

## **Memorable days as warden of the first hostel in Kamand campus**

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It was serendipity that I became a warden of a hostel and that too the 'yet to be established' first hostel in Kamand, the permanent campus of IIT Mandi. I would like to briefly describe my journey here in my first administrative role at IIT Mandi.

I joined IIT Mandi on Apr. 11, 2012 as a young Assistant Professor after completing 10 years stint out of India with absolutely no prior experience of work or administration in India. Added to this fact, is that I had never stayed in a hostel in my entire life. The first two months from mid-Apr. to mid-Jul. 2012 was quite smooth with not much of work, as there was no teaching commitments for me and I was just coming to tune with the cultural shock, that I was experiencing for the fourth time in my life, especially after returning back to home country finally for good.

In mid-Jul. 2012, I was told by Dr. Subrata Ghosh, then EXECOM (Students) convener that his committee is in search of 2 assistant wardens for hostels in Mandi and a warden and an assistant warden for a proposed hostel in Kamand. I did not take it seriously that time, as I thought that I was out of competition, as I was very new to IIT Mandi, no prior experience in administration and also never stayed in a hostel. But few days later, he told me that their committee had an internal discussion and my name has been proposed for the post of warden for the hostel in Kamand. This took me back by surprise as I never anticipated this decision. Subsequently, when I was called by our Director to inform me of this decision. In that meeting, I mentioned to him that I never stayed in a hostel and do not have much idea about life in hostels. For this he smilingly replied that, then you are the best choice for this post. I took his words seriously, agreed to venture into this unknown territory and was formally appointed as the warden on Jul. 16, 2012. Later, through other

sources, I got to know that no other faculty member was willing to take up this task as they do not want to shift their base from Mandi town to Kamand valley at that point of time!

From the first day of my appointment as warden of an unnamed hostel, typically called as the Kamand hostel, my life became very busy, although there was no students on campus at that time, due to summer vacation. I had to sign several bills pertaining to the purchases that were initiated even before my joining and had to plan for accommodating the students once they arrive on campus. Interestingly, as the proposed hostel in Kamand campus was not ready at that time, we had to do make-shift arrangements for their stay at Hotel River Bank, Ekant Palace and Shubham Home stay in Sauli Khad, Mandi. This was a Herculean task, as I and my colleague, Dr. Ashok Kumar, then Assistant Warden of our unnamed hostel, had to travel back and forth between the transit campus in Mandi and these hotels in Sauli Khad multiple times in a day. In addition, we were provided with a list of students (2011-15 B.Tech. batch - 100 boys), who all need to be accommodated in these hotel rooms. To complicate the matter, the transportation in-charge was also given to me and Dr. Rajeev Kumar to manage. When I look back now, I still wonder how I managed these tasks, although it provided a great deal of experience.

By late Jul. 2012, came the students with the hope of getting a two-seater accommodation in newly constructed spacious rooms in the permanent campus, but were quite disappointed with the make-shift arrangement of having 4 to 5 students in one room in these very old hotels. Almost every day, I had to resolve their issues ranging from small to big, as I was their main point of contact. With the able assistance of our hostel caretaker, Mr. Chamanlal Thakur, I was able to handle many of their urgent and real needs. During this time, I realized that lending a patient ear to the students solves half of their problems, and putting efforts to solve their problem and having an open discussion with them solves the remaining half. In this way, I was able to build a good rapport with the students.

After spending 2 months in these hotels, finally the day came to shift our student to Kamand, when the bamboo blocks were almost ready in Kamand besides the D-1 mess (dining hall). Along with our hostel committee student members, I visited Kamand several times in these 2 months and have seen the construction activities in progress. I have recorded those memories as photographs, one of which is shown below.



While planning the shifting of our students to Kamand, there were lot of hurdles. Firstly, our Assistant Warden, Dr. Ashok Kumar resigned from his post, as he was not convinced with the decision of the administration to shift the students to Kamand, while the rooms and mess are not fully ready. Secondly, the Khaliyar bridge that connect Mandi to Kamand (shortest route) broke because of heavy rain in preceding days. Due to which we had to take the long route through Darang to reach Kamand. Thirdly, the Central Minister for Human Resource Development (HRD), who was to supposed to visit IIT Mandi to inaugurate the hostel and the dining hall, cancelled his visit. Despite all these setbacks, our Director and I were quite firm on shifting the student to Kamand. Within a day after Ashok's

resignation, Dr. Bharat Singh Rajpurohit was appointed as the new Assistant Warden to facilitate the shifting and settling of the students in the new hostel in Kamand.

Finally, on Sep. 23, 2012 (equinox day), with the assistance of our students, caretaker, laborers, some supporting faculty colleagues and many other people known and unknown, we all (100 boys + 8 girls of B.Tech., 2 M.S. students (Runa and Sujeet), 2 Ph.D. students (Reena and Rajiv) and myself) shifted to Kamand, which was witnessed by the entire IIT Mandi community, including those that were very skeptical of this event. It was planned that our Director would inaugurate the dining hall and the hostel blocks. But to my pleasant surprise, he called me, gave the scissors in my hand, asked me to cut the ribbon and inaugurate the dining hall (D-1 mess), the first newly constructed building in Kamand campus. Some photographs of this event can be seen below. From that day onwards, I started staying in the renovated building in Kamand campus. This entire period was very eventful.





The following weeks till the winter vacation was very memorable, as we all had a great time enjoying the beautiful campus, which is all for us! We

slowly started establishing all the required facilities in our hostel, ranging from dance room to sports room. All the 112 students were very happy and enthusiastic. I still remember the names of all these students and am in contact with many of them till date. We all developed a sense of belonging to this place and wanted to improve it to the best. With the strong support from Director and institute administration, we could establish a lot of things in our hostel, a few of them are mentioned below.

(a) Mini-gym

(b) Small library cum reading room

(c) Music and dance room with speaker boxes

(d) Office automation software to handle requests (developed by our student, Vinod Kumar)

The hostel life, which I missed as a student in my life, was getting fulfilled in my role as warden of this hostel.

Subsequent to winter vacation, there were several changes, which include the change of caterer of the mess, change of van operator, change of provision store to canteen and many more. In Jan. 2013, we also welcomed Mr. Pavin Samuel as Assistant Administrator Students, who ably helped me in managing the hostel affairs. On Mar. 09, 2013, our hostel, now named by students as Prashar hostel, was formally inaugurated by Shri Virabhadra Singh, then Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh. Ours was the only hostel, wherein the inmates picked the name for the hostel, keeping with the tradition of naming the hostels based on the lakes in Himachal Pradesh. Incidentally, on the same day, the Advanced Materials Research Center (AMRC), also headed by me, was inaugurated by Shri Pallam Raju, then Minister of HRD.

The ensuing period till Jul. 2014 saw the expansion of our Prashar hostel with many more new building under it ambit. We welcomed the 2010-2014 batch (then graduating batch) of B.Tech. students, AMRC research scholars and a few M.S. students, to be a part of our hostel over the course of time. At one point, the strength of our hostel touched 450

students. We were able to cater to all of them. I enjoyed a very good rapport with all the students of our hostel and got their full support during my entire tenure, which I value more than the Foundation Day Award that I had received for my contributions as warden of this hostel. After completing my two-year term as warden, I declined an extension and gracefully demitted the office on Aug. 08, 2014. Overall, it was highly cherishable and rewarding experience to serve as the founding warden of the first hostel in the permanent campus of IIT Mandi!