

## Interview with Prof. Ravindra Gettu, Indian institute of Technologies Madras, India

Prof. Ravindra Gettu, Indian institute of Technologies Madras, India, officially joined RILEM in 2005. Prof. Gettu became TAC expert in 2006, and he covered that role until 2010; he was Bureau member from 2007 to 2011, and TAC Chair from 2010 to 2014. He became RILEM fellow in 2012. Prof. Gettu was also Deputy Chair of the RILEM TCs [187-SOC Experimental determination of the stress-crack opening curve for concrete in tension](#), and [QFS Size effect and scaling of quasibrittle fracture](#). He has been member of several RILEM TCs. He was elected RILEM Vice President in 2015; he was then President from 2018 to 2021. He is the current RILEM Outgoing President. Prof. Gettu will end his Presidency mandate this year in September. This interview is an opportunity for him to reflect upon the association.



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*Pride, Enthusiasm, and Inclusivity – three words to describe my feelings about RILEM as its current President. I wish very much that these continue as attributes of our spirit in the years, if not decades, to come.* R. Gettu, President, 2018–2021, from page 8 of the [Appendix of the RILEM 75<sup>th</sup> History Booklet](#).

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**Dr Daniela Ciancio - RILEM Implementation Manager (RIM):** I have the pleasure and honour today to interview Prof. Ravindra, Gettu, RILEM Past President! The end of your RILEM Presidency mandate is coming to an end this year. Time to look back and make a summary of the last 9 years?

**Prof. Ravindra Gettu (Ravindra):** Well, there are some thoughts that I put together already in 2021 for the [RILEM 75<sup>th</sup> History Booklet](#), but I think it's time to look at it afresh, from a less formal perspective. There are many things that have changed in RILEM from the time I got involved in the administration...

**RIM:** When was this time?

**Ravindra:** I think we're talking 18 years ago. It was 2006 when we had a workshop in Madrid about strategy, with the RILEM President at time, Dr Åke Skarendahl (*Editor's note: Dr Åke Skarendahl, 2003-2006 RILEM President*) at the end of his mandate. Prof. Arnon Bentur was going to become the president by the end of that same year, and he wanted things to change. There was not much involvement from India at that time. They would have maybe just one or two members, and that would be from some official lab without much participation. So... I think they were discussing with Prof. Suru Shah (*Editor's note: Prof Suru Shah, 2010 RILEM Honorary member*), and Shah knew that I had moved from Spain to India in 2005. He supposedly mentioned to them “why don't you get this guy involved?” and the idea at that time was to make RILEM much broader than just Europe. So, they called me and I became a member of the TAC (*Editor's note: Prof. Gettu became TAC expert in 2006*).

**RIM:** I understand you were already familiar with RILEM at that stage.

**Ravindra:** Yes, but frankly, my opinion of RILEM was that it was an old boys' club. My association as a member of a TC was that the Secretary General dominated the rules; rules were too much at that time! RILEM was even taking money from conferences, like there would be a 10% royalty fees if you were running a RILEM conference. I remember that for the conferences FraMCoS (Fracture Mechanics for Concrete and Concrete Structures,) and CONCREEP (Mechanics and Physics of Creep, Shrinkage, and Durability of Concrete and Concrete Structures), which I was involved in, there was a tendency to move away from RILEM.

**RIM:** Because they didn't want to give royalties to RILEM.

**Ravindra:** Exactly. And they were being forced to publish in the RILEM Publications, which was again controlled by the Secretary General. I always think that CONCREEP is a major conference that we lost. It was a 100% RILEM conference, same as FraMCoS, and because of this we lost them (*Editor's note: nowadays, CONCREEP is a RILEM/ACI conference*). For this reason, my impression of RILEM at that time was not really great. But when they asked me to come, I said "yes!". I heard good things at the strategy workshop. I think I joined TAC at that time. I then became a cluster convener and I continued in Bureau. When Ole Jensen was finishing his mandate as TAC Chair, he asked "Would you want to become TAC chair?" and I said "Yes!", and that were five years (*Editor's note: Prof. Gettu was TAC Chair from 20010 to 2014*) in which I learned a lot about RILEM. At that time, I could see how RILEM was changing. Many great things happened in the presidencies of Arnon Bentur and Peter Richner (*Editor's note: Dr Bentur and Dr Richner were RILEM President respectively in 2006-2009 and 2009-2012*). They gave RILEM back to the membership. So that is one thing that really changed and for the better because when few people or one person controls things, things can go wrong. Another great thing, going back to that time, was the growth of the footprint: there was a time when it was felt that we should have a Director of Development: this person would have the mission to grow RILEM beyond Europe.

**RIM:** That person was Geert De Schutter, wasn't he?

**Ravindra:** Yes! We were very lucky to have Geert De Schutter (*Editor's note: Prof. De Schutter, Gent University, Belgium, 2023 RILEM honorary member*) who was already a very well-known researcher. I would attribute, with little bit exaggeration, most of the footprint we have in China to him. I think Geert made a tremendous effort: he would go there, he would know people, he understood the hierarchy and so on. We grew a lot until one year China was having the highest membership in RILEM. From about a decade back, the feedback in a RILEM Annual week was no longer "How things can be better?", but rather "What else do we want to do? Can we do more?". Members stopped complaining! As later I became president, that is one thing that gave me a lot of satisfaction: you never get complaints these days.

**RIM:** Since my time in RILEM (2019), I have never heard anyone complaining during the general council meeting.

**Ravindra:** Well, long back there used to be complaints: "We cannot find this info on the RILEM website" or "We wrote and we didn't get any reply"... all sorts of things! Big efforts were put in by Pascale (*Editor's note: Pascale Ducornet, 2007-2019 RILEM Secretary General*), and Anne (*Editor's note: Anne Griffoin, 2015-present RILEM Publications and Communication Manager*). I think Anne joined RILEM at about the time that I became Vice president. Another interesting thing

is about the [RILEM presentation](#) used in the General Council presentation and other events: Anne and I put together that format and I think that has been used almost with no change until now!

**RIM:** I confirm it is still the same format! What else happened in that period?

**Ravindra:** We, Mark Alexander, Johan Vyncke and I (*Editor's note: Prof. Mark Alexander and Johan Vyncke were RILEM President respectively in 2012-2015 and 2015-2018*), tried to make things systematic: looking forward, bringing young people, etc... When I was a student, I was advised that I could not become a member of a committee. Actually, I helped draft the two recommendations of TC [050-FMC : Fracture mechanics of concrete](#). I wrote both of them (*Editor's note: Hillerborg, A. [The theoretical basis of a method to determine the fracture energy  \$G\_F\$  of concrete](#). *Materials and Structures* **18**, 291–296 (1985), and Hillerborg, A. [Results of three comparative test series for determining the fracture energy  \$G\_F\$  of concrete](#). *Materials and Structures* **18**, 407–413 (1985)) because Professors Bažant and Professor Shah asked me to work on the drafts, but I don't think I was officially a member of the committee.*

**RIM:** This would not happen today.

**Ravindra:** It should not happen again, and now we are going all the way. We are saying that any member, young or senior, can officially join a RILEM Technical Committee, which is a long, long way from where we were. Johan and Mark changed things a lot. I would also credit Johan for giving a five year or seven-year strategy for finances. Another thing that came out from the strategic plan was opening a position for the RILEM Implementation Manager...

**RIM:** Presente!

**Ravindra:** Going back to the footprint: India now has a lot of members coming from the time that there was just one. Having an Indian President helped to send the message that you can also do something in RILEM, it's not something far away; the online events, and the online participation in TCs also took away the barrier of distance.

**RIM:** I find bizarre that it was an Indian President that revitalised the relationship with Latin America.

**Ravindra:** It really started much earlier! We have to thank Carmen Andrade (*Editor's note: Dr Carmen Andrade, 2000-2003 RILEM President*), who was always pushing [lat-RILEM](#) in the recent past. Since I knew Spanish, I always thought that I should make at least one trip to South America and participate in events there. That certainly helped. I think our footprint in China, India, and Latin America has increased. There's a special relation between Japan and RILEM.

Third thing that I would speak about is the RILEM team. We have a good team in the Secretariat and I think that one of the legacies of my mandate would be the hiring of amazing people who are there. People matter! There was a nice transition from Pascale, with whom I had a very nice relationship with, to Judith (*Editor's note: Judith Hardy, 2019-present RILEM Secretary General*).

**RIM:** Do you regret that COVID happened during your mandate? Do you think that you did many things, but even more could be done without the pandemia?

**Ravindra:** I don't think so because it's a long engagement I have had with RILEM. I have been in Bureau for 18 years, nine years as Vice President, President and past President put together. I

don't think, if I look back, I would have done anything greater than what I've done. And, also I am sort of happy that I was able to steady the ship during COVID. There was no panic. The first ROC&TOK webinar was run with students from IIT Madras at the beginning of the pandemic.

**RIM:** It is true! The [first ROC&TOK webinar took place on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020](#), followed by [the second webinar on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020](#), both organised by IIT Madras. Later, [in September 2020, the EAC ROC&TOK webinar series](#), as we know it today, was launched!

**Ravindra:** At the beginning people were even debating which platform to use. We said “OK, we'll go ahead and do it”. Lots of people don't even know what ROC&TOK stands for (*Editor's note: RILEM Online Conferences & Transfer of Knowledge*). That is something that I think I'll always be proud of: that the online transition happened very nicely in RILEM. If not for COVID, we may never have done it. That has changed the way RILEM will do business forever. We will not go back to stopping this, and we should also remember that we went online very strong. So I have absolutely no regret. I was fortunate that I was the President during COVID, and I could do things differently and influence the future way we do business.

**RIM:** Now...let's talk about the future of RILEM. Are you prepared to leave the Presidency? Are you ready to step back or you think maybe you will stay around?

**Ravindra:** First of all, personally I think I've been prepared since the last RILEM Annual Week to leave the presidency. In my last year in the Presidency, I've sort of turned down my involvement. I sort of stand back and watch. I've always been a person who can walk away from positions of responsibility and not look back. I think I've done more than what I was in my capacity. I don't think I could have done more. I think one of the great things about RILEM is that Presidents come, we put a stamp on matters, we do things and then we walk away. I think that's how it should be. People should not hang on to the position. Members should not wonder “why is this guy still around?”.

**RIM:** Where do you think RILEM is going?

**Ravindra:** As I said, there are these three or four things that have become characteristic; because of this, RILEM will change direction, will put emphasis on different things; but RILEM will continue to do well. Emphasis will change. Each president, each Bureau, will have their priorities. I think RILEM is now very fast to react: when we make a mistake, we pull back very fast. One thing we have to keep track on is the multinational or the multiracial, multilingual strength of RILEM. We should not lose that emphasis. RILEM should not be again considered as just a European organisation. This is difficult because we don't have many members from different places who could come into administration; so sometimes the obvious choice is not representative of the whole globe. It has been told to me by many people that I have been the first and only Asian President, or even further, the first and only non-Caucasian President.

**RIM:** First non-Caucasian President in 73 years... We shouldn't wait for other 70 years before it happens again.

**Ravindra:** We should not. This is something that tells us to plan: what should we do differently? That's the only thing we have to keep an eye on: we should not slip back or relax relying on people that we are familiar with. You see... people were not familiar with me, but somebody, somewhere,

must have said “Let's call this guy and see if he can come in” and the rest is history. We have to look out and make an effort to bring people who are not natural members of this group.

**RIM:** I like the word you used before: “obvious”: *the obvious choice is not representative of the whole globe.*

**Ravindra:** There should also be a growth possibility. I joined the Bureau in 2007, and 2015 is when I became Vice President: it takes time! So often we look at the last minute and say that we don't have anyone, any good candidate from outside Europe, but it starts a long way ahead. I think we are on the right path as we see a lot of members from Africa, China, India, and a lot of young people. So, it will happen.

**RIM:** One last question: What do you think about the [RILEM Strategic workshop in Toulouse?](#) You're going to attend that workshop, I suppose, or.

**Ravindra:** I will not attend that workshop because I find myself always talking about the past. I think this should be run by young people and I would like to watch what they come up with. People who do not know the history of RILEM, probably can make more changes. I will go out and visit Toulouse that day!