

Online Interactive Session with WGM/IM Bhakti Kulkarni



Goa's first International Master Bhakti Kulkarni

On the 18th of September, 2020, the class 11 (REG) students of Mushtifund Aryaan Higher Secondary School had the opportunity of having an online interactive session with Women Grandmaster & International Master Ma'am Bhakti Kulkarni

The session began with our respected sir and director of MAHSS Vyankatesh Prabhudesai greeting madam and giving us a brief insight on ma'am's achievements and awards which were quite a few.

Some of them include-

State Champion of Goa in all categories

Hattrick in being the Open State champion for 3 consecutive years (record)

National junior Girls chess champion 2007,2009

National Women's Challenger Chess champion 2011, 2017

National premiers Runners-up 2012, 2017

National Premier Champion 2018 2019

Asian Junior Chess Champion 2011

Awarded Women Grandmaster Title 2012

Awarded International master Title 2019 and hence became the first-ever IM from Goa

Awarded prestigious Geno sports award

Awarded Government of India national Sports Talent scholarship

Awarded Dilip Sardesai award for Sports excellence by CM in 2011
Qualified for the Women's world championship 2018
Bronze Medal in Women's Commonwealth championship 2019

Asian Continental Women Gold Medal (Uzbekistan, 2016)
Commonwealth Women Gold Medal - (Scotland, 2014)
Gold in the 2020 FIDE Online Olympiad
And many more...

Sir Vyankatesh Prabhudesai then began the session by asking what role her parents had to play in her journey as a chess player because it is not easy for parents to support a child to take up sports as a career completely considering the competition. Bhakti ma'am replied by saying that she was very lucky as back then when she had just begun, there was not much competition so there was never any comparison her parents could do with other kids.

It was her father who taught her the game of chess at the age of just two and a half! She then shifted to Goa from Nagpur. From here on her journey began as a chess player and she took part in her first chess tournament in Bambolim at the young age of just 4! Even though she couldn't win a single game, she was the youngest player and the organizers awarded her a consolation prize which was indeed her first trophy ever



Bhakti Kulkarni Participating in her first ever tournament she participated in at Bambolim in 1996 where she received her first ever trophy as a consolation prize. She is reciting the Atharv Shirsha at the inauguration of the tournament.

At the age of 6, she was the Under-7 State champion and qualified for her national under-7. And then went on to win her first bronze medal in her first national in 1998 which was when her father thought she had the potential to achieve a lot more. Her father was naturally supportive in her journey as he as himself a chess player and even though her mother did not know how to play chess, she would support her in every small step of hers.

The next question Sir asked was; what was the role of her coach and when did she get her first coach. Bhakti ma'am replied by saying that a coach is not only important in chess but also in life as a guru. Her first coach was Sir Raghunandan V. Gokhale who is in fact still her coach for almost 20 years! She had been introduced to her coach by one of her friend Dhyani ma'am in a national in Ahmedabad in 2001 where their journey began and which is also why Ahmedabad is very special to ma'am because her first medal (1998 bronze in U-7 Nationals) and also her introduction coach Sir Raghunandan V. Gokhale. Sir Raghunandan V. Gokhale was so humble and accepted bhakti as his student and did not take a lot of money from them either considering that she did not have any sponsors and wasn't financially that well off. Ma'am then emphasized on the need of a coach by saying that a support system is always necessary and it is difficult to focus on every aspect of the game i.e., the opening, middle game and endgame and various other aspects and a coach will always help and keep you updated.



Bhakti Kulkarni with her parents (left) and her coach Sir Raghunandan V. Gokhale (Right).

Sir's next question was how her school Mahila & Nutan played a role in her journey and whether it was supportive in Bhakti Ma'am playing tournaments at the cost of her classes and Ma'am replied by saying that she was very lucky in this regard as well. Her school was extremely supportive and allowed her to take leave from school for tournaments and encouraged her and her classmates by announcing her awards in school assemblies. They were so supportive that in class 5, her father asked them whether she could join school at 10 am and they happily agreed!

Vyankatesh Sir then asked Bhakti how good she was in academics considering that from whatever he had read, most elite chess players are usually smart/ of a higher IQ and generally

good in academics. She replied by saying that she was not a very great student as she was completely focusing on chess, but chess helped her as it taught her how to focus and concentrate on one task for long hours.

Sir then said that Cricket in India is very popular mainly because of it being viewed by the audience on television and asked bhakti whether she agreed with the fact that watching a game on television makes a huge difference in the popularity of a game to which Bhakti ma'am agreed and said that the main reason why chess is not so popular is that not everyone can watch chess, to watch they need to have a good understanding of the game but in recent times, YouTubers have popularized the game to a large extent in this lockdown and unlike cricket, chess takes quite a bit of time to learn.

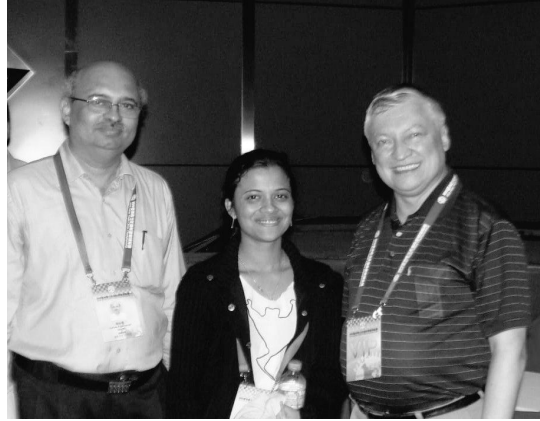
Bhakti ma'am then answered Sir's question on how online chess is played between people from even different continents by saying that many platforms like chess.com and lichess.org are where online chess is played and she has been lucky that the sport she plays is chess as it would not be possible to play any other physical sport in this lockdown.

Sir then asked Ma'am bhakti about her longest and shortest games to which she said her longest one had lasted for 7 hours and her shortest one had lasted for only 17 moves against a German IM.

One student then asked ma'am how she manages to play blitz games as there is not much time and a lot of pressure and how she would compare online blitz chess and over the board Blitz chess. She answered by saying that she preferred over the board chess over online and that both are very different. She said that she personally preferred blitz games over rapid and classical as there is no time to take the pressure and everything happens quickly and that tactical training is required to improve blitz games as they depend a lot on your reflexes

A student then asked ma'am for her opinion on IQ playing a role in chess as the number 1 blitz player in the world GM Hikaru Nakamura had said that he was not very intellectual in terms of his academic performance and his online IQ test score was not that good even though it wasn't very accurate to which ma'am agreed saying that even though IQ does play a role in how good you are, it is always not the case and working hard and practicing in various aspects will improve your game.

Another student then asked ma'am if she had ever played Sir Viswanathan Anand who is a 5-time world champion and has consistently been in the top players in the world to which ma'am said that she had not but she had met Sir Anatoly Karpov, another multiple world champion who had also awarded her the gold medal in a tournament in which he had watched one of her games closely.



Anatoly Karpov, Bhakti Kulkarni and her coach Sir Raghunandan V. Gokhale (right to left) in 2019

A student then asked Ma'am on how she was able to maintain focus for long hours at a stretch to which sir clubbed his own question asking her tips for improving concentration and focus. Ma'am answered by saying that your mind needs to be very stable and your body also needs to be healthy. She also emphasized on meditating and having a good control on food and that she had recently converted to being vegetarian from a non-vegetarian and that you should also advised us not eat a lot of sweets as it makes you very lazy. She also told us that because chess players have to keep moving from place to place, country to country and so on, they always need to adjust so she also carries a rice cooker and some spices with her to cook rice, dal etc. which also served as a good recreation amid her tiring games and travelling.

Finally, one of the students at MAHSS, Eashita Prabhudesai proposed a vote of thanks to Ma'am bhakti Kulkarni.

In conclusion, this session has provided us with invaluable advice and information on not only the game of chess, but life in general, and on the behalf of the students at MAHSS, I would like to thank ma'am for spending her invaluable time and sharing her journey and giving us knowledge for which we will be forever grateful and Sir Vyankatesh Prabhudesai, who is like a Guru to all of us for bringing such personalities from time to time who we have learned so much from.

Written by-

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