

Roorkee Diary

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1. I was invited in March to IIT Roorkee to be the chief guest at the inaugural session of Cognizance 2014. This is billed by them as the largest techfest in India. Last year I had been invited to give a guest lecture at Techkriti – the premier tech festival at IIT Kanpur. They had also billed it as the largest techfest in India. So all the IITs have to get together to decide whose techfest is really the largest!
2. The fastest way to reach Roorkee is to fly into Jolly Grant (JG) airport in Dehradun and then drive to Roorkee. The JG airport is a small airport recently refurbished and the distance of 66 Km to Roorkee is covered in 2 hours! This is because the roads are absolutely horrible with huge potholes and being single lane with heavy truck and bus traffic.
3. This was my third visit to Roorkee – the first was in 1973 when as a student of IIT Kanpur I had presented a paper on solar energy at the national solar energy conference in Roorkee University (it became IIT only recently). My remembrance of that visit was that Roorkee was a small place and we could go any place in town on a cycle rickshaw. Now it is a growing town with city buses and other modes of motorized transport. The second visit, just for a day, was in the 1990s to attend an MNES workshop.
4. IIT Roorkee campus is small, compact and a nice one. Its main colonial style building is majestic and its gardens were blooming. Since it was not the original IIT the area is much smaller than that of the other IIT campuses. It is easy to



walk in the campus and go from one place to another and yet students prefer recently introduced six-seater electric rickshaws rather than walking!

5. I was put in the N. C. Nigam VIP guest house. N. C. Nigam, a distinguished alumnus of Roorkee

University, was my professor of aeronautical engineering at IIT Kanpur. He was a remarkable man and a great teacher. I met him later on in late 1990s in one of the meetings in Delhi and we exchanged notes about IIT Kanpur during 1960s.

6. The inaugural session was well-attended both by the students and faculty including the Director of the Institute Dr. Banerjee.



7. I also used the opportunity of this visit to give a seminar in Mechanical Engineering Department. After the seminar the word spread among the students and so quite a number of them, who were interested in rural development, wanted to meet me. So on the evening of 21st March around 18 students including two faculty members met me in N. C. Nigam guest house.

The two hour long discussion was very interesting and I was thrilled by the interest and the desire of students to do something meaningful in their life. I have always found such discussions much better than the usual lectures – no matter how well they are attended.

8. The road from Dehradun airport to Roorkee passes through Haridwar and other small towns. The whole road scene was quite ugly with ugly so-called religious

buildings (including temples and ashrams) on both sides of the road and the roadside was littered with waste-both plastic and non-plastic.

9. The water in Ganges at Haridwar was flowing nicely and looked quite clean but the river bank was littered with waste. I could visualize how in ancient times the whole area must have been really beautiful since it was probably a thick forest with teak and other trees with Ganges water flowing at good speed - it must have been like heaven. Together with the fact that in ancient times there were very few buildings, this place must have been like the abode of Gods and thus became famous.
10. Today even Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar is full of ugly buildings and littered with plastic bags and bottles and crowded with a large number of vehicles parked near it.
11. My memory of 1973 of Haridwar and Rishikesh was of small towns with lots of people on foot and bicycles but very few temples and ashram buildings. Now the whole place has become huge with garishly colored ugly buildings. Also being small places in those days we could go everywhere by a cycle rickshaw or on foot.
12. There is a massive program of Ganga cleaning by Government of India. However that effort can only bear fruit when we first clean our act by not littering the Ganges bank and crowding it with ugly buildings.

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