

For two PMC school students, a chance to work with scientists, chase their dreams

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Suraj and Muskan.

Suraj Thorat was ecstatic when he got the opportunity to use a computer for the first time in his life, while he was pursuing a summer internship under a team of scientists at the CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory (NCL).

Suraj, who has just started Class IX, hails from a small village called Tondpur in Hingoli district. He has been studying at a Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) school, Vidya Niketan: Hutatma Balveer Shirishkumar, for about a year. But his dreams are about a galaxy, or galaxies, far,

"I want to study galaxies and now I know how to use computers," said Suraj, who, along with Muskan Singh, another student of the same school, has completed a two-month-long internship under the mentorship of scientist Chetan Gadgil. The internship was organised by the Exciting Science group, operating under the aegis of CSIR-NCL and the Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research (IISER), Pune.

This is the fourth year the team has been offering summer internships to students studying at corporation schools, but they have been actively organising science talks and competitions for over a decade. "I was assigned to collect data on the length of rivers, and trace the paths of all rivers across continents like Asia, North America and Africa, using histograms plotted by computers. I have learned so much about the thousands of rivers in these continents," said Suraj. He added, "I was so excited to get a chance to work on a computer... in my school, students are introduced to computers only in class IX.... I am lucky that I know the various parts, their uses and how to operate one before my classmates". For him, learning how to use computers was the highlight of the internship. "He is so happy... Suraj doesn't want to return to our village," said Suraj's father, Bhaskar Thorat.

Muskan, a Class X student who was also part of the internship, was assigned the task of studying mountains in various continents. "Though I had worked on computers and was comfortable with Windows 7, the systems at the labs were far advanced. The atmosphere was friendly and our guides addressed even the smallest of our queries," she said.

Muskan said she considers herself lucky to get such a hands-on opportunity to learn science. "Since Class VI, my summer vacations have been spent in some science-related activity or the other...", she said, adding that she also loves Maths.