



ZOO MATES

IMPACT OF HOSTEL LIFE ON THE BEHAVIOUR AND PERSONALITIES OF THE STUDENTS

Communication Design Project III
DEP - 702

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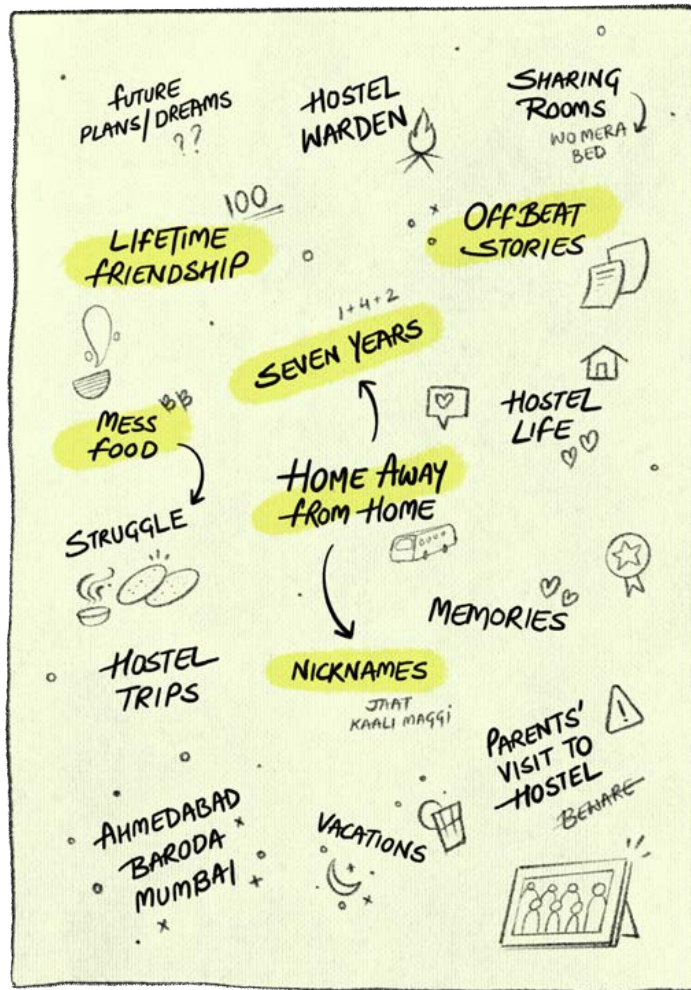
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Introduction

I have spent around seven years living in hostels. I have seen fellow hostel residents struggling, enjoying, doing all the chores by themselves, studying just hours before exams, getting up minutes before morning classes, and what not! And I found out that a lot of other people could relate to this too. Therefore, I wanted to comment in a satirical and comical way, using my skills to write short snippets and visually illustrate content for the same.

Just to give a little background, I started my college life in Ahmedabad from CEPT University. I used to live in university hostels, but I dropped out of that college after a year and shifted to Vadodara. I took admission in MS University of Baroda; I spent my next four years there studying and living in university hostels again. It was my home away from home, and I made a lot of memories there. I learnt a lot of new things, gained countless memories and made some lifelong friends. Then after I shifted to Mumbai after getting admission in IIT Bombay, continuing my hostel life. It has been a tremendous journey, something I am going to cherish for life!

The need for hostels

University education is no longer limited to the two conventional roles of teaching and knowledge development. People also learned that intelligence alone will not suffice. University education will lead to the students' personal growth by presenting them with opportunities to understand how to co-operatively live and function together, so they can become ideal individuals. Such people are a vital benefit to humanity by becoming the potential pioneers of different walks of life. They are to play an important role of nation-building. Therefore, the University has an intrinsic obligation for them for the growth and development of the nation as a whole. In a large degree, the growth of the whole community would rely on the form of facilities and the standard of education rendered accessible to the students on the university campus during the time of their studenthood.

The concept of hostels

The Encyclopedia Britannica refers to 'Hostel' as the ancient term for an Hotel, and was then used to define a house that offers housing for students and others. The term 'hostel' may have been taken from the term 'host' whose basic sense is, 'person who entertains visitors.' The word 'hostel' could have been used for a 'home,' as 'inn' is the spot that visitors will reside from everywhere. Later "hostel" was

strictly used for a place where the students resided for learning purposes.

According to my understanding, a hostel is a place where students come to reside for study purposes. Formal education is imparted to the students in the schools, colleges, or universities but in a hostel, the students stay at night to take rest even during day hours when they do not have classes and prepare for their courses or do any personal reading. Besides having an academic environment and providing board and lodging facilities, the hostels also offer recreational facilities. Hostels have some rules which the residents have to comply with. A warden is appointed to see whether the rules of the hostels are properly maintained and the residents do not have any difficulty. In some hostels, tutors are also appointed to coach the residents.

Source: Hotel Information with Online Reservation And Billing System for Yuj Inn Hostel, ITAE

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Hostel 12/13/14, IIT Bombay, Mumbai

Importance of hostels in education

Hostels at universities have played an significant role in extending and disseminating higher education in our region. We have provided many young people and women opportunities to pursue higher education by offering affordable lodging and mess-facilities. Students who have no higher education services as they stay in a hostel. Hostels also have a very favorable research environment. The hotels also build a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood and bring citizens of different castes, creeds, and faith closer to each other which eventually contributes to national integration. Living in a hostel provides growing educational opportunities. People from all walks of life have highlighted, advocated and acknowledged the importance of hostels in the lives of young men and women who will in future take on a nation's responsibilities.

When higher education is considered to be a method of obtaining valuable knowledge and a way of providing the qualified human capital needed by the government, the hostels provide students with board and lodging facilities and other facilities conducive to a comfortable atmosphere so that they can learn properly in order to achieve the objectives intended for them to prepare correctly in order to achieve the objectives intended for them. This is a hostel that offers the students the chance to stay together and build a friendship with other students.

It is only by a friendship with another that the character and nature of a man may grow harmoniously fitting him to function as a good citizen of the state of a community. This is important in every world, but maybe none more so than in India, where social life poses particular problems due to the complexity of Indian society and the cleavages between ethnic, political, caste and regional classes that prefer to cluster together in order to preserve their characteristic clothes, food, traditions and distrust one another.

Generally speaking, group-living can lead to health effects provided there is a friendly atmosphere, and there is someone to provide proper guidance. It is expected the result of group-living in a hostel will be good. We will turn the people into productive citizens. When the hostel's environment isn't good, it can transform its inhabitants into dacoits, drunkards, traffickers and what not. Youth is the period where the persona is moulded and whatever mark one may like to impose on it easily takes. When the market is successful, so the result is expected to be nice.

In general, a university hostel is an essential educational center under the guidance of people of exceptional scholarship, mature and extensive experience and devotion to the cause of education. This is a 'mini-world' in which young people rub each other's shoulders and learn how to live affectionately like brothers and sisters breaking the

narrow domestic boundaries, how to support others, how to respond to unusual circumstances, how to resist selfishness, how to manage feelings in stressful conditions, how to value the community, traditions, languages of others; and above all how to make reasonable decisions. If the purpose of education can be to train three 'H's, that is, head, heart and hands, and if colleges and universities train the youth's 'heads' and 'hands,' hostels can be said to provide 'heart' training which is much more important than the two above.

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A typical room of hostel 12, IIT Bombay, Mumbai

A hostel gives the student more than the classroom does: a rich environment in interaction and fellowship, exercise in interpersonal interactions, normal contexts in which to establish shared interests and learn conversational skills without the pressure in academic rivalry or the possibility of failure. There the subject profits from debates with informal groups. In partnering for others against self-determined objectives, he will gain personal fulfilment. The hostel provides an excellent opportunity to inculcate virtues such as cooperativeness, sociability, accommodation with various groups of citizens, adjustment with any food quality, adjustment in a normal setting, acceptance, etc. Most beliefs, perceptions, names, actions, and patterns are captured mainly by informal peer group interactions.

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The student tries to imitate the group of peers, and thus the peer group is the determining factor in personal development. Nowhere is this process fostered in such a powerful manner as in a hostel-like living unit. As the student is separated from school, he wants to build a 'home away from home' in his hostel. His desire to build a 'family' pushes him into the road of self-dependence as he alone needs to make a choice about his job, with all manner of change and cost management, etc. This is a spot to rest where the student can exercise his secret talents in different ways.



The management of the hostel may strive to improve student leadership by assigning them some responsibility for the hostel management and other hostel activities. Therefore, it can be found that the hostels can have some beneficial and constructive effect on the residents' personalities, providing the hostels are well run and cared for and sustain the comfortable and conducive environment. Therefore the institutions that make no provision for hostels could not serve the youth to the extent expected of them.

Hostel 12/13/14, IIT Bombay, Mumbai

To add better knowledge to my current perspectives, I saw a few Bollywood films and television shows which are based on this student and hostel lives.

Hostel Daze

The first one being Hostel Daze. Aired in December 2019, TVF's Hostel Daze is a series that portrays the lives of the students at the hostel and also brings us through the adventures of four wing-mates — Ankit, Chirag, Jaat, and Jhaatu. They encounter various difficulties, so they solve several issues, including ragging, learning family barriers to strain. The key leads move through this current period of insecurity of life and emotions. One will get a hint of their first semester in the hostel in the first five episodes.

Hostel Daze is like every other hostel life-based web-series. It is a situation-based series that will carry you through all the stuff in a normal hostel and college life that happen. Unusually and unexpectedly the characters, namely Jaat, Ankit and Chirag, are now roommates. They undergo ragging, tests, share knowledge regarding dating with their senior counterpart Jhantoo. Often, they are all on a search to get famous and create a reputation among their friends on campus. In some instances, however, I feel like the series was extended with the same tired cliché plot we have seen before.

Each one of Hostel Daze's characters is relatively distinct, and almost everyone will tickle the funny bone. The comic timing of the leads to arrive is commendable. Those comments like something would have you on the floor laughing. The casting and dialogue-writing are among a few areas where Hostel Daze got the act right. Catching new faces has definitely become an add-on for the public. The show would have performed far easier had the creator concentrated on scenarios that were both more creative and practical.



Image source: amazon prime video

As three idiots and Chhichhore, this TVF web series often shows the blatant ragging in a laughter uproar. The boys are stripped by their seniors to their under-wears, forced to wear the inner garments of women, pressured to be hugged, and allowed in the same state to walk around the hostel.

Kota Factory

Aired in April 2019, revolving around the grovelling IIT exams, TVF's Kota Factory takes the conventional path, showcasing the plight of the students like us, the faces that blend in the crowd, in a way that elevates the ordinary to the extraordinary. This does not exalt or demean the program of education; this merely presents truth in an unflinchingly honest and logical manner.

Kota Factory is an unorthodox web show, as it dares to be about the students of orthodox India. Some men. The Workers. The potential nine to five-ers. Some who make peace with such a world which creates more "creative forms" than IITians unwittingly. Like several other show, the show locates civilization inside its servitude. There, the student is too distracted to adjust to the inside – a new place, a parentless space, sticky evenings, hierarchies of coaching classes – even to imagine dreaming of the outside. You've got ordinary boys and girls asking whether to move to better classes, or to the more popular coaching

colleges, rather than thinking over whether they're at least in there. The show also portrays the difficulties faced by students who choose to live away from home, from their parents and a comfy life. How they struggle to adjust to a new place among unfamiliar faces. Amid tension of performing better in their academics they have to do all their chores, manage their mental state of wellbeing and what not!

TVF's Kota Factory and its breezy five-episode season celebrates our lopsided education system, or even endorses it. Or Kota in particular, epicentre of institutional dream selling. It only shows the young people who want to tackle it.



Image source: indian express

Vaibhav, the protagonist and his mates from the Prodigy Classes serve as a peephole in a world without the luxury of being accessorized by plot twists and creamy narratives of falling in love.

However, the disclaimers about "tread carefully" are built into the physicality of the show. There's the powerful monochromatic palette, which can be construed as a nod to two years of Kota's 2 lakh teenaged IIT- aspirants colourless and tunnel-vision life. Nevertheless, the final colour gap suggests that the black-and-whiteness may have had more to do with the emotional circularity of Vaibhav as a Kota climber. Then there's a stinging monolog in Jeetu Sir's very first episode, a character dropped into the factory as a tribute to the stereotype of "cool professor" in cinema. His monologue – one that mercilessly deconstructs the world is not only a rude surprise to novice Vaibhav, but also an eye-opener for those hoping to waltz into Kota under a canopy of rose-tinted college films.

Laakhon Mein Ek

Aired in October 2017, "Laakhon Mein Ek" is a sad story about a guy sent away by his parents to study for IIT entry exams. There is a lot of abuse, aggression and swear words. There are a handful of smiles tossed in as well, but they are part of the plot and the series does not try to trade off for humour anywhere.

The protagonist is "Aakash from Raipur," who has little aptitude to crack the exam but is forced by his parents to train for it. He arrived at Genius Infinity, a residential school where the alpha males are the men wandering about with their noses in books and geeks. We see him working his darn best, but IITs are simply beyond his control. The series is tapering through the disappointment of knowing you are not strong enough. This would connect deeply with the millions who went through "coaching" at IIT and could barely hold their eyes open in training. Even after hours of work, stuff wouldn't make sense, and just as you figured you had solved one question, you'd figure out the others were still on the next line. If you were fortunate you were into something new and put aside the alien Physics-Chemistry-Maths. If not, you stepped through one of the thousands of dubious colleges of engineering where ragging is a way of existence.

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Director Abhishek Sengupta shows a knack for portraying tension and anger. We see Aakash moving closest to the edge when his grades do not change given its best efforts. He studies in washrooms, studies as he makes a ruckus with his mates and then studies some more. The original set-up of a happy-go-lucky child imitating Amitabh Bachchan fades away to be substituted by a terrified child barrelling through an unseen future. The series is to be remembered for two mates of Aakash, Chudail and Bakri. Chudail is responsible for roughly 70 per cent of the amusement of the series and is the guy with the peon setting. He's perhaps the only guy



Image source: amazon prime video

at Genius Infinity who loves his time and is the ideal complement to the nerds around him. Bakri is a rustic kid in the village with the right reasons, the right steps in dance and the right language. He even has the world's best one-sided love tale that finishes all too early so we at least get a few poems out of it.

To conclude, the series gives us a number of insights into how the IIT coaching classes have a hierarchy structure and you are regarded with little regard if you are not a brilliant student. You see plenty of stereotypes from the hostel experience, including scenes of abuse or where hostellers bug the shit out of the warden or highlight the faculty's different teaching peculiarities.

Chhichhore

Through this film about his tenure as an engineering student and the lessons one knows outside of the class, director Nitesh Tiwari gives the perfect tribute to his college days. Chhichhore operates on two planes.

The first is nostalgic, on an engineering college campus, of blurry memories of after-hours hostel life. This gives a warning on another plane regarding the desire to meet the grade, to measure up to set standards and to be prepared for achievement, disappointment and all in between.

Aniruddh Pathak is a qualified professional who currently has custody of his teenage family. Aniruddh has unintentionally filled Raghav's aspirations as he appears for his common entrance exams. Plans are created to mark a degree which is sure-shot. Nonetheless, Raghav's mom, Maya comforts Raghav that the result is not as important as his goal. Raghav makes a wrong decision despite this. Seeing their son oscillate between life and death, Anirudh reaches into his memory bank and calls on his college mates to help him. The clique that dominated the roost at Hostel 4 and the annual inter-hostel sports rivalry took on the athletic mighty Hostel 3.



Image source: amazon prime video

They recount the tale of their hostel existence and try to relay important life lessons to Raghav by their encounters as the underdogs who sought to shift odds and throw off the mark of "losers." The story writers inculcate strength, mischief, laughter and cadence in the hostel scenes. To see hostel life steeped in friendly rivalry and pranking but not characterized by exhausting ragging is refreshing.

To conclude, there are two significant sections to the plot. One is about the adolescent child and how one can not only care about the consequences because the consequence is not as relevant as the initiative. And secondly, why hostel life is so extraordinary, teaching students so much in their experience at the college. The insight one receives there cannot be put on paper; it can just be felt.

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3 Idiots

The film "3 Idiots" is adapted from the best-selling novel by Chetan Bhagat, "5 Point Someone" which was screened with the dramatic comedy genre last 2009. It is a tale of friendship that started between three ambitious students of engineering - Farhan, Raju and Rancho. As the two searched for Rancho, all their memories and past experiences came rushing back from the binding of their pact till the last day that they saw Rancho. While they hunt, they uncover the mystery of Rancho, which throws their friend's whole reputation in a pit of uncertainty.

The film is an outstanding entertainer with a story that reaches one's spirit. In its unusual set-up in cinematography, it attracts the viewers, and reveals interchanges of past and present period. This allows the audience to speculate regarding the future consequences of the film, or whether to use these flashbacks to explain the story's present events.

The film can be called a movie by spirit and plot, particularly for the youth. It supports the idea that students should be able to select their career, and to pursue their desires and decide their future whatever they wish to become. It questions teachers and parents' narrow-mindedness in pressuring children to select the career they find acceptable, taking into consideration the prevalent view of that career in society. This often calls for the development

of curiosity and the derivation of enjoyment from everything a human does. Developing interest in that specific field is the secret to success in every sector and a man will enjoy his job. It is better to let the children make their own decisions regarding a future they're involved in or excited about.

The film discusses numerous societal problems, such as the Indian education system, the disparity between rich and poor, upholding the values and judgements of the family, and the materialistic perception of society. There are also plenty of ideals that the film reveals, some of which are the importance of loyalty, caring for your children, pursuing your goals and staying positive while confronted with challenges that are represented by its most famous line "All is well."

The film discusses numerous societal problems, such as the Indian education system, the disparity between rich and poor, upholding the values and judgements of the family, and the materialistic perception of society. There are also a plenty of other ideals that the film reveals in between.

The film draws one's attention to the most critical topic confronting today's academic environment, which is higher expectations and performance requested from the students by parents and teachers. The film discusses all the crucial problems and weaknesses in India's learning environment and calls for a drastic and positive reform in the country's existing educational process and structure.

The film "3 idiots" as a whole is a beautiful blend of human feelings, passion, achievement, disappointment, determination and struggle. The director has done a wonderful job of so skilfully increasing the critical topic. It attracts people of all kinds and ages.

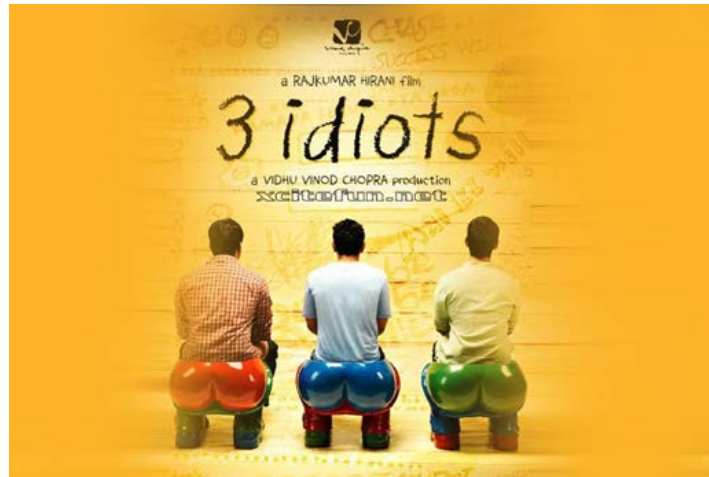


Image source: bollywood hungama

The End Of The Fucking World

Aired on Netflix in January 2018, the TV show is a tale of a self-diagnosed psychopath aged 17 years and the young girl he is willing to kill in cold blood. However, as she correctly cautioned, "The title shows us very clearly that this series does not have a pleasant ending." Each of its heartfelt moments highlighting first love, repressed childhood pain, and belonging, combined with the usual British sardonic style of the series, disguise the inescapable fact that these two roaming teenagers are in serious trouble with the law. These two risks imminent danger when Alyssa persuades our suspected murderer James to leave town with her.

Accidentally they wind up breaking into a serial rapist's home, Dr Clive Koch. As Koch returns home to see Alyssa sleeping in his room and lonely, he hits her. It is then that James comes out from under the pillow, armed with the newly acquired information of Koch's crimes and the hunting knife he was intending to use on Alyssa, and stabs him in the throat, causing Koch to bleed. The two cover their traces together as scientifically as possible. The cycle leads James to become emotionally and physically unstable as he is not the callous person, he believed he was and flee the scene eventually. They spend the remaining series as fugitives on the run, with their next step often becoming more emotionally unstable and messier than the last.

The remainder of the show attempts to unpack how two teens could become murder suspects at the forefront of a nationwide manhunt, including if as caught up in their misery as James and Alyssa did.

We discover during the series that James watched his mother drown while he was a kid planting a seed deep inside his amazing brain that he needed to be genetically imbalanced as he did not rescue her. Meanwhile, when she was a teenager, Alyssa's father left her, leaving her to a harsh stepfather and lazy parents, and persuaded that she is incapable of affection. They are teenagers who experience nothing but suffering in people.



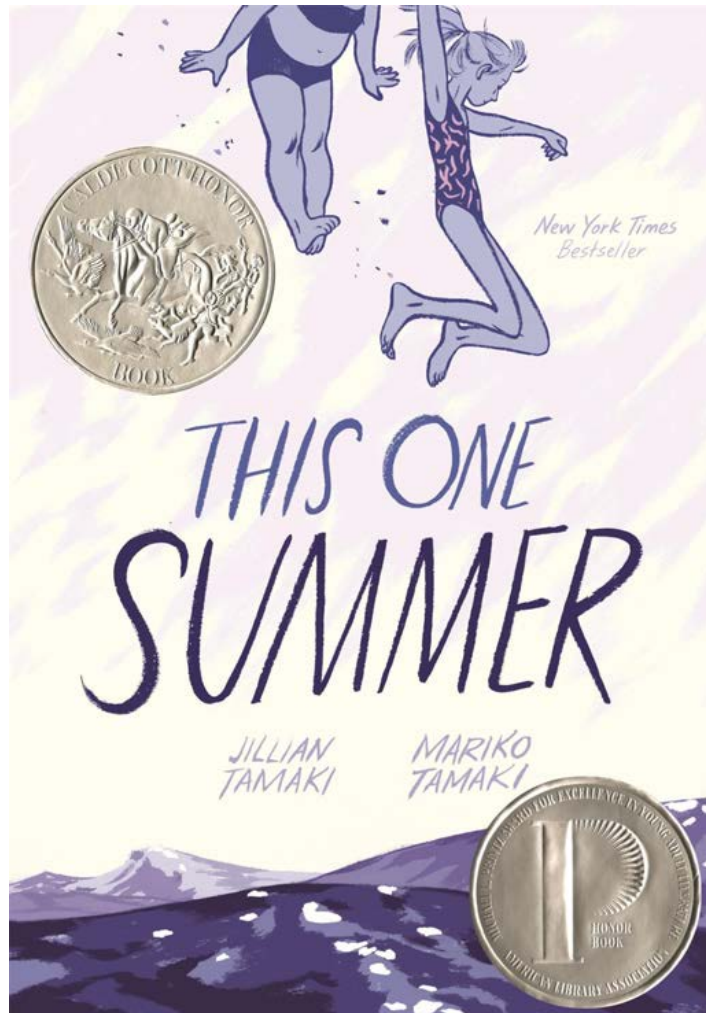
Image source: netflix

This One Summer

"This one summer" is a colourful slice-of-life book that beautifully portrays early teen's worries and slight anxieties. The illustrations are stunning, simplistic in form but so full of emotions and showcasing the beach's summer scene in a dramatic way. The novel is absolutely written in shades of blue, so occasionally reading it feels like staring at it underwater. The illustrator has done phenomenal work! The artworks are breath-taking.

Well, storyline growth or character creation isn't anything in the way, but it was the appeal of the tale to me. Life is not necessarily characterised by major realisations or sudden events; often, it is a gradual succession of interactions, errors, embarrassments and compassion.

The main character is rude to her parents, selfish, and a pitiful person who develops a crush on someone she is invisible to and spending a decent deal of summer alternating between sulking about frustration and giving in to the childlike pleasure of going out on holiday with a pal. All these things portrayed various aspects from my life at that period in one way or another, and because of this the narrative was filled with significance.



In particular, concern was the conflict between the main character and her parents. She cannot understand the sorrow and loneliness of her parents. The mother-daughter bond is complicated, so no compromise is imminent. Even, if anything this complex had all been bundled together at the end, it would have been frustrating.

The story's key theme appears to be the relationships as dynamic, complexities and ever-changing are. What I loved focusing about accompanied by such lovely drawings!

Master class by Neil Gaiman

To get a better idea about story writing and narration, I watched a series of lectures by Neil Gaiman in which he teaches the art of storytelling. "I dream ideas up and write them down" is the way Neil Gaiman explains his diverse methodology, and he honours librarians with cultivating a lifelong enjoyment of reading as an "equal kid born in libraries." Currently, as one of our time's most popular authors, his successful and critically praised plays combine styles, thus attracting all ages markets and earning awards of all kinds.

According to him, humans are fundamentally creatures that share tales. If you are talking to a friend or writing a book, you use the same resources to create a link, to inspire men, and to help them see the universe differently.

The following are a few things that are noted down from his class, which helped me in writing a better story for my illustrative book on hostel life.

Truth in fiction

In his masterclass, Neil Gaiman, who is famous as a writer for some brilliant novels, talks about how fiction is one of the most exciting phenomena which human beings have. Human beings are storytelling creatures, and stories are essential.

Stories are imperative as we convey the truth with stories. We use memorable lies to build these stories. We employ people who don't exist and things which didn't happen to them in places which aren't even there to communicate stories. The writer is telling the reader something important, something vital, which will stay with them forever using lies! And that's the magic of stories, the magic of fiction.

Provide precise, tangible sensory specifics such as, you should dream up a non-existent underwater tunnel.



Image source: masterclass

Nonetheless, if you explain the sewer scent and the constant leakage of water, you bring the reader through a tangible encounter that adds to the meaning of the truth. Incorporate the common in the new, such as having the reader rooted in activities they do recognize is as critical as adding new, fascinating components.

Sources of inspiration

The things we read, the songs we listen to, the situations we experience, the people we encounter and out of them writer grow beautiful stories. The influences of a writer are all sorts of things. The writer should open him/herself to everything, as ideas come from subverting the familiar/expectations. Imagine stories about people around you, the people you don't know. Ideas come from the confluence.

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Finding your voice

Style of writing is the stuff you get wrong, the part where you are not perfect. One should start with imitation; the most important thing is you start somewhere. Mistakes maybe are the most important thing for a writer. And after you are done writing a million words, you will have your voice. You learn more after finishing a failure, so finish things!

Developing the story

How does one know if their ideas have legs if it could go somewhere? If anything, which keeps you flipping the pages and does not make you feel cheated at the end, then your story is legit. "And then what happened?" is what will keep the reader interested. When starting from scratch, write down everything you know. The writer should know what the story is about, a sort of theme. Create conflict as a writer, specify what do your characters want; characters with mutually exclusive characteristics.

Short fiction

An excellent short story is a magic trick. Imagine your brief account as the last chapter of a novel and write it exactly like that. The fewer words the writer can use to write a story, the better. The compression, the economy, all of these things are good. Writers should use short stories to practice their craft.

Dialogue and character

Dialogue and character in a story, amount to the same thing. Figuring out what your characters sound like, how they talk, etc. is really important; because the dialogue is the character. A good dialogue is like making the reader smile, making them see things, moving the story along and most importantly, it is telling about the people who they are saying it to. The characters you are writing about becomes a part of you and are separate from you at the same time. You need to know your characters well enough if they would do certain things, therefore trust your characters.

Find the part of you that is the character, whether the character is a murderer or a policeman. There will be times when you have to write about people whom you have not met or talked to or people from cultures you do not know or people from professions you don't understand, therefore do your research. Also, when you've too many characters lying around in your story, then you'll have to help your reader, by giving every character something different from the rest of the characters in the story; doing so will help the characters to be memorable.

No matter what which genre you write in; please take the time to talk about your characters in detail. Think of who they are, what they desire and what could hinder them from having what they want. That though, no matter what story

you're telling, it's the character who creates the atmosphere and suspense and anticipation, not the storyline. Come up with a collection of intriguing, troubled characters, and it doesn't say how fantastic the writing will be.

Worldbuilding

There are two ways you can introduce a character; they can be static, or they can be on the move. A plot is something we have never seen before, something which makes the characters more interesting.

The joy of world-building in fiction is like the joy of getting to play god because as an author, you get to build the world. Story writing is an act of magical creation. An author should smuggle in details from their own life, alter the reality you have seen or experienced. In a story, moments of truth create credibility. Also, allow your characters to discover the rules of your world, and they discover those by making mistakes or by taking advantage of those rules.

Descriptions

Tell readers as much as you like. To describe something, set a scene for people, or define a place, or specify a gate. And assuming that the readers know general locations/things, describe what makes your places/things in your story different from what they already know so that it evokes

emotion and make these things memorable. When you are writing a description, the most important thing is to find something which appeals to the senses.

Humour

Humour in anything you do is always good; whether it is broad or subtle, is always vital. Sometimes it can be dry, or sometimes it can be overt because humour is recognition. Humour is that moment which was there all the time, but now someone has articulated it, and they have articulated it in a way which you have never seen before. And sometimes it is just the joy of unexpected.

To make something enjoyable, twist the cliché. Deploy funny words at proper places to bring out the humour, ending with funny words is always important.

Genre

An author should understand the reader's expectations. It is quite possible to look at fiction and not get the genre. There's a difference in a novel set in American wild west and a cowboy novel, and there is the difference between a book set in the intelligence community and a spy story. And if the author doesn't understand that, it will wind up disappointing the readers, confusing the publishers, etc. Learn the rules in

order to break them. When you are writing fiction, you need to know more than the reader, although you don't need to know everything. Sail against the expectations, get out of your comfort zone.

Comics

Once you have an idea and start analyzing the proposal in your mind, the positives and the concept's limitations, it's where you start to find out which way the strategy will work better. Yet you do have a whole different field of terrain when you come to comics. We get to use images and phrases to attempt and achieve something inside the reader's mind that you will not be able to do in pros and movies.

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Start with making thumbnails and figuring out how much information you want to give to the readers in each frame and pages. Scriptwriting in a comic is like writing a letter to the artist, the message should inspire them, enthuse them and describe what the author is doing and why is he doing it.

The page in comics is a unit. The problem with comics is that you cannot put something important on the right-hand page; you can't put a plot on a right-hand page. Because if it is going to be a surprise, put it on a left-hand page. Let people turn the page and find the things.

Dealing with writer's block

If you are experiencing a writer's block, don't just look at your blank page or keyboard! Do something else, maybe go for a walk, or a run, go swimming, go gardening, play with children, explore the world. Then come back and pretending you have never read your draft before, start from the beginning and read it through. Giving yourself a deadline helps in writer's block; sometimes it is the time crunch which lets you focus.

Editing

Writing is a two-fold process; first is creating and second is fixing or editing. The first thing you do as a writer, is you explode, you explode onto the page. The story is an

explosion, and once it is done, then you get to think about it. Think about what works and what doesn't work. When your first draft ready, reread it with a set of new eyes. And don't obsess over perfection, because perfection doesn't happen in this universe, it is what we aspire.

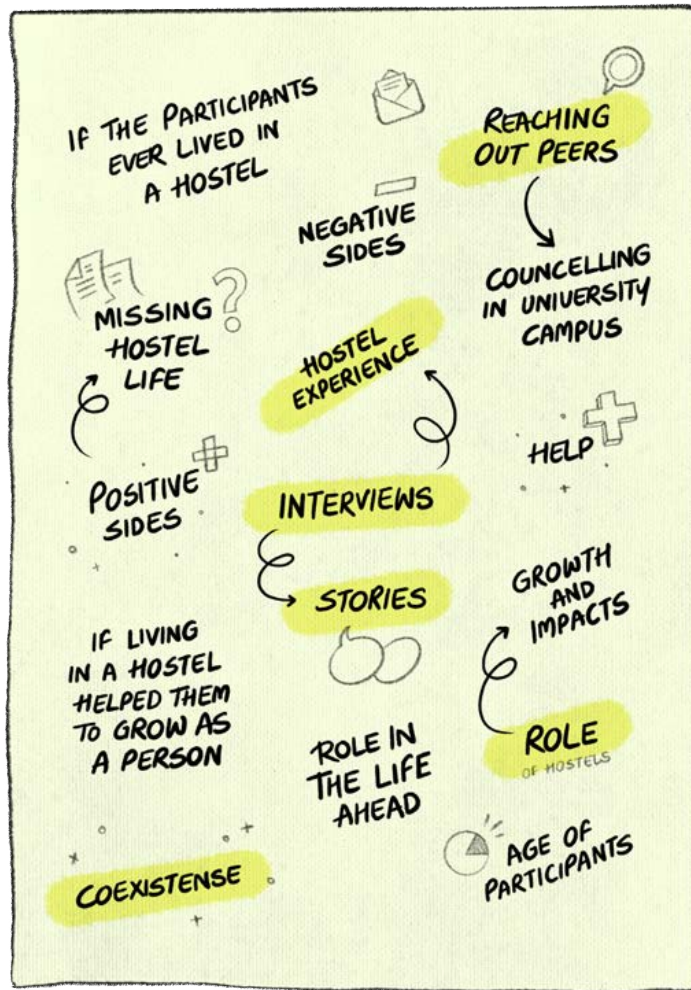
Rules for writers

The first thing is you have to write. Secondly, you have to finish what you are writing. Having finished what you have done, send it out to the world so that somebody can publish it. These days the internet broadens your scope. And when you finish your first thing, start the next one, you keep going! That's the trick.

The writer's responsibilities

The writer's responsibility is to tell authentic and honest stories. Tell as well as you can and tell as many people as you can. To encapsulate as much as you can, the things which you believe.

Writing is a two-fold process; first is creating and second is fixing or editing. The first thing you do, is you explode, you explode onto the page.



Primary Study

Interviewing people for the first time and asking them about their hostel life experience was difficult, since many of them did not live in hostels during their college life in the first place and secondly many of them were not comfortable sharing their experience with a stranger.

So, I reached out to my peers to get stories from their lives. And it was interesting to find that most of them have been positively impacted by the lives they lived in hostels. Many of them also shared interesting stories from their times in hostels. Since, it was not easy to reach people during the lockdown period personally, an online survey was conducted to gather information. And the summary of the data is shared on the following pages.

A lot of them talked about how living in hostels during college life plays a major role in the life ahead, and also the importance of hostels in education. Majority of the stories narrate the positive sides, while a few others talk about the negative sides of the same. There are people who enjoyed their time being in hostels, and then there are those who definitely didn't like it.

As one of the interviewee stated “The first time I had the experience of living in a hostel was in my undergraduate college. I can safely say that hostel life has had nothing short of a transformative impact on my life. I have learnt so much, made so many friends, faced so many challenges, and by the time I graduated, I was a different person altogether.

Among the most important lessons, hostel life teaches you is self-reliance and co-existence. You make friends, and they are there for you. You help them out too. You make some possible life long friendships. However, you have to learn to look after yourself and be responsible for yourself. You come away with a deeper understanding of people at least within your age group and become more empathetic. This is a sort of parallel education going on that nobody really teaches you, but you learn from experience. You learn whom to trust and who not to, and your beliefs of right and wrong evolve. You make bittersweet memories that you may look back on, as your perfect moments or your hard-learned lessons. All of these are an essential part of the human experience and make you a well-rounded person.

I am glad and very grateful to have had a hostel experience that threw all sorts of lessons, challenges, joys and sorrows my way and helped me become a slightly better version of myself.”

- Prason Dhapola, Student, IIT Hyderabad



Interviewee: Prason Dhapola during his hostel days

“I still remember my first day of shifting into my hostel room that accommodated a group of four in a space big enough only for a bed and a cupboard for each. For someone living away from home for the first time, one would think of better living options.

But I still remember my thoughtful roommates and the warm friendships I developed with my neighbours that made me fit right in within a week's time. That point onwards my perspective of the twelve odd years as a growing adult changed drastically. I sketched around the different corners of the facility, ran errands to fill water bottles, befriended the canteen helpers and soon enough, my hostel was home for me. It was there that I learnt to work independently and keep myself motivated. I developed ways to deal with loneliness and learnt how to keep it from getting the better of me. Living between different kinds of hostel mates taught me to value the great people from the good and eventually develop friendships that last a lifetime.

My hostel days have really helped me turn my life around when it comes to blooming relationships and thriving against adversities. When a student decides to live in a hostel, I would honestly want them to think of it to be an experience that will build them up for life.”

- Deeksha Honawar, Alumnus, MSU Baroda

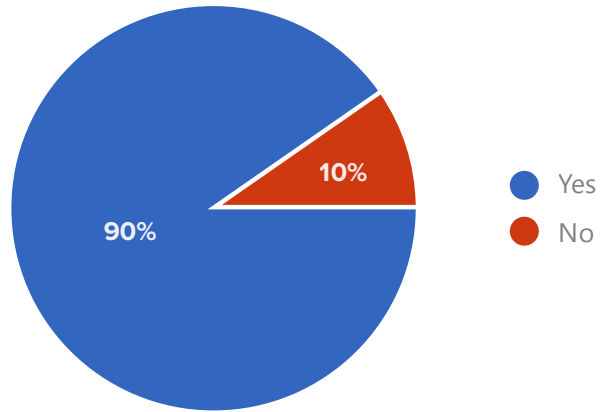
“I can fully well say that hostel life indeed does have a significant impact on anyone. For better or for worse, staying home away from home is quite a unique experience. Firstly, we learn independence, co-existence, socialising, group studying, to name a few. Then, living entirely by yourself as a student brings a sense of frugality in our minds on how to manage and save on expenses even with little means.

Also, it brings a sense of neatness, a sense of self, especially more so in single solo rooms and you realise how important hygiene is, right from personal hygiene, laundry to taking care of the room.

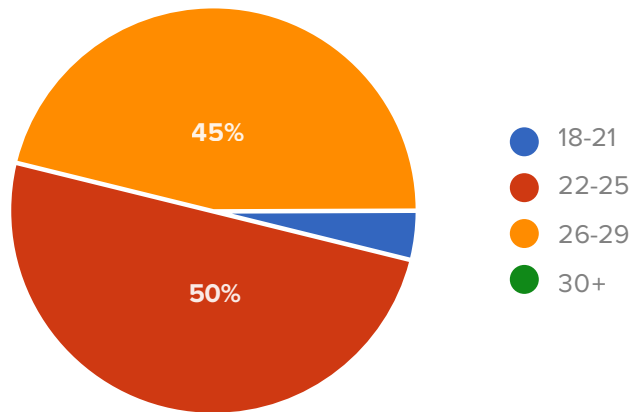
It also gives us unbounded freedom to do anything we want but also gives an opportunity to learn how valuable this liberty is and how we shouldn't misuse it. Hostel life has given us a chance to celebrate various different festivals together and create many happy memories.

Organising, celebrating and concluding many events help us learn how to manage large gatherings together, which eventually shall help us later on. Lastly, it helps us to learn how to be civilised, which is an essential aspect to living in a society and brings about an overall development in one's personality with regard to living with students together.”

- Amogh Inamdar, Student, IIT Bombay



If they **ever lived in a hostel**



Age of participants

Summary of the responses

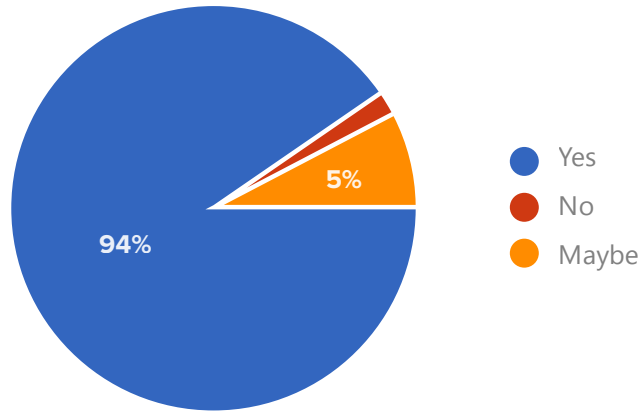
To broaden my perspective and to get opinions of people on how did living in hostels impacted their behaviour and personality or say life in general, a survey was conducted. And a summary of the same is shared below. Questions like their age, did they used to live in a hostel during their higher education, or if they are still living in a hostel environment, and if the learnings of the hostel helped them in their life and/or helped them grow as a person, etc. were asked.

Also, if they would like to read an illustrated book on hostel/student life and if they would like to share some exciting experience from their hostel life were asked.

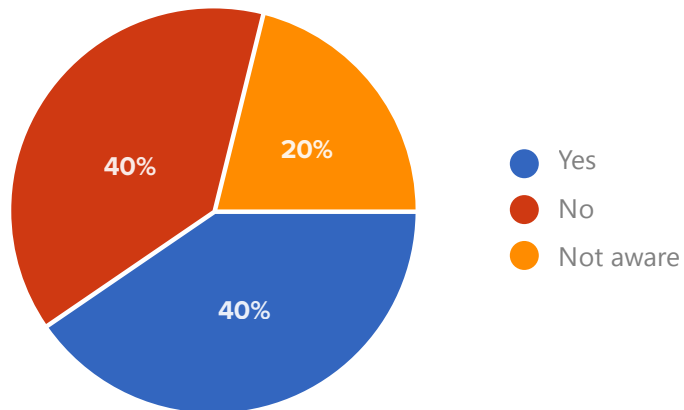
Nearly one hundred students and alumni from different universities like CEPT University, IIT Kanpur, University of Colorado, SRM University, IIT Bombay, MSU Baroda, NIT Nagpur, NIT Surathkal, MIT Pune, IIT Kharagpur, NLU Jodhpur, IIT Guwahati, etc. participated in the survey.

If they ever lived in a hostel

About ninety per cent of the people who participated in the survey were either living in a hostel or have lived in a hostel during their college life. The majority of them have lived about two to four years in a hostel. And then some have lived about 10-14 years in a hostel!



If living in a **hostel** helped to grow as a person



If any **counselling** help was offered on campus

Age of the participants

Majority of the people who participated in the survey were between eighteen to twenty-nine years of age. And that is why I would be targeting this segment of people for my illustrative storybook, as they would be able to relate to the scenarios better than anyone.

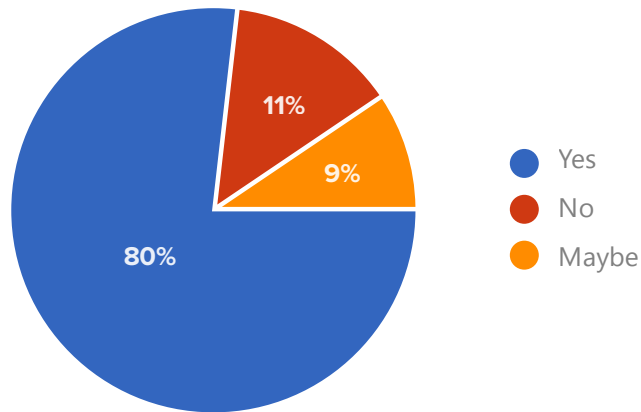
If hostel helped to grow as a person

The majority of the people responded that hostel life definitely helped them grow as a person in their life, about ninety-four per cent of them. Then there was about five per cent of people who were not so sure about this. Then one per cent of them said that the hostel life did not help them in growing as a person.

If counselling was offered on campus

Participants were also asked if they know any sort of counselling help was offered on their university campus or not. And it was interesting to note that about forty per cent of people were sure that college offered them counselling help if needed, forty per cent said counselling was not provided, and rest twenty per cent were not aware of this.

Although my goals were changed at a later stage of the project, so this part was omitted due to the same.



If they would like to read an **illustrated book** on student/hostel life

Did living in hostel **help in your life?**



How badly do you **miss your hostel days?**



1 2 3 4 5

Interest in illustrated books

At the end of the survey, the participants were asked if they would like to read an illustrated book on student/hostel life, and the majority were positive about this, some were not sure about this, and then about eleven per cent did not want anything like this.

If living in the hostel helped in their life

Then the participants were asked on a scale of one to five, if living in a hostel helped them in their life. And about ninety-five per cent of people agreed to this, out of which sixty-five per cent strongly agreed. There were also a few of them, who think it did not help them.

If they miss their hostel life

Then they were asked if they miss their hostel life. Around seventy per cent of them still miss their hostel, while fifteen per cent don't feel the same.

And all these points became exciting findings, which helped me decide the characteristics of my characters for the story. Also, I asked the participants to share any exciting event which had happened during their hostel days.

Following are a few of them.

“To start with, Our hostel room had to be shared by ten people. It was fun and the total opposite of privacy. Nobody had personal items and personal life tbh. Everyone brings munchies when they return from their homes, and that day will be the worst. Rules of the jungle prevailed those days, and the fittest of them all will get to eat. Everything about those days will be missed. Enough rants. That's it.”

- Anu Sankar, Alumnus, GEC Idukki

“I was able to be myself and considering my sexuality. I met many friends who are interested in the same field as I was. The home was a wonderful place, but I don't have much in common with my siblings. In hostel and college, I met many who were into fashion and art and design. We would empower one another to be inspiring in our works, our sense of style and our lifestyle. More to this, I would like to mention that I became more confident because the hostel had competitions and events that encouraged me.”

- Mario Pathaw, Alumnus, LPU Punjab

“There is a friend of mine, who was neither social nor behaved friendly with the others. He was selfish. He used to stay with his relatives, who stayed near the college. Our classmates used to hate him due to his bad manners. However, after the second year, he decided to stay with us, in our hostel. It was difficult for him first to cop up with us.

However, we could see a transition in his way of talking and dealing with people. At the end of my B.tech, he became a completely different person. The one who never help anybody in exam hall started distributing his answer sheet to the entire class and waited till the end of the exam so that he can ensure his friends also written the answers. I can confidently say that this transformation occurred to him was because of the hostel life, where we stayed together, shared jokes, ate together and made fun of each other and even celebrates the breakups and backdrops!”

- Sangeeth Sankar, Student, IIT Bombay

“We used to have wing treats. So a wing is a specific section, of a particular floor, of a building. It usually has nine to eleven rooms. In your life in Kharagpur, wingies are the one who are always with you. In wing treats, we used to go the wings of 4th years, and each room would have its special dish. It used to be super fun, and I think it is one of the unique features of Kharagpur.”

- Pratik Khedikar, Alumnus, IIT Kharagpur

“Coexistence is one of the most important lessons you learn in your hostel life. Sometimes it can be challenging when you and your roommate don't get along. I remember I had two of my classmates who weren't entirely fond of each other sharing the same room. One of them used to work late

at night and leave his lights on. The other would sleep early and turn his lights off. He would also run the fan at full speed and cover himself with a blanket while the other guy would shiver in the cold. His excuse was that he couldn't fall asleep without the sound of the fan. So this went on for quite a few days, and the workaholic roommate complained to me about it a couple of times, and I ignored. All changed one night when he decided to put his foot down and went over and switched the fan off. The sleeping roommate quickly got to his feet, and just as the former went back to his desk, he turned the fan back on and went back to bed. No word was spoken. The workaholic guy got up again and turned the fan off yet again. This went on for quite a while, and ultimately they ended up both standing by the switch, glaring at each other and taking turns to switch the fan on and off. I was right there in there room finding it hard to believe what the hell was going on. Looking back, it was the most hilarious piece of roommate drama I have ever seen.”

- Praseem Dhapola, Student, IIT Hyderabad

“We had a movie marathon of all parts of the final destination one night, in the TV room of our block. So many people joined, and there was a mini zombie apocalypse next day. Everybody was paranoid; people moved beds from under the fans to a corner, and many were walking only from the centre of the corridors, people were hyper careful in labs. And this other time the hostel management installed a few

cameras inside hostel blocks, to have proofs against student interactions. In a day or two, someone washed their blanket and hung it over the wall so that it covers the camera. This became a norm, and without any need for signalling, people started taking turns washing blankets just to hang over the camera.”

- Ramya Reddy, Alumna, NIT Warangal

“I can't recall any particular exciting experience from my hostel life, but I can share my overall experience. Senior students make fun of junior students. Sometimes ragging takes places in the hostel. I remember one time a snake that came into my friend's room. He saw the snake and screamed at the top of his voice. His neighbour took numerous photos of the snake and rest of the boys took selfies. All my batchmates are nice. I really miss my hostel life.”

- Arnav Roy Choudhury, Student, IIT Bombay

“I miss my 'ME' time: that space gave the opportunity to see the deeper self, understand ourselves better, build ourselves, and be self-independent. 'Home away from home': I do miss my family and home, cherishing the moments and support given by our family but new friends are the new family in the hostel helping cope in everything we do. Without them, we are nothing. Friends are love.”

- Naveen Kumar, Student, IIT Bombay

“When I was doing my bachelor's degree, I was a day scholar but a frequent visitor to men's hostel. And gradually in last semester, I was a full-time parasite in the hostel. It was because I just enjoyed the way students lived in hostels. Mostly because of their flexible timing for work or things like that; as I was an architecture student, such things at home were not possible in my case. I learned many things from there like how to ride a motorcycle, to survive with limited resources like food and clothes, etc.”

- [Abhijath Ajay, Alumnus, COE Trivandrum](#)

“So many! Like gathering in one person's room all the time to party to smoke up or to chitchat. Some time for just sleepover also. And waking each other up every day for classes or for breakfast, and even mess special dinners. So much hype, because usually mess food is boring but when special dinner is there everyone gets excited and fill their plate with max food.

Another interesting thing that used to happen in our girls' hostel is that clothes used to get stolen from the laundry area. Then girls used to put up posters and pamphlets in the lift and corridors of the missing piece of clothing; for example 'this purple pyjama of mine is missing, here is a pic of me wearing it, it was very special to me as my mom had gifted it to me, please return it to me'. Also, sharing room with your roommate is super tricky because you start developing a

mutual understanding for each other. For example, my roommate knew that I couldn't sleep with lights on so she bought a nightcap for me so that she could work and I could sleep peacefully at night. Also ordering food and watching something while eating, with friends by your side, of course, is one of the best things. Also, weird neighbours, who sing so loudly you can hear their songs in your room. There was a girl who used to sing so loudly everyone was irritated. She used to sing even while pooping. One more thing, I love how in hostels over time you get so comfortable with other residents. Like you don't care about what you're wearing, or if you've taken a shower, etc. you can just be yourself with them. It starts feeling like home, and other people become family.”

- [Apoorva Lalit, Alumna, IPSA Indore](#)

“Once my roomie left the key to our room inside the room and locked us out. We stayed on the 2nd floor of hostel, considering that the window opening from the courtyard side was quite thin and high and so was I, so I climbed 2 floors and into the room through the window and got the key. Since then my friends called me 'Spidey'.”

- [Theertha Suresh, Alumna, SPA Delhi](#)

“I think the idea of sharing a room with a bunch of complete strangers is quite interesting; the way each person uses their space, and the invisible boundaries you create, it could be a lot of fun and easy-going or even a very strenuous operation where you have to tip-toe around! It is also interesting how you make space your own in a way; in a way, it could tell more about a person or even give a completely different view of them like that's not what they look like from outside. Also when you shift into a new hostel room, there are often traces left by the people who were there before you like graffiti on walls, stuff left in table drawers, etc. which get you wondering about what kind of a person they might have been.

It's also interesting to look at the many unsaid (non-vocal) conversations (cold war of sorts) that go on around you and how often one person's mood can affect everybody around, like sometimes to the point where you wish there was someplace where you could have a little space to yourself (the terrace of the hostel is often one breathing space where you end up meeting people whom you didn't know live in the same hostel as you)! Also, the common pets of the hostel are very memorable. Trying to grow plants in the little shared space, you often get very enthusiastic at first, and eventually, you get busy, and they often wither away - and you desperately try to bring them back to life!”

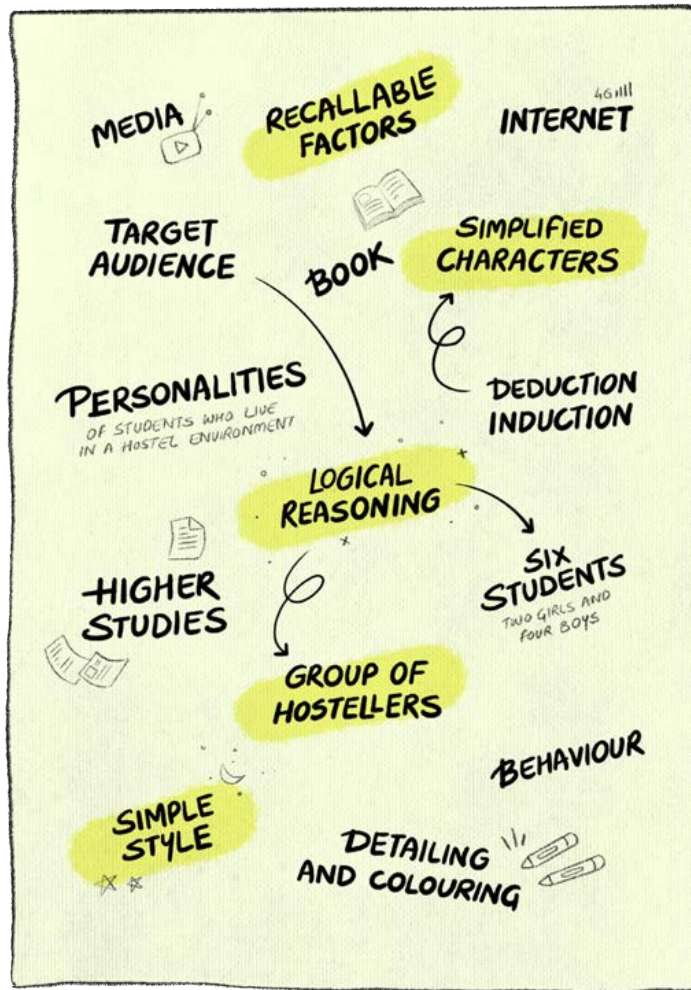
- Savithri Mana, Alumna, NIFT Bengaluru

Coexistence is one of the most important lessons you learn in your hostel life. Sometimes it can be challenging when you and your roommate don't get along.

Based on the study, following points were noted:

Hostel life definitely impacts the behaviour and personality of the students. And by the time students graduate from their college, they make a lot of unforgettable memories. Sometimes, the stay could be challenging as well, but one learns something out of it eventually.

And not everyone wants to live in a hostel in the first place. There are students who have lived in a hostel, but still hate the hostel life. Then there are students who consider that place their home away from home. Some of them believe that the family they make by themselves in the hostel helps them cope in stressful situations and times selflessly. Also, hostel life trains students to survive with limited resources, and teach them brotherhood.



Inference

Based on the Bollywood movies and TV series that I watched, I pictured a group of hostellers pursuing their higher education from a reputed university around which my story will revolve. And to get a better idea of interactions in a hotel setting, I am going to depict a group of six students coming from different backgrounds in my illustrative book. There would be interaction scenarios between these hostelites and their teachers, their parents, as well as with other hostel mates.

Studying some movies, television shows, graphic novels, comics, etc. by various artists, I observed that there are enough movies and TV content on hostel life. Still, there is very little content about hostel life in terms of books and almost no illustrative manual in this particular setting.

Also, by conducting interviews, I found out that people are interested in reading an illustrative book on hostel life. Therefore, I shall be exploring the behaviour and personalities of students who live in a hostel environment during their higher studies through my book.

The style of the characters will be simple, so as to give more time on reading the expressions of those, instead of spending the same on the detailing and colouring.

Other reason for making simplified characters being, the recallable factors attached to simplified and unique figures.

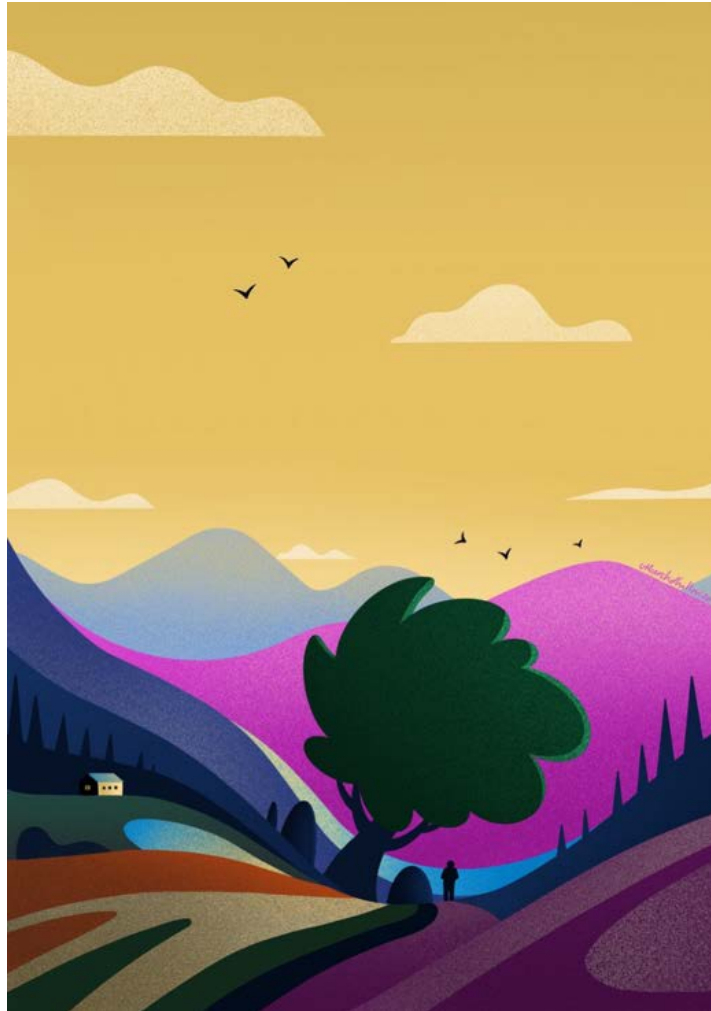
The style of the characters will be simple, so as to give more time on reading the expressions of those, instead of spending the same on the detailing and colouring. Other reason for making simplified characters being, the recallable factors attached to simplified and unique figures.

Most of the people who participated in my primary study were between the age of 18 to 29; therefore, I will be targeting this age group for my project. And also, the characters in my story will fall in this same age group. And more than three-fourth of them stated that the hostel stays helped them in their life ahead. So, based upon that I will

be adding such incidences in my story which have a more significant impact on the lives of my characters, beyond their hostel life, which will help them grow as a person.

Also, through my primary study I got to know that there are people who have lived in hostels but did not like their stay there. So, based upon that there will be some characters in my story who do not like hostel life as well.

The medium to reach out audience will be printed books, but to maximise the reach, I may use the internet and social media platforms, as most of the audience I am targeting uses smartphones and web.



Explorations

In the initial few weeks of starting this project, I decided to explore my style of illustration, as the medium was going to be a graphic novel. The best way I realised was to do speed paintings and sketching so that I do not focus much on the stylisation. Even I tried to experiment on the colour schemes, which were way different from my usual palettes.

The one on the left is from the final batches of paintings I did. And I almost painted over thirty paintings. Most of them were landscape studies, and a few were architectural studies. I started this because I wanted to do a bit different from what I usually do, or say different from the style I am stuck with from a long time. Almost all these pieces were done in tight deadlines, ranging from 20 to 50 minutes.

In a few of these pieces, I just tried to play with the values, and that is why I kept them black and white, and the rest are colourful. In some pieces, to push my limits, I just used one brush, and the results were something I did not expect!





The magic sometimes happens with side projects and not your main work. Practice productive procrastination.

Do not worry about a grand unified vision for your work right now, and you can connect the dots later. Hobbies are critical because they will keep you content. A hobby is something that does not take away but gives.

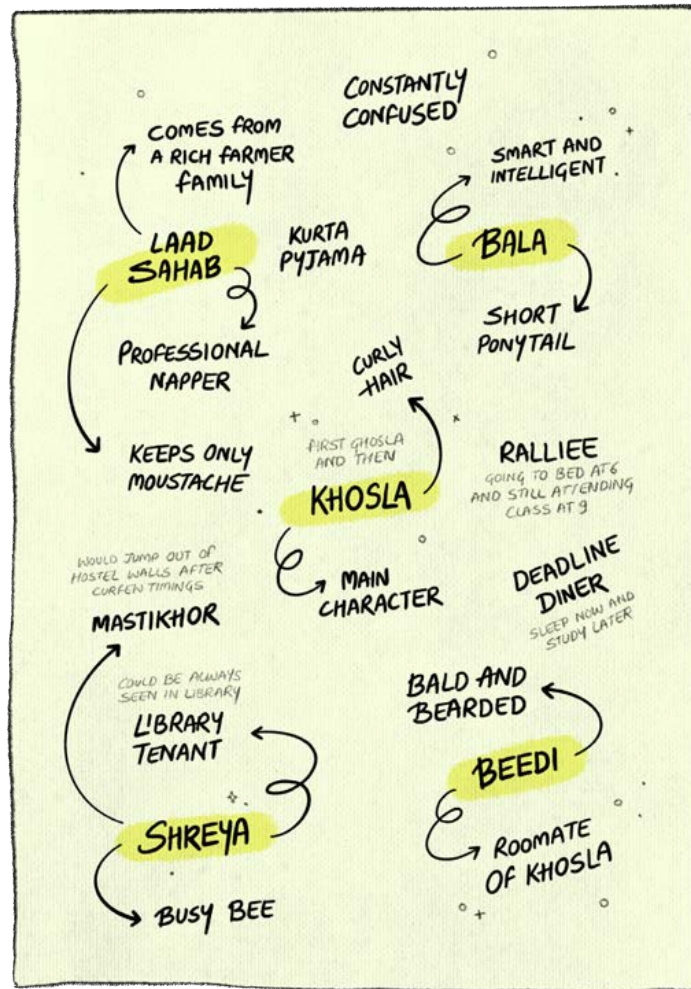
I learnt many things by doing this exercise, the first being delivering on time. Doing so many illustrations in a tight deadline made me realise I can make paintings much faster than I have thought of. Most of the time I avoid using textures, but this very time I used a lot of them. And they really give life to the artworks for sure. Also, trying out different kind of environments helped me making better compositions and apply design principles.

This was a fun exercise. Although I have been living in my hostel room in H12 for a year, I did not think of illustrating it on a paper, but this exercise made me do that. The first black and white illustration is of my room, and the very

next piece is of our hostel mess's iconic cone building. I used a pretty dream-like colour palette to complete that piece.

As Kleon in his book, 'steal like an artist' advises, "There are times when the magic happens with side projects and not your main work. Practice productive procrastination. Take off side work, and have room to get bored; do boring stuff like ironing, to avoid the mind racing about. Walk back and you miss out. Hold all the interests in creation, and never give them out to pollinate each other. For now, don't think about a grand overarching dream for your job and you will draw the dots later. Hobbies are important, as they make you healthy. A hobby is something that does not take away but gives."

Character Study



The first step was to get the characters of the hostellers in place, so as to start executing the narratives into final visuals for the illustrative book.

The first thing I did was making notes about how I wanted my characters to look like. What their backgrounds were and if they have some unusual habit, etc. Doing so helped me in visualising my characters better. Then I started with sketching out different faces based on the notes I made.

In order to make all the characters simple and distinguishable from one another, I kept the shape of the head different for all of them, and also, I tried to do the same by playing with their hairstyles and facial hair.

I started with the main character of the story, who is a young man, 20-22 years old, and is a college-going student who loves his hostel life. Then I moved on to visualising the second character, i.e. the lifesaver of the main character. He is a boy hailing from a wealthy farmer family in Haryana and is a professional napper, and also wears a unique handlebar moustache.







The reason mentioning the young guy in his early 20s with curly hair as the main character is his frequent appearances throughout the story. The motive is to bring out funny narratives through exciting visuals. The young man with curly hair is known as Khosla in his hostel, and the one with a handlebar moustache is Laad Sahab. Then there is Bala, who is a smart and intelligent guy with a short ponytail. He wears thick spectacles all the times. Then there is a bearded man with a thin and lean body, who is known as Beedi amongst his friends. Also, he happens to be Khosla's roommate. Then there are Shreya and Gunjan, the girl members of the group.

After finalising on the character design, the next step was the rendering process. After drawing a few rough drafts, I shortlisted the above four options. The left-most rendering style is raw. I have provided sufficient appeal to make the characters look as lively as possible.

However, considering the time availability, I chose the last option, which allows me to draw a more significant number of strips/stories which would come handy to collect audience feedback. Also, the last option gives me the freedom to add colour and texture to the characters, even at a later stage.



One of the doodles drawn while sketching for character design.



About the characters

Structure of the hostellers that I am portraying in the story is such that some of them are in love with their hostel life, and a few are not. Some like passing their time doing nothing, while others study hard and utilize every minute of their time in the hostel. And the snippets are based on their interaction with each other and other hostel mates. A short description about each one of them as described by Khosla (the main character of the narratives) is as follows:

Beedi and Bala

“Beedi is my roommate. Although he is famous for selling various kinds of stuff which are considered to be illegal in the eyes of civilised people, but among the H9 residents he’s known as Beedi for another reason. It’s because of his ‘Beedi’ like thin body! Beedi is my senior for two years in calendar years but my senior for several years in spiritual awakening! And if you are looking at a protruding set of shining teeth, a short ponytail with a thick pair of glasses on a squarish face, you are looking at Bala. His actual name is Balchandra Radhaswami, but too long to pronounce on a daily basis and also too mundane in terms of our cool H9. Therefore for obvious reasons, he needed a new name. Also, Swami is nicer than an average human being. The one thing which confuses me about him is that he hates being in a hostel.”



Shreya and Gunjan

“Although she should have a nickname, but for some reason, she hasn't been awarded one. Shreya is a library tenant, as she can be seen 25 out of 24 hours in the library, that too studying! And that's why she's a 'busy bee'. She's mischievous at times too! She would jump her hostel walls after curfew timings, and she would google or Facebook, the cute guy she'll spot in a movie or a series or at college itself. And she's the one who would complain about the mess food and the rules all the time, but won't do anything to make a change. Also, she enjoys talking over the phone for hours; maybe it is her parents, a long lost friend, or just perhaps Palak from next room.”

“If you see a girl amidst a major selfie-taking session and wearing the same bandana every single day with a pretty mole on her upper lip, you're looking at our very own Gunjan. Although bandanas are used to represent gang affiliation, Gunjan wears it for fun, or if you say in her words, it's 'fashion'. She talks a lot! Like about everything possible on planet earth. She doesn't consider it as gossiping; rather, she calls it sharing real valuable information. Although she has been single all her life, she will give significant relationship pieces of advice.”

“There's only one thing that Shreya and Gunjan share in common, and that's their hostel room.”

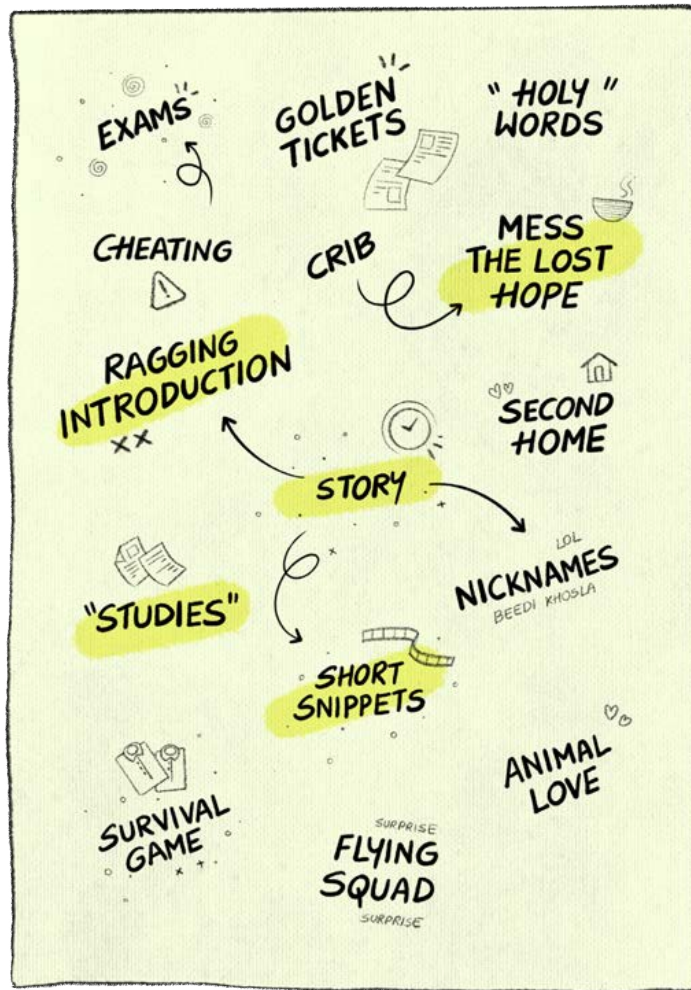


Laad Sahab and Khosla

“Then there is Laad Sahab, a Jat guy from Haryana. I am not so sure about his actual name, but it ended something with Malik. We didn't even name him Laad Sahab in our H9. It was his parents who did the honorary. His room is refugee friendly, and his experience in dealing with refugees could have served as the starting point for a successful career in the hospitality business. His room 107 is always open, there are welcome pin-ups in the walls, and when his finances are sound, there will be welcome drinks as well! Also, all kinds of cigarettes would be provided except on the days when our warden raids his room.”

“Then there's me. My identity mark in my hostel is my curly hair. And I'm known by the name 'Khosla', and I suspect this nickname has to do something with 'Ghosla'. If you blow smoke into my hair, it would remain trapped and will only come out when someone pats my head, and then even the smoke comes out very confused. There were rumours that one pigeon laid eggs on my head one night! Thank goddess, it was just a rumour! I am a little poverty-stricken, and Laad Sahab is my lifeline and assured supplier of free cigarettes and things like that. Once Laad changed his cigarettes brand, which made me very upset.

Also, sometimes I write poems and make artistic things, which only a few people appreciate.”



Story

The storybook will consist of short snippets around hostel life. The prologue will be about the main characters of the story, followed by pieces on hostel mess, shared rooms, nicknames, ragging, examinations, submissions and so on.

Prologue/Characters

Character one; Beedi is my roommate. Although he's famous for selling various kinds of stuff which are considered to be illegal in the eyes of civilised people, but among the H9 residents he's known as Beedi for another reason. It is because of his 'Beedi' like thin body!

Beedi, my senior in calendar years for two years but my senior in spiritual awakening for many years, was lying on his fractured bed one Sunday afternoon when I came back from our canteen after getting snacks. His space reeked of pigeon droppings, and therefore mine. Our moving room was to the sounds of two pigeons singing a mesmerizing melody. On the built-in cupboard of the Beedi's part of the room, one of the pigeons was moving around in circles. The other pigeon was circling Beedi's half-smoked cigarette, an arm's length

away from a very glazed Beedi himself, looking at the said pigeon. Out in front of him was pigeon shit on the desk. At first, I was shocked and yelled at Beedi, and I yelled at the pigeon while he was unresponsive. Throughout their sacred state of harmony, neither had skipped a beat.

Eventually Beedi stared up sadly at me, his brows furrowed. "They are living things too. They're bound to crap around. Why should you be so upset?" So I was in utter defeat.

~

Character two; Then there is Laad Sahab, a Jat guy from Haryana. I am not so sure about his actual name, but it ended something with Malik. We didn't even name him Laad Sahab in our H9. It was his parents who did the honorary.

His room is refugee-friendly, and his experience in dealing with refugees could have served as the starting point for a successful career in the hospitality business. His room 107 is always open, there are welcome pin-ups in the walls, and when his finances are sound, there will be welcome drinks as well! Also, all kinds of cigarettes would be provided except on the days when our warden raids his room.

~

Character three; My identity mark in my hostel is my curly hair. And I'm known by the name 'Khosla', and I suspect this

nickname has to do something with 'Ghosla'. If you blow smoke into my hair, it would remain trapped and will only come out when someone pats my head, and then even the smoke comes out very confused. There were rumours that one pigeon laid eggs on my head one night! Thank goddess, it was just a rumour!

I am a little poverty-stricken, and Laad Sahab is my lifeline and assured supplier of free cigarettes and things like that. Once Laad changed his cigarettes brand, which made me very upset. Also, sometimes I write poems and make artistic things, which only a few people appreciate.

~

Character four; If you are looking at a protruding set of shining teeth, a short ponytail with a thick pair of glasses on a squarish face, you are looking at Bala. Of course, he is not shaitaan ka sala. His actual name is Balchandra Radhaswami, but too long to pronounce on a daily basis and also too mundane in terms of our cool H9. Therefore for obvious reasons, he needed a new name.

Swami had come to UIT (Universal Institute of Technology) to become an engineer. And that was one of the most unusual things I find about him. He wants to design a turbine that would rid India of her energy problems. And he can be seen reading thick textbooks in his room, mess, corridors or even

in bathrooms at any given point of time. Also, Swami is nicer than an average human being, and that's another unusual thing about him. The one thing which confuses me about him is that he hates being in a hostel. But this one thing about him is out of my contemplation.

~

Character five; Although she should have a nickname, but for some reason, she hasn't been awarded one. And that's because of Bala's crush over her. In my defence, everyone should be given a nickname. That simplifies a lot of things, like you don't need to remember complicated names. That's it. Shreya is a library tenant, as she can be seen 25 out of 24 hours in the library, that too studying! And that's why she's a 'busy bee'. She's mischievous at times too! She would jump her hostel walls after curfew timings, and she would google or Facebook, the cute guy she'll spot in a movie or a series or at college itself. And she's the one who would complain about the mess food and the rules all the time, but won't do anything to make a change. Also, she enjoys talking over the phone for hours; maybe it is her parents, a long lost friend, or just perhaps Palak from next room.

~

Character six; If you see a girl amidst a major selfie-taking session and wearing the same bandana every single day with a pretty mole on her upper lip, you're looking at our very

own Gunjan. Although bandanas are used to represent gang affiliation, Gunjan wears it for fun, or if you say in her words, it's 'fashion'.

She talks a lot! Like about everything possible on planet earth. She doesn't consider it as gossiping; rather, she calls it sharing real valuable information. Although she has been single all her life, she will give significant relationship pieces of advice. And she's always making or thinking about making her hostel room prettier.

There's only one thing that Shreya and Gunjan share in common, and that is their hostel room.

Nicknames

Of the many misconceptions that reign over our campus, the biggest is about how deeply a fresher is subjected to ragging. This causes a lot of fear in parents and it takes a lot of convocation to convince them that, far from being difficult, it's really enjoyable at UIT (Universal Institute of Technology).

The way I see it, ragging really is an acclimatization and assimilation help. This helps create relationships with hostel mates as easily as possible. This also helps to detoxify his own grandeur to a fresher of thoughts. It is reasonable if a recent entrant to the UIT arrives with the preconceived idea

that he is the gift of God to create and that he is the solution to the technical challenges of India, if not the entire planet. Someone has to inform him that, in this sea of most talented brains from all over the world, he is at best mediocre. Cutting down an confident, proud person by a few notches and instilling confidence and survival instincts into a timid introverted one are the supposed targets of exercises that scream.

It wouldn't be a joke to claim that for better or bad, mostly better, ragging transforms lives forever. I've had my seniors' situations in that way. The most obvious distinction is that the titles must still be modified. Most nicknames, initially intended to last the length of a UIT term, are often forever fixed.

~

The name of Bimito Samuel Phillips was found to be too fake and modified to Billu Sharma first, and it went through several changes, eventually to settle down at Beedi. So that has nothing to do with his own identity, or the sort of plays that he indulges. It's just because of his 'Beedi' like thin body! And nowadays every package written on it by the name Bimito Philips, immediately meets with a mysterious answer from 'who is Bimito?'

~

And there is Mohit Malik completely unknown, who is the real name of a very well known Laad Sahab. And on his arrival at UIT, his heavily Haryanvi accented tone was a hit. And even Malik's parents call him Laad Sahab, which explains his name.

Ragging/Introduction

I came across a really scared freshy, Mitul Awasthi, when we were in our first year. I was confused by his fear from the Rashtriya Military School at the UIT. To him the worst ragging in UIT was supposed to have been like elementary school classes. Yet the truth was, this Mitul, who, by the way, had a cherubic face defying the military academy, was really frightened too.

But, within a few days this Mitul paced around feeling way too happy for a new freshy. He was enjoying the ragging now, as I had anticipated. I soon gained the trust of Mitul and asked about his initial response to ragging. He chuckled at me and said, "I figured all this talk of standing naked in front of the hostel was true, just like my previous school."

~

I came across a bunch of second-year guys this one time whose excitement for their new-found power was alive still. They had a fresh victim to themselves; I think his name was

John. I watched as they tried out the routines they had played on the previous year. But that guy stood there with a blank face, straight hands and firmly directed eyes to the ground. He replied nothing. He didn't mention a word or move a muscle, and his face did not change any expression - not embarrassment, rage, disgust, nothing. Classical segregation! Nearly half an hour of attempts by the seniors did not produce anything. This was fun to see his harassers' expressions change from delighted to shocked to confused to angered to angry to indignant to irritated and eventually to vanquished. And if John had laughed, his scoundrels must have felt their work was done.

~

Then there was one raggee who alleged that ragging in UIT was on another level! And that he wants to drop out of UIT altogether, and informed to the journalist in his area that UIT ragging was fierce. Mr Journalist ran his story in a local newspaper. The story said there were three ragging gangs, and each had his own ringleaders. It said one of the rooms was a dreaded chamber of ragging.

The article took our college administration by storm! The education minister called our college director, who passed it to our Dean of student affairs and so on. Several inspections were done by the college administration, as well as by the government officials. But all in vain.

It turned out that this raggee, our very own Bala, was reluctant to join UIT in the first place. His father had coerced him to join, and he used this story of bullying to get out, damaging names in the process.

Ragging was something all of us sometimes did, just as we sometimes took baths, had breakfast and went for morning lectures!

~

In my initial days of ragging, I was quite enjoying it for the fact I was making new bonds. But it was maybe because my seniors were actually really nice, which I learnt later.

There was Mr Bewda, my own coined nickname for one of my senior, who did substance abuse to such an extent that would make even Beedi shy. He was kind of a lone mortal; he wouldn't talk to anyone, and vice-versa. But this Bala incident made Mr Bewda step up on stage and elucidate Bala about what he has done. Mr Bewda expressed his sharp disapproval of the Bala doings. His point was that faking such incidences undermines the credibility of genuine cases. After a short session, Bewda left.

But this session left all my peers, including me, in shock. Not because he rebuked Bala, but the fact that he interacted with us insignificant beings surprised us. As we shared the news

about this unprecedented event with our seniors, they revealed something even more shocking. They told us Bewda was once allergic to alcohol and all kinds of dope. There were legends of him taking bath several times if he remotely came in contact with any intoxicant. His descent into addiction was sudden and rapid one and all of that started after some traumatic encounters with his seniors.

He was physically assaulted and publicly humiliated on several occasions, even forced to drink and smoke. These incidences disturbed him mentally and emotionally and being already exposed to drinking and drugs; he ended up resorting to substance abuse as a coping mechanism. It was his story that moved my seniors and made them decide against ragging their juniors and to keep healthy interaction sessions instead.

Sharing is caring

In college you can categorise people into three segments; first one are sloggers who take studying very seriously, then there's the second category, the get by-ers, people who get average marks and spend a lot of time in fun activities and then there's give up-ers, the one's who have given up on studies. And fortunately, a very few fall into the last category. Gunjan is a get by-er, whereas Shreya is a slogger. The chemistry doesn't match. And then there's the matter of the

tube light. Shreya studies late into every night. So late that it could be thought of as early. While Gunjan isn't an early-to-bed kind of person, post 10 pm is reserved for senseless talk sessions which late until midnight. After which she wants her complete 8 hours of sleep, however, it is challenging for her to sleep in the glare of the giant tube light.

So the first time she made polite requests, then strong language was thrown in, including threats of pulling down the tube light. Shreya didn't give away. So, then, Gunjan hatched a plot which was bound to succeed. She moved her post-10 pm talk sessions to the room and extended them way beyond midnight. And these sessions weren't soft-spoken polite discussions. High pitched sound and loud laughter was used, enough to disturb any sane human's attention. Sure enough, the tables turned. There were requests at first and then threats of complaints to Warden. Then a middle ground was offered! To put out tube light precisely at midnight.

~

Then there's Bala and his roommate. According to his roommate, Bala had this strange habit of locking his room. He would lock it even when he left to take a shower. And that innocent act irritated his roommate since according to him, the hostel rooms should never be locked.

So one day he jumped into the room from an open window by climbing a tree touching it and locked the room from inside and left. Poor Bala was pacing the corridor in his towel, but did not complain about it to his roommate. But we knew that he would return the favour, and he did when the time was right. But his roommate had planned for it by keeping the window ajar. And Bala didn't know that his roommate's flexible ways and his wiry hands could somehow squeeze in through the bars and extend far enough to open the door.

Animal love

We all went to a local mountain range this one time and Beedi captured a snake. In reality, when Beedi stepped in and tripped over it, the snake was going calmly about his business. The snake had no concern about it but Beedi did! The snake was trapped in a jar for this act of tripping, and returned to the hostel.

Beedi jumped around the next morning, attempting to capture insects, grasshoppers and earthworms to feed the snake. Yet the snake had agreed to go on a hunger strike to demonstrate the blatant injustice of being jailed without fault of his. Our corridor was a miniature zoo for a couple of days, featuring all sorts of creature Beedi found that he felt the snake would consider enticing. Yet no luck.

Finally, Beedi decided to let it go and released it in a nearby jungle.

~

And then after Beedi's fame about his pets spread far and wide! So this one time a kingfisher came seeking shelter in Beedi's arms. Its wings were injured and weren't flying well. That whole week you would find Beedi taking care of the kingfisher, nursing it back to health. He would manage to bring a small fish from the market every morning to feed the bird. And soon enough the kingfisher decided it had taken enough advantage of Beedi's hospitality and vanished one morning.

~

Some of the animals in our hostel are by choice because they are wanted. Take Rowry, for example. He is as much of a hostel resident, as any of us students. He doesn't go to classes, like some of us, but he doesn't have to, as he is our hostel pet dog. He has to make do with the same terrible food that we all get, and he even participates in the good and the bad with the rest of us.

~

Not all animals in the hostel are pets, nor are they welcome. There are the monkeys, of course, they are barbaric and sometimes dangerous. And then there's the smaller threat

of the pigeons. One year a gang of pigeons attacked our hostel toilets. And I took offence at their unruly behaviour. And I thought of teaching them a lesson by catching them one by one and pouring a bucket of water and then let them go. The poor pigeons struggled, unable to fly with wet feathers. That's the only time I've seen a bird to trip in its own. And after I had caught each and every one of them, I was content that I had taught them a lesson. Unfortunately, those bird-brains never learnt my intended lessons. And one day one of them used my nest-like head for excretory activities.

Mess - The lost hope

My first meal on my first day in the hostel was a glimpse into the culinary experience in store for me for the next four years, which looked definitely painful and unpleasant. Like a sane human being, I was adept at eating with my hands and particularly adept at breaking off pieces of my chapatti with only three fingers.

My first attempt to do so that first dinner time in the mess made me precisely aware that my survival would depend on how quickly I evolve my eating techniques. I had to bring my set of teeth into play to tackle the version of chapatti the cook saw fit to serve us. And after the first bite of the same went down my throat, I could hear the strong protest from

within. Then there were potatoes in every meal the cook used to prepare, and by the number of times we were served potatoes it looked like the mess must be getting them for free.

But I suppose I should be grateful for the disaster. After all, I learnt a healthy habit of eating a heavy breakfast, a light lunch and a lighter dinner. The best part of mess meal is the breakfast. Because it would require exceptional skills to make omelettes, bread-jam, and potato chips taste bad!

~

This one time, our mess cook decided to serve us sweet corn soup during dinner. As the people attempted to help themselves, they realised that what they needed was not serving spoons but knives to cut pieces off this soup before they could have it. It was certainly corn and undoubtedly sweet, but it wasn't something which could be called as soup. Our cook had made something which is expected to be thicker than water to the limit! But it certainly tasted better than the dishes we were eating on a regular basis.

~

One day in our first year I saw in our mess menu, that we would be served fruit salad in breakfast. Just the idea of having fruit salad in our mess thrilled me. So the day before I didn't even go for dinner, because I wanted to enjoy the

fruit salad the next morning to the fullest. I imagined a lot for fruits like pineapple, apple, banana, pomegranate in nicely flavoured milk. But, as usual in this mess of ours, there were many disappointments in store for me. First, I was disappointed seeing the small bowl. Then I had to really search to find any fruits in the small bowl. And my dream of having a nice fruit salad remained a dream.

~

Although there were golden times as well when students used to get ill or broke their bones, doing something as simple as jumping from the first floor. These people had to spend some time in the university hospital, but the relief was that they were saved from sampling mess food. Strange times!

~

Coming from a wealthy farmer family, Laad Sahab was fond of milk. There are even rumours that he drinks milk directly from the buffalo's teats. Imagine such a being who spent his entire life surrounded by milk, in our H9 doesn't even have a drop to drink. But lucky enough, our mess used to make a non-potato dish once in a while, which had panner in it! So Malik Sahab decides to embark on a competitive strategy. To get most of the paneer from the mutter-panner bowl, he buttered up the mess workers by chatting with them in Haryanvi about a variety of stuff. He didn't ask them to do

anything different, but the next time and every time from then on, the new bowl of mutter-panner was placed right in front of him on the table.

~

Everyone in our hostel has a total unanimity on one issue, which is our mess food. Mess food sucks, and sucks bad. Vegetables and dals are tasteless, chapattis are thick, and one needs both hands to tear them. Even Rowry, while receiving a freebie chapatti, will chew at it distastefully and make faces.

One thing about which our cook is famous for is the free use of oil. Everything which can be classified as a food item reeks of oil. If you run out of hair oil, you can use one of our mess chapatti on your head. If the hinge of your door creaks, you can oil it with one of our mess's potato, and what not!

Then there were invitations to family functions, and considering our messy circumstances, it used to be an extraordinary treat to be invited to a family function. The only time we would head out of our hostel, bathed and groomed with well-ironed clothes.

“Studies”

The one thing we're in the hostel is for studies. And our

graduation project, successful or not, will be immortalised in the form of project reports in our library. It is mandatory, and that's the tricky part.

Now typical students like us went to the library, copied notes, sat up nights with a senior who will help us out in exchange for chai and cigarettes, then carried the printed ream to a nearby shop to get it black binding with embossed golden letters. But Beedi was a do-it-yourself kind of man that way and in no way an ordinary student. He typed out his entire report by himself. Printed out one copy on the bond paper, and the remaining three on thin tissue-like papers. He got only one of the copy bind in the outside shop, and the remaining three were wrapped in thick yellow paper and stitched and stapled crudely to vaguely suggest a bookish look.

Beedi was proud of what he got from the binding shop. A professional-looking black hardcover document with golden letters announcing that it was his graduation project. This was so good compared to the one's he stitched, that Beedi decided to retain the black book for himself and offered the yellow ones to the panel of internal and external examiners.

~

All of us had to do a mini project as well, and for mine, I chose the topic "Influence of social media" under the

guidance of Professor PP Siddhu. I was informed that I should buy a small notebook, visit the library frequently, take notes of the research and references and report back to guide every week. This was a routine most of us had left behind with school. And there was little or safe to say, no contact between me and guide. Now the time to submit the bound book of labour closed in. So I had to produce one.

I sat on the bench of the central lobby of my hostel wing with a full view of the corridors and started writing the report. Taking into account the negligible information I had on the topic and non-existent research I had done, I decided to seek public help. And within minutes everyone gave inputs on influence, profile reach, impressions, trends, engagement and whatnot. My hostel mates helped me out, and some even wrote my presentation slides for me. Staying up all night and transforming myself into a social media tycoon was a different experience.

~

I don't know how professors put up with it, but they are frequently visited by students pleading for a change in their grade. For Beedi, it was a matter of survival and therefore, totally justified. But for some other, I suspect it's some kind of hobby, an obsession with good grades. On one such occasion, and there were many such occasions, Beedi had bunked a course he really needed to pass with even a D,

and he decided to go and fall at the professor's feet. So he went to this professor and told him how he misunderstood the question and how he meant to answer it differently and so on. He thought he would have sent all the papers to some irretrievable mass storage and could bluff his way out. But not Prof. Siddhu, he pulled out his answer paper and asked him what would he do differently if given a chance right then. But Beedi didn't prepare for it.

After ten minutes of pleading and requesting, Prof. Siddhu changed the grade to D. And told him that he has sensed that even if he repeats the course, he would learn nothing. So there's no point in failing him.

Hearing Prof. Siddhu, Beedi felt very unfair. It was very unfair that there aren't more such enlightened professors in our college.

~

Balachandra is clearly one of the brightest in our batch. So, he and I do not have much in common. I remember one time after our final examination results were out, I asked him, "Bala, how's your result?"

He said, "It is good, didn't get a single B. How is it for you?" I said, "I didn't get a single B, either." And we both just smiled at each other and moved on.

"Holy words"

New vocabulary in our linguistic meant constant practising. So of us became so adept with our linguistic skill that it was hard to turn them off. The gaali became part of our normal speech. Of course, sometimes we were in situations outside the hostel, in polite society where these words were considered insulting, and got us in trouble.

One summer I stayed back in the hostel because I had to repeat one course. That meant I could say all the things I want to say without any filter. Back home, it becomes difficult to manage my dual personalities, because my parent thinks I'm still their school-going Rahul, who hates the people who curse. Little do they know that now the tables have turned.

Just one evening to have fun I called up Ladd Sahab from an unknown number. He had gone home for the vacation, obviously. Although senior Sahab picked up the call. Now, Mohit and his dad have an uncannily similar voice, something I learnt the hard way. Thinking it was Mohit on the line, in my typical unrestrained emotions, I said, "Hey Malik bastard, fucker. What the fuck are you up to", so on and so forth.

There was a brief silence, followed by the person on the other end saying he was sorry, but he's Mohit's dad, and he is not home. He has gone out.

But I was convinced that it was Malik's typical pranks. So I got more abusive with creative suggestions involving the use of certain body parts. But again, the person on the other end continued politely that he's Mohit's dad and that he's not home.

This sort of exchange went on for a while until it became evident to my mind that he was indeed Malik's dad. Accessing the damage I had done, I swiftly went into damage control mode, phasing out expletives and starting to discuss the weather, crops, and so forth.

~

Then there were some tensed fights in our hostel where you just flexed muscled of your throat. And in such contests, if your vocabulary was limited to only the generic B, F or M words then you didn't stand a chance of staying in the fight for too long. You had to have a multi-lingual explicit knowledge. And just multi-lingual vocabulary wasn't enough either. You had to be creative and imaginative. And if you construct a gaali consisting of at least eight words, you were amateur learning from the masters.

And then you needed to bring novelty and innovation in the brew by translating common phrases into Sanskrit with which you could make people speechless because they would know that something bad was said but wouldn't figure out

the meaning of what was said and therefore wouldn't know how to retaliate.

Cribbing/Cheating

During a workshop test, many of us sat around Bala and cheated away shamelessly. Bala was smiling mischievously while writing the examination. Bala, and all the rest of us who cribbed Bala's answer, got 3 out of 20 on the test. The instructor called all of us one by one and wanted us to answer an important question. How did all the seven of us get the same answer wrong for every single question?

Now we all could make sense of Bala's mischievous smile. He had set us up. He did not care because he was going to crack his usual A anyway in the final test.

~

One who had mastered the skill of copying was Beedi. He was good at sports, soft-spoken, a nice guy. But he became too involved in cigarettes and booze to pay much attention to academics or tests. Once he showed up for a test still under the influence of one of those substances, and all he could do was copy from the guy in front.

Now the way people sat to give their examination, it would be very awkward to show the full page to the cribber behind.

But Beedi had mastered the art of copying! The left-hand half sheet first and then slightly shifting his position to copy the right-hand side. The supervisor would walk back and forth, looking at his answer sheet in puzzlement and could not figure how he was deriving an equation in that interesting manner.

Golden tickets

We go to the university hospital voluntarily on occasion, when we need medical certificates. Medical certificates are required when we are about to face the consequences of missing lectures, not having the expected grades, not having studied for a test and so on. Our hospital is a trading zone for medical certificates, also known as golden tickets. It is well established that if you have a medical certificate from our hospital, it is a fake one. If you're genuinely ill and go to the hospital, it is highly unlikely that you will recover in time to carry a medical certificate back and submit it wherever required. So, whenever there's a need, people will queue up outside the doctor's door, will cough unconvincingly when they go in, and ask for certificates, simple. Some deals with one certificate and a few deals with certificates in bulk! Or say in a wholesale fashion. The doctor is the same, and the patient is the same, the certificate is the same. It's only the date that changes after each expedition.

~

There was this time when one of the professors used to set a tough paper in our second year. I, along with Beedi and Laad Sahab, decided to duck his test. The hopeful plan was that there would be re-test announcement for all the people who would produce a medical certificate and hopefully a rest eat would be set by someone else.

But when we checked with the professor, he was clear there won't be a re-test, and he would fail all the students who bunked the test. Beedi protested that all of us were actually ill on the same day, and we would all have medical certificates to prove our point. Professor agreed to a re-test but on the condition that we'll have to produce certificates from a private hospital.

Luckily Laad Sahab's uncle was a doctor, and he happened to have his letterhead, which was perfect for dealing with that situation. Finally, three of us sat for a re-test, while the professor inquired how all three of us get treated by a doctor whose clinic was 200 kilometres away from the campus.

Flying squad

Occasionally, we would have visitors, uncles, aunts, parents, and then some relatives you've only heard about in your childhood. Some brought much needed and very welcome funds. Some brought food from home and treated us to

dinners at restaurants. Sometimes these visits were unannounced, but usually, there would be a notice, and we had a chance to clean up our act according to their expectations.

One fine day my father decided that he wanted to see me. So my parents were on their way to the hostel. Having been forewarned about my parents' planned visit, I wanted them to give a good impression.

The first task at hand was to clean my room and make sure there was no evidence of any of my extracurricular activities. This did not take long since I had very few belongings. The few unwashed clothes lying on the floor were pushed under the bed. The bedsheet which had not been changed for a couple of months was flipped upside down. And then some unwanted posters were taken down.

The second job was to make sure that the rest of the gang knew in advance that we were having some visitors. My parents arrived, and after greeting them on the hostel gate, my father decided to check out my room to which I insisted. Having cleaned my room, I was quite confident that there was nothing suspicious that he was going to spot. But I had missed on one tiny, but crucial detail. He spent a minute or two, commented on the fact there were no books in my room. To which I had no reply!

~

One day Laad Sahab's parents dropped in unexpectedly. We saw them from the lounge and invited them and pretended that Beedi had taken Mohit's room key by mistake. Then Beedi and Bala hurriedly cleaned up Laad's room, removing all the cigarette butts and arranging all his stuff neatly.

Eventually, when we 'found' Beedi, he said 'Oops, here's your key', and we all dropped into Laad's room with his parents. While entering the room, even Laad Sahab was shocked, seeing such a clean room we had never seen!

Survival game

The most challenging task in our hostel, which is also agreed upon by some great masters, is to wear clean clothes. Now, wearing clean clothes doesn't sound as difficult as it is, to be honest, it is not. But just the idea of cleaning our clothes on a regular basis is the real challenge here.

But Beedi was a human of a different kind. The kind which invents new techniques to always stay number one in the survival game. He devised a method, which may look unhygienic to some mortals. He used to recycle his undies. On Mondays he would wear undies the right side out, Tuesday wear them back to front, Wednesday wear them

inside out right side on the front, Thursday wear them inside out and back to front, Friday was a no undies day and the weekend was to wash them clean. And the next Monday, the routine repeats.

~

Being a Delhiite, during his first year, Balachandra used to take all his clothes to his parent's home and have them washed there. Initially, the lady who used to work at his place was happy to accommodate, but after it became a routine, she must have started hating him to the point she almost threw the pile of his dirty clothes along with the rest of the house trash.

In her defence she said, she couldn't differentiate between the two. To which I would say, she wasn't lying, to be honest.

Second home

On weekends, those of us whose home was in the city would go home, to rediscover the delight of delicious food. Bala was a local-ite, and he used to hate our hostel. So his routine would be surviving five days in the hostel, and then he would pack his bags and visit his home on Friday evening and would come back only on Monday morning. But as the months progressed, Bala began to return earlier and earlier from his weekends home. Monday morning, Sunday evening,

Sunday afternoon, Sunday morning and so on, and leave later and later for the weekends. Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon, and so on, till he started to stay the weekends altogether. Hostel life changed him, and it became his first home.

The end.

After these twelve chapter and character descriptions, there will be a poem at the end of the book, to give proper closure to the book. To show the transformation which happened in the behaviour of Bala, and how he felt about the hostel after the four years, he spent studying in college and residing in the hostel. The poem talks about how Bala has transformed into a strong person over the years, and how his hostelmates and hostel life has played an essential role in achieving that.

Bala mentions that from crying under a tree to hugging a pillow, hostel life has taught him lessons to smile even in the worst scenarios possible. And he can not also talk about all this to his beloved ones, his parents! Because doing so will only make them sad, and they will worry about him. And that won't help him to become a strong person. He also mentions how some strangers became his family and helped him improve as a person. He then talks about how that one room, four years and six friends, with whom he had fights and laughter, made him a better human being.



Iconic cone of hostel mess 12/13/14, IIT Bombay, Mumbai

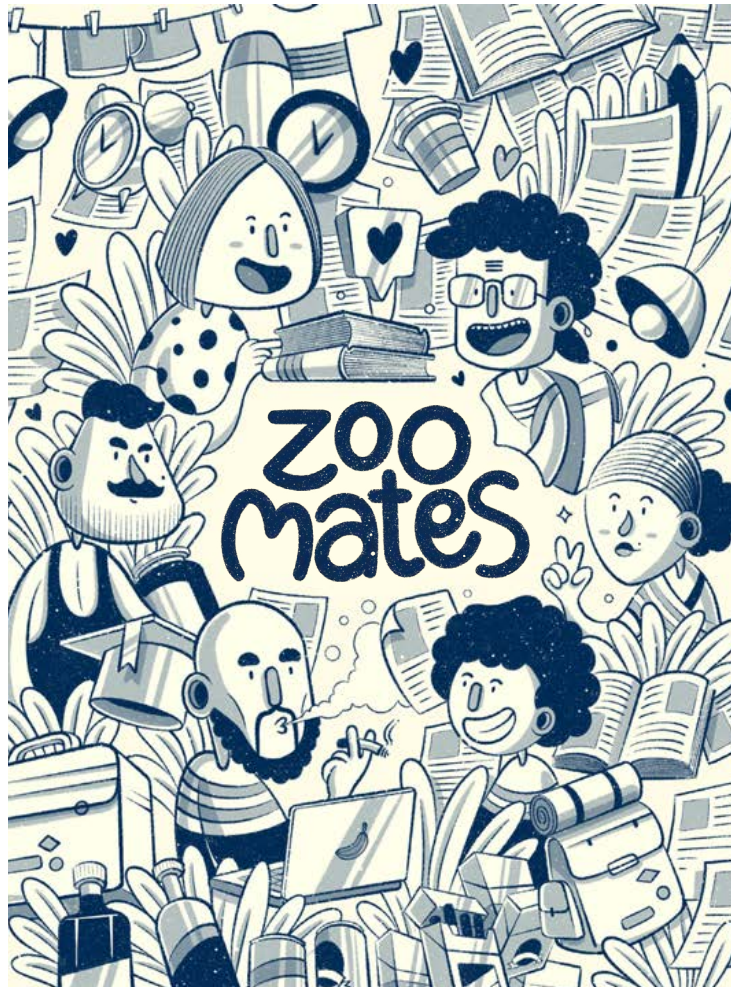
Home away from home

From crying under the willow,
To hugging the pillow,
Hostel life taught him the lessons,
To smile in tears and glow,
Not letting anyone know,
Especially parents, who love him the most you know,
And that's how he has to grow.

The hostel was where some strangers became his family,
He brought new people into his world,
With whom he could fly like a free bird.

From crying out in mother's lap to smiling with a stab
at the back,
He's come a long way and there's no looking back,
This place gave him the strength to take the flak!

That one room, two beds, four years and six friends,
Hundreds of fights, thousands of laughter and millions
of unforgettable memories made him strong and move
with grace,
Even in danger's face,
He will persevere and always ace.



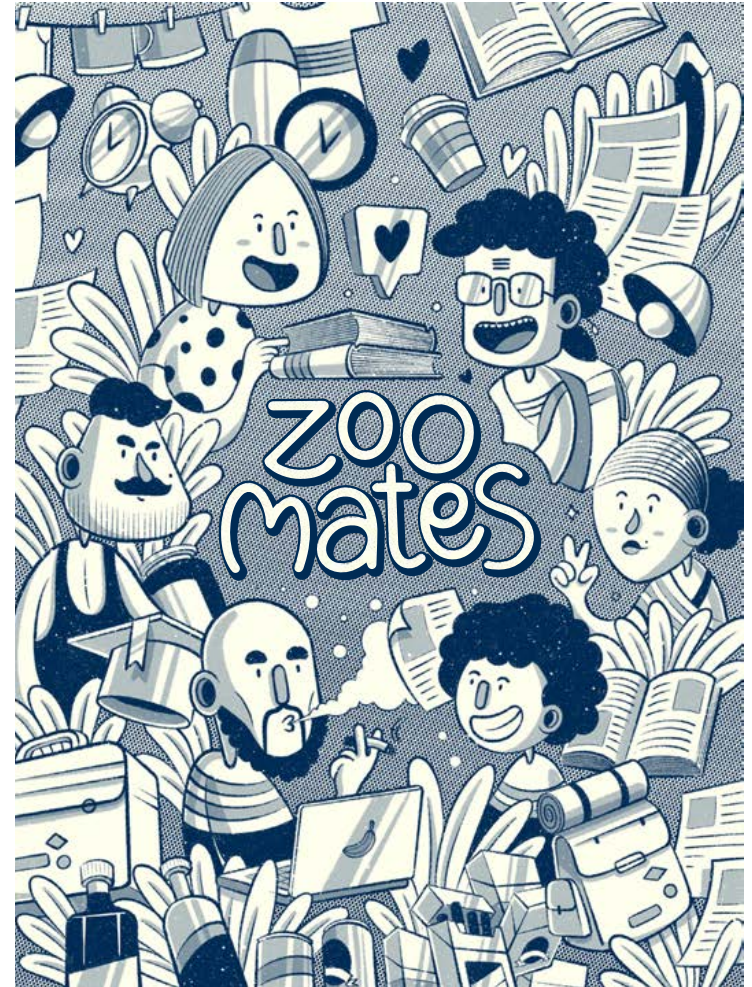
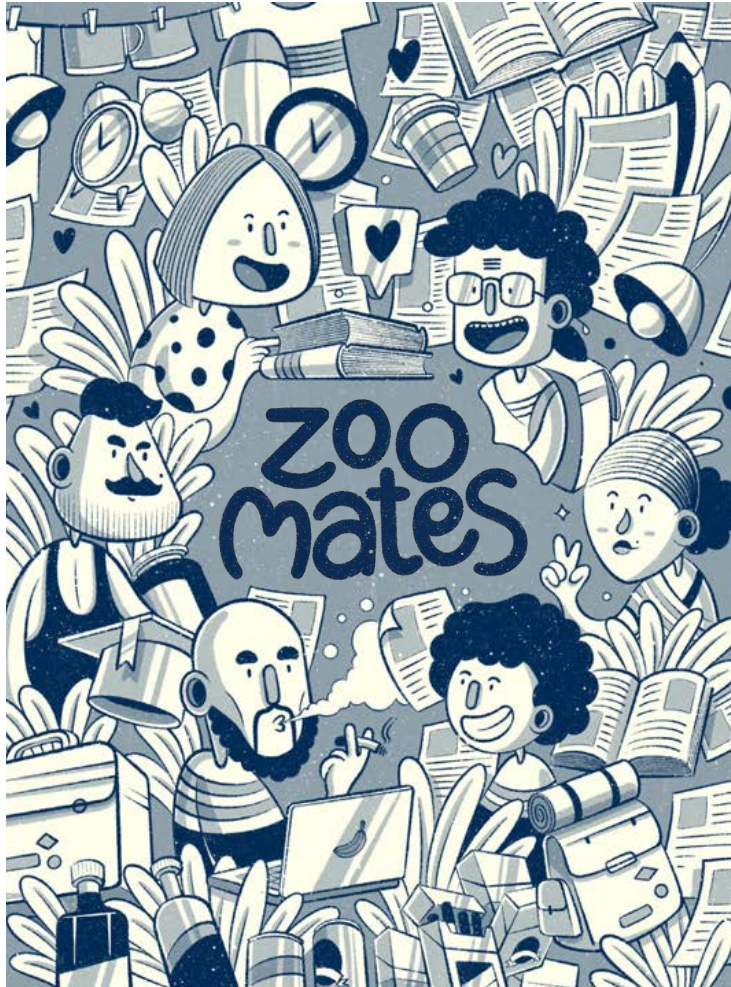
Final cover design of the book

Cover Design

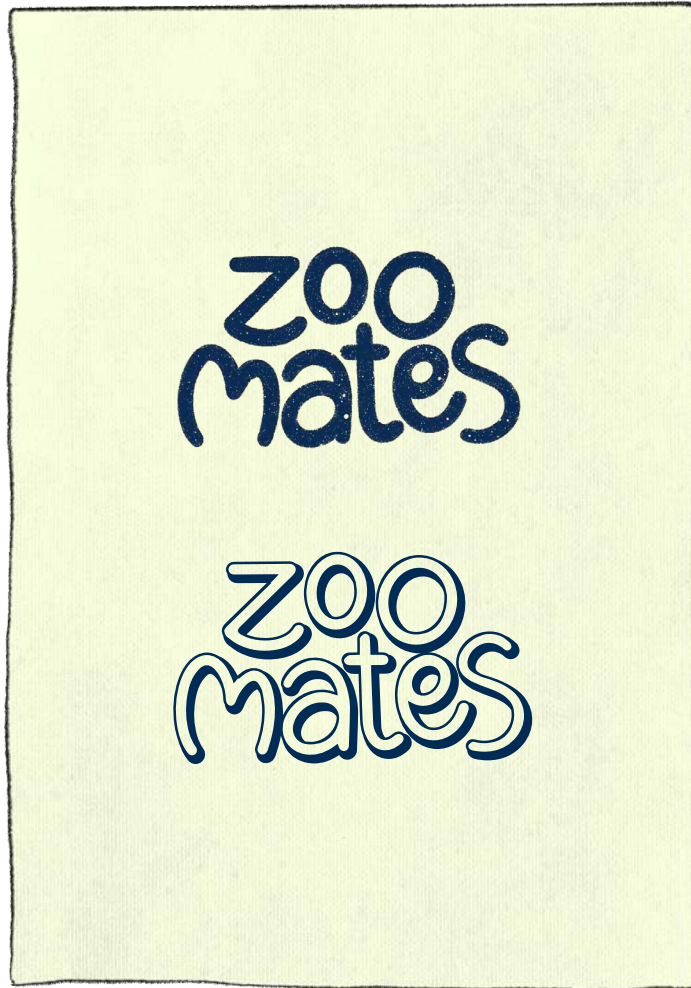
The cover was designed once I was done with a few chapters of the book. Going with the flow of the final pages, I kept a similar rendering style for the cover page of the book as well.

The one on the left is the final version of the cover. A few iterations are given on the next page. The idea behind this one was to depict all the main characters of the story, which the reader will encounter while reading the book on the front side, while the back-side of the cover is filled with characters whose appearance is limited in some episodes.

The expressions of the main characters are representing their true self, which the reader will find out later while reading the stories. The characters are although hostel mates, but more like 'zoo mates'. Complementing the characters are the things which they use or encounter during their course of stay at the hostel. And I have used a lot of vegetation to go with the 'Zoo' part of the book.



A few iterations for the book cover



Book Title

After doing the secondary study, I inferred that the same should be crisp and easy to remember.

The initial ideas were lengthy and were not entirely memorable. For example, 'Home away from home', 'Funhouse', etc. A different approach was to use pun words in the naming, the use of same might help the readers to remember the name better, as well as it will help convey different sets of meaning through a single word. So, I had come up with 'Hos-tales' in which tales of the hostels is combined to form a single word, and the overall sound resembles to 'Hostels', but that did not make it to the final list based on the feedback.

I came up with another name 'Zoo-Mates'. As in a zoo, several different species are kept together in harmony, likewise in a hostel, human beings of contrasting characteristics are held together in the hope they will keep harmony. Also, the name is such that it creates curiosity among readers, and is not as direct as 'Hos-tales'. So, I went ahead with this option and created a custom logotype for 'Zoo-mates'.



Final Pages

I have divided the pages into different frames depending upon the requirement of the narrative. Most of the narrative part is told through the text part in the floating boxes, and in some regions, the dialogues are directly delivered by the characters.

The initial few pages are used to establish characters in front of the readers, and there onwards the chapters of the graphic novels start.

The image on the left shows how the final book will look after getting printed via a mock-up. A few more pages are shown on the following pages.

In the end, a few more images are there to show the look and feel of the pages of the book by using mock-ups. Also, I have kept the look of the pages to be like old-style faded paper to bring a nostalgic feeling.



THE KIND WHICH CAN BE CONSIDERED TO BE ILLEGAL IN THE EYES OF CIVILISED PEOPLE!



BUT AMONG THE HOSTEL RESIDENTS HE'S KNOWN AS BEEDI FOR ANOTHER REASON.



BEEDI, TWO YEARS MY SENIOR IN CALENDAR YEARS BUT SEVERAL YEARS MY SENIOR IN TERMS OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING, WAS LYING ON HIS BROKEN BED ONE SUNDAY AFTERNOON!



WHEN I CAME BACK AFTER HAVING SNACKS FROM OUR CANTEN, HIS ROOM, AND HENCE MINE, REEKED OF PIGEON DROPPINGS.



OUR SPACE WAS ROCKING TO THE SOUNDS OF TWO PIGEONS SINGING A MESMERISING TUNE, ON THE BUILT-IN CUPBOARD OF THE BEEDI'S PART OF THE ROOM, ONE OF THE PIGEONS WAS MOVING AROUND IN CIRCLES.



THE OTHER PIGEON WAS CIRCLING BEEDI'S HALF-SMOKED CIGARETTE, AN ARM'S LENGTH AWAY FROM A VERY GLAZED BEEDI HIMSELF, LOOKING AT THE SAID PIGEON.



OUT IN FRONT OF HIM WAS PIGEON SHIT ON THE DESK.



AT FIRST, I WAS SHOCKED AND YELLED AT BEEDI, AND THEN AT THE PIGEON.



THROUGHOUT THEIR SACRED STATE OF HARMONY NEITHER HAD SKIPPED A BEAT.

BEEDI EVENTUALLY LOOKED AT ME ANGRILY HIS BROWS FURROWED, YELLED AT ME, AND I WAS AT A COMPLETE LOSS.





THEN THERE IS LAAD SAHAB, A JAT GUY FROM HARYANA. I AM NOT SO SURE ABOUT HIS ACTUAL NAME, BUT IT ENDED SOMETHING WITH MALIK.



WE DIDN'T EVEN NAME HIM LAAD SAHAB IN OUR N^o. IT WAS HIS PARENTS WHO DID HIM THE HONOUR.
*N^o IS SHORT FOR OUR HOSTEL *



HIS ROOM IS REFUGEE-FRIENDLY AND HIS EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH REFUGEES COULD HAVE SERVED AS THE STARTING POINT FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN THE HOSPITALITY BUSINESS.

ALSO, ALL KINDS OF CIGARETTES WOULD BE PROVIDED EXCEPT ON THE DAYS WHEN OUR WARDEN RAIDS HIS ROOM.



MY IDENTITY MARK IN MY HOSTEL IS MY CURLY HAIR, AND I'M KNOWN BY THE NAME 'KHOSLA'. AND I SUSPECT THIS NICKNAME HAS TO DO SOMETHING WITH 'GHOSLA'.

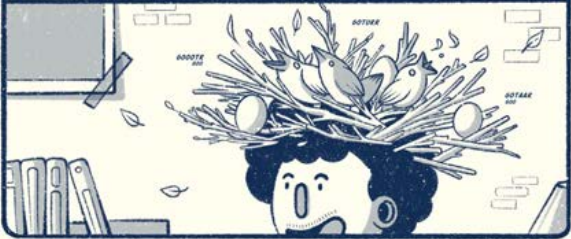


IF YOU BLOW SMOKE INTO MY HAIR, IT WOULD REMAIN TRAPPED AND WILL ONLY COME OUT WHEN SOMEONE PATS MY HEAD!



AND THEN EVEN THE SMOKE COMES OUT VERY CONFUSED.

THERE WERE RUMOURS THAT ONE PIGEON LAID EGGS ON MY HEAD ONE NIGHT! THANK GODDESS, IT WAS JUST A RUMOUR!



I AM A LITTLE POVERTY-STRICKEN, AND LAAD SAHAB IS MY LIFELINE AND ASSURED SUPPLIER OF FREE CIGARETTES AND THINGS LIKE THAT.



ONCE LAAD CHANGED HIS CIGARETTES BRAND, WHICH MADE ME VERY UPSET.



HIS ACTUAL NAME IS BALCHANDRA RADHASWAMI, BUT TOO LONG TO PRONOUNCE ON A DAILY BASIS AND ALSO TOO MUNDANE BY THE STANDARDS OF OUR COOL HR.



BALCHANDRA
RADHISWAMI HAD TO
COME TO IIT THAT IS,
UNIVERSAL INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY TO
BECOME AN ENGINEER.



HE WANTS TO DESIGN A TURBINE THAT WOULD RID INDIA OF HER ENERGY PROBLEMS.



AND HE CAN BE
SEEN READING
THICK TEXTBOOKS
AT ANY GIVEN
POINT OF TIME!

IN MESS.



IN CORRIDORS.



AND SOMETIMES EVEN IN BATHROOMS!



BUT, THE ONE THING
WHICH CONFUSES ME
ABOUT HIM IS THAT HE
HATES BEING IN A
HOSTEL.

I DON'T
WANT TO
LIVE HERE!



NOW LET ME TELL
YOU A LITTLE BIT
ABOUT SHREYA!



ALTHOUGH SHE SHOULD HAVE A NICKNAME, BUT FOR SOME REASON, SHE HASN'T BEEN
AWARDED ONE, AND I SUSPECT THAT'S BECAUSE OF BALA'S CRUSH OVER HER.



BUT IF YOU ASK
ME, EVERYONE
SHOULD BE GIVEN
A NICKNAME.

GIVING A NICKNAME
SIMPLIFIES A LOT
OF THINGS, FOR
STARTERS, YOU DON'T
NEED TO REMEMBER
COMPLICATED NAMES,
AND THAT'S PRETTY
MUCH ABOUT IT.

SHREYA IS A LIBRARY TENANT, AS SHE CAN BE SEEN 25 OUT OF 24 HOURS IN THE
LIBRARY, THAT TOO STUDYING! AND THAT'S WHY SHE'S A 'BUSY BEE'!



SHE'S MISCHIEVOUS AT TIMES TOO!



HEHE
HEHE
HEHE



SHE WOULD JUMP HER HOSTEL WALLS
AFTER CURFEW TIMINGS.



AND SHE'S THE ONE WHO WOULD COMPLAIN ABOUT THE MESSY FOOD AND THE RULES ALL THE TIME, BUT WON'T DO ANYTHING TO MAKE A CHANGE.



ALSO SHE ENJOYS TALKING OVER THE PHONE FOR HOURS. SOMETIMES IT'S HER PARENTS, SOMETIMES OLD FRIENDS WHO LOST TOUCH, OR JUST PERHAPS PALAK FROM NEXT ROOM.



AND IF YOU SEE A GIRL INDULGING IN LONG SELFIE-TAKING SESSION AND WEARING THE SAME BANDANA EVERY SINGLE DAY WITH A PRETTY MOLE ON HER UPPER LIP YOU'RE LOOKING AT OUR VERY OWN GUNJAN.





AND IT'S CALLED FASHION!

ALTHOUGH BANDANAS ARE USED TO REPRESENT GANGS AFFILIATION, GUNJAN WEARS IT FOR FUN, OR IF YOU SAY IN HER WORDS, IT'S 'FASHION'.

SHE TALKS A LOT! LIKE ABOUT EVERYTHING POSSIBLE ON PLANET EARTH. SHE DOESN'T CONSIDER IT AS GOSSIPING; RATHER, SHE CALLS IT SHARING REAL VALUABLE INFORMATION.



GUYS I HAVE SOME EXCLUSIVE NEWS!



GUYS I HAVE SOME EXCLUSIVE NEWS AGAIN!

ALTHOUGH SHE HAS BEEN SINGLE ALL HER LIFE, SHE WILL GIVE INVALUABLE PIECES OF RELATIONSHIP ADVICE.



SHE'S ALWAYS MAKING OR THINKING ABOUT MAKING HER HOSTEL ROOM PRETTIER, AND THERE'S ONLY ONE THING THAT SHREYA AND GUNJAN SHARE IN COMMON, AND THAT'S THEIR HOSTEL ROOM.



Testimonials

After completing five chapters of the book, I circulated them among my peers for feedback and reviews. The following are the responses I received for the same.

“Thoroughly alluring and undoubtedly sterling! The story design, grading and unfolding of the characters along with well put graphic tonality kept me engaging and swirling into nostalgia. This is the kind of fiction where we stop believing into its origin and readily recognize it as a part of our life space without any efforts. Truly reckon it as a material of commercial value and gleefully awaiting upcoming bits!!”

- Harsh Shah, Alumnus, CEPT Ahmedabad

“Zoo Mates' is the comic book we have been needing for so long. It tells the tale of an average hostel life experience that we look back at as fond memories. Other than being a crucial part of our growth as an individual and adult, hostel life is usually where we find our lifelong friends and some of the most interesting characters in life.

Packed with lots of relatable characters and stories, the comics have an almost universal appeal for people who

have lived in a hostel in India. What I find particularly spectacular about the comics are the choice of illustration style and the beautiful execution. To me, it speaks of playfulness and nostalgia, which is appropriate in my opinion as that's how most of us want to remember our hostel days. Being a comic geek myself, I was pretty impressed by the consistency of style and quality throughout all five chapters I have gone through.

I am really looking forward to reading more and can't wait to get my hands on the full version.”

- Prasoon Dhapola, Student, IIT Hyderabad

“It is goofy and makes you chuckle. I enjoyed it! ‘Zoo Mates’ with its distinct characters has me feeling nostalgic about my college days. I found the comic highly relatable and the visuals very satisfying. However, the narration could have been a little less complex. I had to re-read a few sentences to understand what they meant. Maybe full stops over commas at some places? Either way, I would love to read the rest of it.”

- Shrida Shah, Alumna, MSU Baroda

“I kept staring at the cover page as I was mesmerized by the style he used. I read it in one go and read it so fast that I forgot that every good thing ends as well. And now eagerly waiting for the new chapters. The sections are well divided

and narrated the story very well—arrangements and connection of characters and their characteristics blew me away like wow. The introduction to Beedi is quite captivating, how he comes in different chapters but appropriately linked to how you receive him in the previous episodes.”

- Bhawna Soni, Student, IIT Bombay

“Beautiful sketches are the strongest point, the story could be much better to have a grasping effect on readers, unless the story is worked out, it has good potential to get published.”

- Amogh Inamdar, Student, IIT Bombay

“Utkarsh's illustrative abilities come to life in the Zoo Mates' compilation of comics. Very aptly named so, the stories of the eccentric characters can't help but take you back to your nostalgic college days where you can clearly identify their real-life counterparts. Through the jovial narrative of comic strips, Zoo Mates has addressed the shortcomings as well as the blessings of hostel life - the zoo animals that we endure living with, the lessons we learn in these testing times, and the rollercoaster ride that is surviving hostel days. The simple and clearly comical illustrations along with a stylized visual language have brought this comic together in a marvellous manner!”

- Deeksha Honawar, Alumna, MSU Baroda

Conclusion

My primary takeaway from this project was learning how to write short narratives. I have always lagged in writing good content, and this was my second attempt in writing short tales.

Also, while getting stories from my friends and family, I realised that I am not the only one whose life has been influenced by living in a hostel environment, I found that majority of the people whom I interviewed were influenced too. And around ninety per cent of them said that living in the hostel helped them grow as a person.

I enjoyed a lot illustrating the panels of the book, and I am looking forward to putting these stories up on platforms where I can reach a large number of viewers and get their feedback.

References

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