As We Leave (F)

Aug 8, 2024 | Harshit Raj

You'll get to hear many stories about how things work out at the end in most of the "As We Leave" you read. This one is slightly different, this is about how small efforts from *your end* add up to create the bigger picture. I'm not telling you that you are in control of your path, but the direction is in your hand. This ain't a story of ups and downs. Not because I didn't have ups and downs but because those don't define me. This is the story of a guy who took "explore everything" quite seriously, using sheer "enthu" alone. This story is an exciting, serendipitous, blessed, yet somewhat planned journey. In this piece, I've tried to mention some core sections of my stay at IITK.

Part 0: Why? Because it is a Norm? I'll pass

"You see me as inferior in contrast to your idea of "normal." But what is normal, but mediocre?" — Ezra Claytan Daniels, Upgrade Soul

Before you get started with my *graduation notes*, here's a bit of a prelude. This story is filled with abnormal situations and events, mostly because I do not like normal in my life. Mediocracy haunts me. My ultimate goal in life is to not get bored. IIT Kanpur provides a pretty streamlined approach to advancing through the ranks. Observe in first year, secretary in second, coordinator in third, and observe again in fourth. But where is the fun in that, I did not climb this ladder; I made my own way. Despite having a decent list of PORs, none of them was *secretary*.

Part 1: Capricious Overdoing

"If it is a user input, take it with a bucket of salt" — Dr. Deepu Phillip, DoMS, IIT Kanpur

This journey began with a very turbulent era. I didn't like STEM. It was my third preference among my career choices. But in my heart, I knew this would be the easiest degree among my options. COVID hasn't been kind to most, and I was no different. My coping mechanism was escaping. I'm (self-proclaimed) the greatest escape artist of all time. I was hypersocial in my initial years of college. I must have pinged (or bugged) almost all students of my branch. I gained many friends and acquaintances in this endeavor. I tried my best to help out as many peers as possible, but this ended, as all things inevitably come to an end. I've taken up all the offered projects that intrigued me. I've participated in (and won) all the events I found interesting.

Next, I tried to *interact* with seniors and alumni. I pushed this *interaction* to a limit, and even as I graduate, I know more seniors than my own batchmates. I won't say this was the best decision, but these connections really helped. Ps. I was on the other side of *interactions* when the campus was finally open.

In all these experiences, I heard many opinions, perspectives, and advice. The beauty of IIT is that none of them were wrong, but only some of them were relevant. Everyone makes statements based on their experiences, and there can be a correlation between two situations, but it can never be the same. As an individual, you are unique and will have your own unique experiences. Never take anyone's word as holy grail. It truly helps to know many perspectives, but don't just be average of them. Be true to yourself.

Part 2: Imputed Elections

"If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking at all" -- John F. Kennedy

Did I tell you I was participating in everything? They rolled out a nomination for Election Officer, I got in. They rolled out a nomination for Senator, I left the Election Commission, and participated in it too. Well... thanks to my extremely supportive batchmates I was at the center of the (decision-making?) student body. I love managing stuff where I get to know the other side of an event and all the groundwork that goes into a final small event. Maybe also because of the challenges and chaos it presents.

> ... meri mukhya abhiruchiya ... aur *lafde dekhna* hai.

Pretty early I got to witness the political shenanigans of IITK. I must admit it is nothing to be sneezed at. Students' elections in IITK are organized every year and we invite ~8K residents to participate and choose their next leader out of which nearly half show up. Is it not weird that most of them hear the same kind of stories and reviews? It is not. These talks, or call it rumors, are controlled by a mere few for most of the electorate never check on them. I mean why would they? It is convenient this way. The entire election is controlled by a mere ~100 students. This number is of a good election year, General Election 2022 was controlled by a handful. Who will triumph in this neither on intention nor on skills. I am a mere observer. I always had a side in every election but only by option of elimination.

This bird's eye view of the entire student body also gave me a gateway to be involved everywhere and nowhere. Per my mood, I toggled many interests and breezed through clubs, cells, and festivals. My acquaintance with any student group was part-time at best. Not all paragraphs will end with a closing note. This section ends here. 😂

Part 3: Jumping on Responsibilities

"I quit every goddamn day, I just never said it out loud." - Harvey Spectre, Suits (Series)

Like I said before, I wasn't a secretary anywhere. *Kya matlab nhi liya mereko.* :)
I jumped to positions or situations, made an impact and left. You all may think
senators don't work. Maybe the Senate doesn't but Senate sub-committees
do, which is then presented to the Senate. I was fortunately or unfortunately
in many of these sub-committees. The final sub-committee I was in decided
what degrees IITK should offer.

I've built crazy products with Abhishek and Somya, but most never got
deployed. The one that did will be used by the entire campus community. My
SPO journey was a bit wild. The tech I joined with was so bad that I had to
take responsibility for Web Head within a couple of months after becoming
Web Executive. I did justice to this responsibility by delivering a new portal
within a year of joining SPO. The challenges I faced during this weren't just
technical, they also extended to personal and bureaucratic. It was a great
learning experience, I encourage every like-minded junior to build something
from scratch.

Another significant responsibility I held was Organizer of Techkriti in my
second year. I got to see a lot of behind-the-scenes and behind-the-door talks
in the process and witnessed first hand all the measures taken to ensure a
smooth conduction of a festival. But most importantly Techkriti gave me
three amazing friends, Shivnagi, Daksh, and Priyanka.

Rome wasn't built in a day but the Inter IIT High prep product was built
overnight. *Living on the edge and not falling.*

Oh!! Oh!! A very unrelated incident but I'll pen it here only. Y20 came to
campus with a protest and left with a protest. I was part of the administrative
briefs in the first protest. And unluckily I was inside the directorate when the
second protest stormed the directorate. I was shit scared not gonna lie. :(

Part 4: Friends -- Core of IITK Memories

:: Please feel free to skip this section, readers' discretion advised::

Every time I got into trouble, I knew I was around the best of the kinds. I've met many good people on campus but some are just trouble. Harsh and Vedant pulled me to Kedarnath and back, near-death experience but survived, under the pretext of "yehi batein to baad me yaad aayeingi". "Darte hai kya" became the precursor to every stupid call for action. "Bas thodi der aur" made an entire night skip. Every story is incomplete without telling these idiots. Everyday was just a day till I met these idiots. Due to censorship issues, I can't pen most of the recent stuff.

I'll send a personal memo to all my dear friends about how much better they've made my life or otherwise instead of putting this here in the interest of the general populous. I've left IITK, yet some of these have permanent residence in my heart- *Gamla Chor* Shivgamini, Random Group Blah Blah, Mentally sick byous, anya, Musa, SIGKILL, GDC, sher, and many more. But I very clearly remember crying to seniors about not having friends and they assured me the best ones would come sooner or later. As I found mine, I'd want everyone should have at least a few true friends. I (*touchwood*) am truly grateful to have all of these around. Since most of them didn't post their AWL I'll spam their photos with some half-decent captions.

"They were brothers but bound by more than blood ... counterparts gangster princes of the city, they were meant to conquer"

Part 5: Academic Pass

"We are not what we know but what we are willing to learn." - Mary Catherine Bateson

I had arrogance in my first year, that I know ESC101 level C programming. I've only been humbled day after day. The more and more I get to learn and explore the more and more I've begun to realize it is too little. As I write this I am graduated and the list of stuff I know is much smaller than the list that I don't. IITK provides you with full freedom and the courses touch on the breadth of what they want to teach. You can either argue about its futility or reap its benefits.

I've tried to approach every problem without practice and apply full novelty to it. Mostly I'm surprised by how close it is to the real solution. Once I pitched a bizarre approach in the middle of the end sem of a course the end sem was extended by 30 mins to allow me to finish the answer. :) Be real, instead of emulating some solution you've seen somewhere, think of it from the core. Reverse engineering is my side hobby.

I've successfully graduated while maintaining a CPI that's just good enough and I finally managed a B+ in an HSS course(I generally get a C 😭).

Part 6: Professional Life

"To each, his own"

Once I knew I was set for a future in computer science. My dream was to be a SWE. Well fresh out of school SWE seems too far and mighty. I connected with like-minded seniors and built an amazing profile in SWE. Till my second year, I was fixed to be a SWE. At this point, I've explored machine learning, formal programming, theoretical computer science, etc. I've invested my summer towards SWE. Intern season was fast approaching and I was left with algorithm design and computer systems to explore. Incidentally, a couple of weeks before the intern season, I read about systems and took a leap of faith towards systems. I'd invest my next two years of college solely in systems completely disregarding my prior investment toward SWE. There's always

that fear of imposter syndrome but taking a pivot and trusting yourself is the best. You may need to put calculated checkpoints around the exploration but it's worth a journey.

Part 7: Jack of all trades

"The final chapter… I'll call it: Frog at the bottom of the well drifts off into the great ocean. Just barely glorious… But glorious indeed." -- Jiraya Sensei, Legendary Sannin, Naruto (Anime)

I've tried to cover all that IITK offers and probably have some control over systems. Jack of all trades, a befitting award presented by ACA during the CSE 2024 farewell. Now that IITK is my alma mater, I'll carry its flag and go into this world and explore further, make memories, and make an impact.

What is the message I leave for you, the reader? There will be a lot of paths moving forward, I'm sure you'll find yours. Be unique.

If you've made it till here. Thank you for reading. If you ever wanna catch up or chat about anything feel free to ping me. sayhi@harshitraj.xyz

Signing Off
Harshit, 200433
Zoo Keeper 🦕

Photos: 🖼 AWL

Thumbnail: 📄 Copy of harshit_antaragni.jpg

Quote: "The final chapter… I'll call it: Frog at the bottom of the well drifts off into the great ocean. Just barely glorious… But glorious indeed."

INSTA CAPTION:

"The final chapter... I'll call it: Frog at the bottom of the well drifts off into the great ocean. Just barely glorious... But glorious indeed."

In this 47th edition of As We Leave 2024, Harshit Raj, a Y20 student in the Department of Computer Science, shares with us his some snippets of his experiences at IITK, from taking 'exploring' very seriously and interacting with many people - seniors and batchmates alike, to building and breaking tech in IITK and walking on his own path.

Article link:

https://voxiitk.com/as-we-leave-2024-47/

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