story of “coming to terms” with one’s depression. It also provides some crucial bits of information on IIIT’s mechanisms to deal with mental health.



Ethical Concerns with Developments in technology - and why IIITians should care

As researchers and future developers in a top tech Institute in the country, debates and concerns on the ethics of technological advances are very much a consideration that should be made - or so say the articles that fall under this theme. And with the recent global concerns over privacy, mass-surveillance, and police states - it’s not hard to understand why. These are all articles that either directly or indirectly tell us to think about the social consequences of our creations.

Data and IIIT (April 2017) talks of privacy - its importance, the ethics of data-mining, and the importance of personal data. It then goes on to college-specific examples of such practices, elaborating with an a simple example (and history lesson for basically everyone post-2014) the issues surrounding such “accepted” practices:

“... instances just show how vulnerable we are in the current world, where the data that makes us us is no longer solely in our control. **Data in IIIT does not have a history of remaining secure either. Case in point: The 2014 incident when the ISAS grades portal was breached into and all information was uploaded online**”.

Understanding privacy (November 2017) and *A Twisted way to learn (April 2017)* are far more generalised “Eye to the Future” articles, but these, too, come with the self-same warning label. The former is in the context of Aadhar, raising arguments on biometrics that had been colouring mailing lists and inboxes at the time over a separate, but related, IIIT-Biometric issue. The latter is an equally generalised piece on limitations

of Machine Learning and biases, but raises the same call to action:

“As researchers, It is important to not get swayed by the cool ML prototypes and hypes ... What we really need today is not mindless application of of algorithms to problems, without any big picture insight into the change we are bringing on to our world. Instead, we need to actively address these issues, and hope that we are able maximize what we truly ought to: humanity.”

Research Ethics and Why IIIT Needs to Catch Up (April 2018) embodies in its entirety the spirit of this section. Covering this very topic, it takes a deep dive into the consequences of our research, and the mechanisms IIIT has - or doesn’t - in place to ensure ethical research.

I, Researcher

As researchers, It is important to not get swayed by the cool ML prototypes and hypes. To merely enlist a few big issues that plague ML based solutions,

1. Unknown “correct” objective.
2. Known-Hidden biases in data or lack of foresight about the data.
3. Lack of broad and real-world evaluation and testing methodologies.
4. Incomplete understanding of ethical, political and administrative implications and impact.

In a certain imagination of capitalism, it is said that consumers are said to express their preferences and values by how they choose to spend their money, what is termed as Dollar Voting. Similarly, perhaps, especially as programmers and computer scientists, we need to adopt *code voting*, ie. let our research and engineering work reflect our preferences and values, at least to the best of our abilities. Some of the first steps towards this are already been taken by some of the leaders and visionaries of AI, who all assembled in Asilomar Conference on Beneficial AI in January 2017, at the initiative of Future of Life Institute, and came up with the Asilomar AI Principles as a broad consensus on some 23 principles that we researchers and entrepreneurs must try imbibe in our efforts.

What we really need today is not mindless application of of algorithms to problems, without any big picture insight into the change we are bringing on to our world. Instead, we need to actively address these issues, and hope that we are able maximize what we truly ought to: humanity. ■

“A Twisted way to Learn”,
concluding paragraphs

Commentary on Institutions and Institutional Discussions

People like complaining. People like complaining about a lot of things, and in IIT it is, more often than not, directed at the Institute and related bodies - the attendance policy is terrible, DisCo doesn't make sense, the admin doesn't listen to Parliament, Parliament doesn't help students, and so on and so forth. These may be justified, or not - but some issues snowball into problems big enough worth either separate investigation, or dedicated ranting spaces (with citations).

And there's a multitude of such articles:

There is *On the Wrong Side of Disco, Parts I and II (April 2017)*, where the first attempts to explain what DisCo actually is and how it works, clearing the air on a controversial topic; and the second focuses on the student experience of actually going through the process. The related Commentary on Disciplinary Committee Decisions (November 2017) is a critical look at a list of DisCo decisions that had been released earlier that semester, questioning specific aspects and the general opacity of decision-making.

Cracked-mia: Visible Cracks in Academia (January 2019) talks of issues in academic research, including specific instances within college but also about research and academia in general.

PT: Physical "Training" to "Torture" (website-only, April 2018) raises long-expressed issues about the (then) PT system, it's ineffectuality, and the inflexibility it posed to students. It is worth noting that the revamped system was introduced in the semester following, incorporating some suggestions in the article.

Student constituted bodies and Institutions get their share of flak too. Skipping over all the Parliament stuff - there's been enough of that to get the trend - we find *Everything's Not*

Right with the SACB (website-only, March 2018) that raises concerns with the functioning of the erstwhile board. The body was dissolved soon after.

Just before the year's admissions season, *A Meeting With The Apex: Issues with the Body on Top (website-only, July 2018)* expresses often-felt concerns with the standing model of the Apex-Mentor system in college, followed by some suggestions that are reported to have been incorporated afterwards.

Bollywoodized Freshers (November 2017) summarises its message as:

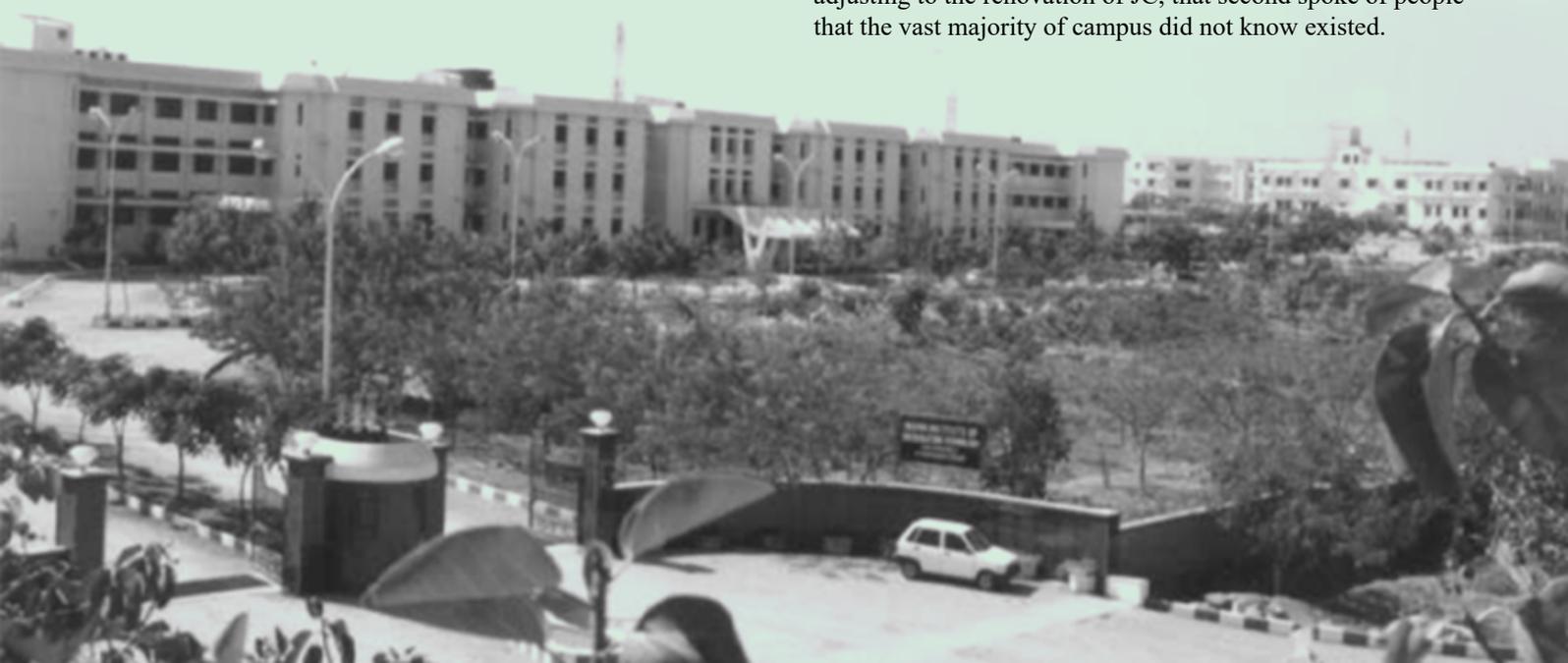
"The Freshers is the guilty pleasure of students of our institute – our Bollywood, our yearly dose of public celebration of mediocrity, repetition and sexism"

Looking behind otherwise closed doors: Investigative Articles

These are the stories we love finally publishing (doing them is a different matter), the one-year-delayed "scoops" that sucked the soul out of those researching these for publication. They may be matters of concern to us all, but with an effort barrier few wish to surpass. On the other hand are matters of no evident concern that do have a lot of history and context worth revealing.

The Water Bill (July 2019) is the goliath. A prime example of the first type of article, this is characterised by the scale of the issue that involved people not paying fees in retaliation, constant pinging of all sources (the engineering department, parliament, the protesters, multiple meetings), and the year it took to verify and finally publish all the information. A team of first years with a then Chief Editor spent a whole year finally compiling the comprehensive issue with updates that nobody other than some members of parliament really knew till the end.

New Canteen, Newer Problems and *The Invisible People Behind OBH (January 2019)* are both examples of the latter. Where the first spoke of problems vendors were having adjusting to the renovation of JC, that second spoke of people that the vast majority of campus did not know existed.



MAGAZINES POST 2014



October 2015



April 2017



November 2017



April 2018



July 2019



January 2019

MARCH 2020

Articles centered in and around Campus Life

All conflict does not a story make. A complete picture of IIIT as a living, breathing body of students requires more than coverage of ideological debate; it needs stories of the campus population (dogs), of the couples situation, the state of clubs, the food scene, the gaming scene, odd hostel rules. It calls for entirely unnecessary statistical analysis of the effectiveness of Dating Apps on campus. A reader from outside college should be able to appreciate just how bored UG2k17 got during a three-week activity period.

All of these can be found in abundance in the magazine. To list the articles specifically mentioned above:

- > *Isle of Dogs* (January 2019)
- > *Coupling-Decoupling* (November 2017)
- > *The Club Renaissance* (April 2018)
- > *#GGWP The Gaming Scene: Here and Now* (July 2019)
- > *The DLF Food Crawl* (July 2019)
- > *Hostel "Woahs!"* (July 2019)
- > *Mirror, Mirror on the wall, can I get a match at all?* (July 2019)
- > *The Induction Schedule in Review* (April 2018)

Looking beyond the themes

It's not all been about themes, and there's a lot skipped over in the incredibly short summary provided above. I would like to pause here, though - and consider, in equally short snippets, some things from the past 4 years that have had a ton of Impact, whether or not they fit into any of the "themes"

The ones with a visible impact

The section must necessarily begin with *And it was all Yellow – A Tribute to the Yellow Box* (November 2017). Seminal in that it is till date the only recorded instance of a Ping! article directly contributing to major change on campus. It was an obituary for Yellow Box. However, an official in IIIT Administration happened to read it, and consequently took steps to bring the beloved canteen back.

The second is also particularly notable: The Cross Entry articles. Arguments had been informally presented when the two-parter - *Co-ed Hostels: What Do They Imply?* and *A Case for Co-ed Hostels at IIIT* (April 2018) was released. The rest, has since been ongoing (or not. Check out the Editorial).

Echoes - The Revamped Newsletter

The other major change that has been introduced of late is the reintroduction of The Newsletter, Echoes. Modelled more after the Echoes of yore, it seeks to fill in the gaps - cover the news, give context to articles, and generally for pieces that cannot be covered in the regular magazine, due to constraints of space, time, or manpower. It serves as a historical record for the college, much like Ping! has tried in the past; but this time, hopefully, to a better extent.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I would like to refer to "*The story of Ping!*", published in Volume II Issue 4, as the founders and co-founders of the magazine were leaving. In particular, this particular statement that stands out as crucial to its continuation as a Media Body by and for the students. ■

the torch, to write, to connect. Ping! though isn't the tool of a handful, it's the platform of everyone



A visual representation of the author at 6:05 AM