

THE KAF81 STORY

The arrival of the new class in 1976, at what was then known as BHU-IT, was a milestone event. For the first time, the seats in all five years of the engineering program were filled by students who had been selected through the gruelling JEE.

This was the time of The Emergency, when ragging was still practiced under hush-hush conditions, English usage was frowned upon in the city, and the Institute was becoming a melting pot for diverse religions, cultures, languages and outlooks.

Students had the luxury of single rooms and were thrown together by batches distributed across all the hostels. It was a time of blending, bonding and growing up. By the time they graduated, the class of 1981 had become brothers and sisters for life, had founded the annual cultural event - Kashi Yatra, and had built up momentum for the wholesale migration of students to IIMs and universities abroad for postgraduate studies.

In 2006, at their twenty-fifth reunion, talk turned to the question of what could be done to show gratitude to the Institute. A collection was taken up with the intention of funding the remodelling of G-11 lecture room, in which many an hour had been spent at lectures and in watching 16mm films weekly, courtesy of the IT Cine Club.

Surprisingly, disbursing those monies was not an easy task. No facility existed for covering the last mile between the source of funds and the recipients; no account existed to which donations could be credited; and no system was in place to identify deserving recipients for scholarships.

In a few years subsequently, it became known that G-11 had been renovated by the Institute itself. So, at another reunion in 2014, sitting around a bonfire in the Mahatma Gandhi Alumni Hostel, the idea to start a foundation took hold and the "last mile problem" of connecting the funds to the awardees was eventually solved by creating the Kasi 1981 Alumni Foundation (known popularly as KAF81) in March 2016, a not-for-profit company incorporated under the Companies Act 2013 (Charitable Company) with 5 members of the 1981 batch as full-time directors.

In 2017, KAF81 began making scholarship grants to deserving students. The grant process begins with online applications from undergraduates, which are screened by a committee of batchmates and then a shortlist of candidates who meet the criteria for merit and means are interviewed by panels of alumni from the class of 1981.

Panel members treat their responsibilities as a sacred trust where they give the gift of personal presence over and above their monetary contributions. Personal one-on-one interview sessions at the Alumni Hostel involves sitting across the table with current students, listening to their stories, sometimes of great personal challenges and struggles and providing them with advice, and helping sow seeds for career plans and dreams.

The panel makes recommendations to the Foundation's board for disbursement of scholarships. The institute has helped immensely in this process by communications to students on the availability of KAF81 scholarships, by verifying applicants test scores and family income levels and by routing the scholarship funds into awardee accounts.

Members of the class of 1981 donate their time and expertise without expecting or receiving any reimbursement whatsoever. Almost one hundred percent of the funds that KAF81 raises, are through annual donations by batch members and occasional grants from charitable foundations. These are earmarked for scholarships or for an endowment to fund scholarships and other academic enrichment activities for current students. The Foundation's accounts are audited annually and made available upon request.

Scholarship pay-outs have steadily increased over the past four years. In all 93 students have benefited so far, with 36 students receiving scholarship in 2020-21 alone. KAF81 is truly a mechanism by which the class of 1981 is collectively giving back to their alma mater, community and the nation.