

Interview with Mr. Suhas L. Yathiraj

District Magistrate of Gatham Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, Winner of Silver Medal at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics and Alumnus of NITK Surathkal

NITK: Many Congratulations Mr. Suhas Yathiraj, for the silver medal you got for India at Tokyo! It makes us so very proud as an NITKan!

Suhas: Thanks a lot. First of all, it is my pleasure to talk to my alma mater, NITK Surathkal. In fact, when we were studying in 11th and 12th standard, it was a dream for all of us to get into KREC Surathkal as it was known then. I believe, in fact, clearing CET exam and getting into REC Surathkal was my first big achievement so to speak, that I could be proud of. So, yea... one day this college is asking me back to speak – I think, life has been extremely kind to me.

NITK: You had a modest upbringing – somewhat away from the cosmopolitan. Do you think you would have achieved even greater with a more urbane childhood?

Suhas: I was born in Hassan but I have never stayed in Hassan. I have studied, done most of my schooling in Shimogga. I don't think if I were in Bangalore or any other place I would have done better. Because Shimogga at that time, had one of the best schoolings that one could get. And we were all quite well-educated in a sense and we were all focused on what we had to do. My first dream was to become an engineer from a premier institution and then, to get into a multinational company. In fact, when I was doing my engineering, I was really not sure what I would do after engineering. I had the option of writing MS, TOEFL and GRE exams and I thought of even writing CAT to get into an MBA. But then, I think somewhere with my aptitude, I always wanted to do Civil Services. So, I wrote UPSC. After NITK Surathkal, I got offers from a few multinational companies via campus placement and joined one of them. I was working for SAP Labs in Bangalore for 3 years and I had an opportunity to work abroad also. I did get offers from some other companies which would have paid me better and had an opportunity of working abroad. But I chose Civil services instead. Getting into the IAS was a dream for me. So, I think, that was again a dream come true. God has been kind, I cleared IAS in my first attempt.

NITK: We learn that you were one of the first District Magistrates to develop and deploy mobile applications in governance. Tell us about your administrative achievements. To what extent being an engineer helped you in administration?

Suhas: Yes, being an engineer, it will always help throughout your life. Essentially engineers solve problems. Whatever job you do, whatever you do in life, it will always involve problem solving. Being from computer science, it is all the more relevant in the present day and era in the government. I was involved in developing a few applications – for tackling malnutrition and for enabling the voters to vote more seamlessly. I also had an opportunity of being the District Collector of Prayagraj when the *Kumbhmela* was held, two years ago. That was the world's largest conglomeration of people and being the District Collector of Prayagraj, it was a huge learning experience. I was posted in Noida amidst the pandemic. Here also technology was of great use. I set up the Integrated Command and Control Centre for Covid Management which was hugely applauded by the Central and the State Governments and the

model was even replicated in many other districts. So yes, technology is always of use; it is just that we need to improvise it and apply it according to the situation.

Being in IAS has its pros and cons; but it is certainly a job that gives the widest exposure possible and one of the diverse work experiences that anybody can get in India. I don't think getting such a huge responsibility at such a young age is possible in any other job. So, I have been very fortunate to be in different districts. I have been a district collector of almost seven districts now and yes, wherever I have been posted, people of those districts have showered immense love and affection because of the work that I was able to do there. So that is one thing that is not available in other jobs generally.

NITK: It is very difficult to think of achieving an Olympic medal even as a professional athlete. We wonder, how as a busy IAS officer, you could achieve this seemingly impossible feat? What would you tell our students specifically regarding multi-tasking and multi-achieving as you have accomplished?

Suhas: Multi-tasking, yes! It is definitely challenging, but it is doable! What we need to do is to choose those tasks, which actually make us happy. You know, I love my IAS job; I love my collector's job; at the same time, I love my badminton. Badminton is almost a spiritual experience for me! So when you love doing things, it does not give you pain; rather it makes you happy! So, generally I do my job from nine o'clock to nine o'clock in the night and after 9 or 10 in the night, I get onto the badminton court and I play and yea, sleep quite late. Because I love both things, generally, it never makes me feel tired or it never makes me feel that I am doing something that I don't want to do. So, it's the thing that I love doing and so I think, at the end of the day, if you cherish what you are doing, the doing part becomes source of joy and happiness. Then you can achieve anything in life.

NITK: Having spent four formative years of your life at NITK, what would you like to tell your juniors about it?

Suhas: I would like to take this opportunity to wish all my juniors who are studying in NIT Surathkal... All the very best! NITK is one of the most premier educational institutions of the country and I am sure after having gone through the grind of the college at NIT Surathkal, when you are out in the world, you will be able to tackle all those challenges that the world or society would throw at you. The biggest learning that you will have at NIT Surathkal is you will have the confidence and you will have the problem-solving skills that would be needed in the real world out there!

Thank you, thanks for getting in touch with me! In fact, I have not come to NIT Surathkal since 2004 when I passed out. It has been 17 years! But you know, all the moments that we spent in college, hostels, everywhere – they are all etched in my memories forever. Looking forward to meeting; looking forward to coming to the college soon... Thank you so much!

NITK: Thank you so much for this interview! We are sure our students take those cues from you and tread the lines of perseverance, success and a general sense of welfare. We wish you many more laurels and a great time ahead! Hope to see you soon at NITK! Thanks again!

Acknowledgment

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