

HIS SCOOTER

A FATHER'S FAREWELL , A SON'S BEGINNING

MY STARTUP

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Prologue:

Before the World Noticed Me

We all know stories of success — they often start with a dream, skip the dark days, and end with applause. But life doesn't work like that. Mine definitely didn't.

This book isn't just a memoir. It's not a pitch. It's not a LinkedIn success story dressed in fancy words. It's raw. Real. And rooted in the kind of moments we rarely talk about — the hunger, the rejections, the nights where your tears mix with the water in the shower, and you pretend everything's okay.

I was born in a one-room house in Pune, with a father who taught me strength without shouting, and a mother who gave more than she had. I've been a courier boy. A canteen worker. A factory helper. I've sold Cokes in interviews, practiced cold calls in ration shops, and learned to lead without a playbook.

Today, I run my own company — vConnect iDess — not because I had a plan, but because I refused to stop walking. I didn't have an MBA. I didn't have connections. What I had — was a voice inside that said: "One more step."

This book is for:

The 20-year-old who just got laid off.

The fresher who's scared they'll never get a break.

The first-gen entrepreneur who doubts if they belong in a boardroom.

The dreamer with nothing but belief in their heart.

You won't find overnight success here. But you will find the power of showing up — again, and again, and again.

I've tried to keep every chapter short, real, and emotionally honest — a mix of truth, failures, grit, and learning. Each one ends with a takeaway, not as advice, but as a conversation from one struggle to another.

Because if I can do it — really do it — so can you.

So let's begin. Let's do it — together.

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Chapter 1:

“Baba and the Landline”

My baba always smiled at me after dinner and said, “One day, when you grow up and have your own company, I’ll call... and the receptionist will answer, ‘Good morning, how may I help you?’ – and I’ll say proudly, ‘Could you connect me to Mr. Hemant Ghale? His father is on the line.’”

Maybe that’s when the first spark of becoming an entrepreneur was lit inside me.

My father’s last posting was NDA Pune as a drill instructor at the National Defence Academy. He was a man of discipline, grit, and clockwork routines. Every morning, he trained cadets (Future Indian army officers) who would one day protect the nation. But destiny? Destiny had different plans for his heart.

Somewhere between parades and protocols, he met her – my beautiful mom. She was grace to his grit, softness to his structure.

No grand gestures. No dramatic proposals. Just quiet understanding. Respect. And love – forged slowly, like the very soldiers he trained.

When he knew, he knew – They left for Dehradun and tied the knot, away from noise, but close to heart. Simple, soulful, timeless.

And that’s how I came into the picture.

I was born in a one-room kitchen in Pune, in a sleepy little colony where people respected tea more than time. Ours was the

kind of neighbourhood where front doors were always open, neighbours argued like siblings, and every evening smelled of onions sizzling in someone's pan.

My father, an ex-Army man, had taken a quiet civilian job in Pune that brought us that humble quarter. But in that tiny home – with peeling paint, creaking fans, and no concept of luxury – I had the universe.

Because I had Baba.

I was the youngest of four. The ladla. The soft one. He had the kind of love that never needed to be announced. It was tucked inside small things – like wrapping my textbooks in brown covers before school started, or sneaking a mango into my tiffin during summer. It was quiet, but it was complete.

He gave me everything before I could even ask. It was like he could read my dreams before they reached my lips. One Diwali, I mentioned how my friend had a new red cycle. That's all I said – a passing comment. But on the morning of the festival, while other kids burst crackers, I walked outside to find a brand-new red cycle waiting for me. Slightly oversized, shiny as the morning sun – and somehow, perfect.

Even when my wishes made no sense, he didn't correct me – he protected the dream. There was a time, during my very early childhood, when I saw a man on TV wear a wristband and disappear. Some B-grade sci-fi serial, probably. But my young mind believed in it with everything I had. I cried for that band for days – a band that could make me invisible. Everyone laughed. "Beta, aisa kuch nahi hota." But Baba? He didn't laugh. He laced up his shoes, took my tiny hand in his, and walked from one toy shop to another, asking, "Woh invisible banane

wala band hai kya?” Shopkeepers smiled, shook their heads, some even chuckled. But Baba played along like he was on a mission. And when someone said, “Sir, aisa band toh hota hi nahi,” he’d put on a mock-anger face and scold them like they’d failed us. “Kya dukan hai bhai? Ek band tak nahi rakhte?” He fought imaginary battles just to keep my fantasy alive. That day, I didn’t get the band. But I got something better — a father who refused to let the world steal my wonder.

He was strong like a soldier, but soft in all the ways that mattered. When Pune still had space to breathe, he quietly bought two *ghunta* of land, on one half, he built our home — four simple walls that saw everything: our first steps, our loudest fights, our quiet tears, and our biggest dreams.

The other half? He left it empty. “Aage chalke kaam aayega,” he’d say.

Later, he bought another *ghunta* — not for himself, but for us. “Kya pata, kal ko tum dono bhai alag chulha chalana chaho... jagah honi chahiye.” He didn’t plan for luxury. He planned for peace. He wasn’t preparing for distance — he was preventing resentment. He loved us enough to make room for our future disagreements, without ever letting ego get in the way.

Inspired by that quiet strength, I found myself trying to build too — in my own little ways. That year, I signed up for a cricket course *and* a computer course at NIIT — side by side. One was for the love of the game. The other, for the hope of a career. It wasn’t easy, balancing both. But I kept going. Somewhere, in some corner of my mind, I was just trying to live up to the man who had already laid the foundation — not just of our home, but of our future.

He didn't say "I love you." He showed it – in cycle rides, in toy-shop adventures, in land documents with our names quietly scribbled in margins.



Every summer, when schools closed and the hot afternoons begged for long naps and cool drinks, we packed our tiny bags and headed to Mausi's house. It wasn't just a vacation spot – it was our childhood escape.

Her home had a rhythm of its own. Morning poha, afternoon *aamras*, and evening games on the terrace. We cousins would gather like a mini army – running, laughing, fighting over beds, stealing mango slices from the kitchen, and getting caught every single time.

Mausi's scoldings were soft, her hugs softer. She treated us like her own, and somehow remembered who liked what — one cousin's extra ghee, another's dislike for milk. We'd sleep under the fan, listening to her stories or old songs playing faintly on the radio.

Those summers weren't just holidays — they were lessons in family, in sharing space, in simple joys that didn't cost a thing.

My childhood, like that of many others, was playful, joyful, and filled with laughter. It was a time of scraped knees, roadside cricket, mango-stained summers, and endless games that needed no batteries — just imagination and a few good friends. We didn't have much, but we had enough to smile wide and dream big.

Every colony has its own Olympics.

Ours were held not in stadiums but in the cracked courtyards of government quarters — with tricolour ribbons fluttering over borrowed chairs, loudspeakers blasting patriotic songs, and that unmistakable smell of sun-dried dust, boiled corn, and borrowed dreams.

26th January. 15th August. February Fun Fares. Those weren't just calendar dates — they were *my stage*. My escape from the ordinary.

I would sign up for everything. Carrom. Table tennis. Spoon races. Even those awkward lemon-in-spoon walks where every second felt like a lifetime of balance. The prizes were plastic, the medals faded gold, but for those few hours, I wasn't just a boy from a tiny home with too many worries.

I was a competitor. I was someone.

And slowly, quietly, something shifted – not just in me, but in him. My father.

He never said much. Didn't clap wildly. Didn't show up with banners or shout my name like the other kids' dads did. But I noticed the way his eyes lingered a bit longer when I came back with a prize in hand. The way he folded the certificate neatly instead of tossing it aside. The way he introduced me to our neighbours – "He just won again," he'd say, casually, but I could hear it. The unspoken pride.

It wasn't about winning. It was about being seen. And for a boy like me, growing up in a world where validation was rare and love often looked like silence – that meant everything.

Those colony sports days didn't make me an athlete. But they did something far bigger. They gave my father a reason to believe in me – and in turn, they gave *me* permission to believe in myself.

Sometimes, the podiums that matter most... are the ones set up between rusted chairs and uneven tiles. The medals? Paper-thin. But the confidence? Solid gold.

Let's be honest: I wasn't picked for my football skills. I was picked because I owned shoes. That's how I became the "backy" – the guy who stood somewhere near the goal post, praying the ball never actually came my way.



My job? Clap when we scored. Pretend I was stretching when I missed a pass. And of course — yell, “Pass! Pass!” like I was Messi trapped in an invisible cloak.

But I didn’t mind. Because back then, just being on the ground felt like glory. I wasn’t benched. I wasn’t forgotten. I was... backy. And in my head, that was one step away from the captain.

Now cut to February. The annual fancy dress competition — where kids became trees, traffic lights, and freedom fighters with thermocol beards. I wasn’t planning to participate. I thought I’d be too busy backing some other sport.

But fate had other plans. One of the teachers saw me screaming “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” with Josh during assembly and said: “*This boy? Soldier material.*” No audition. No warning. Suddenly, I was Major Arjun from *Border*.

They slapped on a toy gun, plastic helmet, and a mustache that smelled suspiciously like my mother's kajal pencil. And before I knew it, I was on stage, knees shaking, holding a mic like it was a live grenade.

My line? "*Maa, main wapas aaoon ya na aaoon... lekin Tiranga zarur lehrayega!*"

I yelled it with the passion of Sunny Deol and the pitch of a stressed squirrel. And the crowd? They lost it. Applause. Laughter. One aunty even cried (either from pride or the kajal fumes, we'll never know).

That day, something changed.

For the first time, I wasn't the background guy. I wasn't warming the bench or chasing a ball that never wanted to be passed to me. I was center stage, with fake medals and very real applause.

Turns out, you don't need a real gun or a football goal to feel like a hero. Sometimes, all you need is a prop mustache, a one-liner from a Bollywood movie, and the guts to yell your truth in front of 300 sweaty classmates.

Because bravery isn't always on the battlefield. Sometimes, it's in saying yes to something that terrifies you. Even if it means looking like a tiny Sunny Deol with slippery shoes.

There are moments in life when you surprise yourself. And then there are moments when you shock the entire school. This was both.

It started innocently. I was sitting in tuition, solving math problems I didn't understand, when my tuition teacher suddenly declared, "*You. You're going to dance in the school competition.*"

I looked behind me, assuming she was talking to the wall. Me? Dance? The only “moves” I had were the ones I used to dodge homework and hide report cards. Even today, if I dance, it’s more Sunny Deol meets power outage — full energy, no rhythm. But she was serious. She saw something in me I didn’t. Probably panic. Because within days, practice began. And let me tell you — tuition was never the same again.

Math got replaced by mujra. Algebra by arm waves. And her soft voice? Gone. Replaced with:

“LEFT LEG! No—not your other left! Are you dancing or fighting?” “Do you want a stage or stitches?” “I said spin, not summon demons!”

Honestly, she hit me more during those dance practices than in all of my math mistakes combined. I started praying for math homework again.

Then came the big day. Costume on. Hair slicked. Nerves shot. As I peeked from behind the curtain, I saw her — standing at the right-hand side of the stage, holding a long stick like it was Excalibur. She didn’t say a word. Just looked at me and tapped the stick once.

Suddenly... I remembered all the steps. Not out of confidence. Out of survival.



And somehow — miraculously — I danced. Not perfectly. Not gracefully. But with every beat, every step, and every trembling Sunny Deol move... I gave it my all. The crowd clapped. The music ended. Victory. Afterward, she walked up, nodded once, and said, “*At least you didn’t embarrass me.*” Which, from her, was a standing ovation.

Back then, life felt like it would always stay the same. The days were stitched together with tuition classes, colony cricket matches, the smell of dust after a football kick, and that annual excitement of fun fares and freedom.

Vacations meant longer evenings, less homework, and the sound of Doordarshan in the background. We didn't have words like “startup” or “personal growth” in our heads — just a vague idea that we'd grow up one day, do engineering, and make our parents proud.

I thought I'd become a mechanical engineer — the kind who wore dusty uniforms and solved real problems with oily hands. Maybe I'd join Bajaj or Tata, sit behind machines that made real things, and someday, bring home a paycheck that made my father nod and my mother smile a little longer than usual.

That was the dream — simple, straight, and soaked in sincerity.

Life, back then, felt like it would always stay the same. But destiny had a different plan. My Baba fell ill.

At first, it was just a fever — one of those things parents brush off with home remedies and rest. But this one stayed. It lingered. And slowly, it began to change everything.

Hospitals replaced school PT periods. Doctor visits became the new Sunday outing. Medicines on the table. Whispers behind closed doors. And a heaviness in the air I didn't know how to name at that age.

I watched the strongest man I knew — the man who once cycled through Pune's heat with groceries in one hand and dreams in the other — suddenly become tired by just standing.

There were no more talks about my college or my career or which engineering branch was best. The conversations at home turned into calculations — hospital bills, medicines, borrowed money, and hope.

It was in those moments — when childhood slipped quietly into the background — that I first learned:

Dreams don't always break because of failure. Sometimes, they bend because of love.

I wanted to fix everything. I wanted to help. I didn't know how. But I knew that life — the one I thought would always stay the same — was never going to be the same again.

First came the bypass surgery. Then came the follow-up appointments, the bitter pills, and the soft, worried murmurs exchanged between doctors and my mother. Hospital visits soon became more frequent than school picnics. The sweets in our kitchen drawers slowly vanished, replaced by strips of tablets and prescriptions waiting to be refilled.

The man who once carried me on his shoulders now needed help just to walk to the bathroom. And me — the pampered kid who never tied his shoelaces, who left his school bottle half-full knowing someone would always pick it up — I had to grow up. Not all at once. Not in a dramatic flash. But in quiet, painful shifts.

Like the first time I saw fear in Baba's eyes — not fear for himself, but for us. For what might happen if he wasn't around.

The days of Baba's poor health dragged on, and the weight of expensive medical bills kept knocking at our door. We didn't realize it then, but this wasn't just another illness — something bigger was coming. Something that would shake the very foundation of our home.

“The Day My World Was Packed in Boxes”

As if Baba’s illness wasn’t enough, life had one more curve to throw at us.

My father retired.

His civil job – the one that kept our home running, the one we built our small, secure world around – came to an end. And with it, so did our right to stay in the quarter that had raised us.

The same quarter where I took my first steps, lost my first tooth, and had my first fight with the neighbor’s kid over a cricket bat. The same quarter where the windows let in both sunlight and dreams. The place where Diwali smelled the brightest, and where monsoons dripped into buckets while my mother hummed old songs in the kitchen.

We had to leave it all.

I was 14. Old enough to carry my own bags, but not old enough to understand the full weight of what we were leaving behind.

The news came like a quiet storm. No explosions. No drama. Just my parents whispering behind doors, making phone calls, and looking at each other with eyes that said everything they couldn’t in front of me.

And then... the packing began.

Box by box, memory by memory.

The carrom board that still had chalk marks from my last win. The cricket bat was signed by colony friends who didn’t even know I was leaving. My books from tuition, still marked with scribbles from my ever-patient, sometimes-stick-holding teacher.

But what do you pack when what you're losing isn't just space — but a sense of belonging?

I looked at the swings in the colony park one last time. At the broken basketball net. At the walls where we scribbled nonsense with chalk and pretended it was graffiti. At the narrow staircase where I sat alone one evening after losing my first ever match and thought, "Maybe I'm not good enough." Even that spot... felt sacred now.

And then came the hardest goodbye of all — my friends. Not all of them knew I was leaving. Some I hugged. Some I waved to from the back seat. Some I didn't even get to say goodbye to at all. But a part of me still hopes... They remember me.

“The Months That Stretched Like Years”

Months passed.

Hope, once a strong thread that held us together, began to wear thin. And options? They ran out long before hope did.

We were now surviving almost entirely on Baba’s Army pension – a modest amount that arrived like clockwork but never felt enough to cover the growing weight of reality.

My father – once the provider, the problem-solver, the man who cycled through the colony with quiet pride – now sat mostly by the window, wrapped in a shawl even when it wasn’t cold. He was not just healing from illness. He was mourning the loss of purpose – and we all felt it, even if we never spoke it aloud.

And amidst it all, my elder brother was away. He had already joined the Indian Army, just as we had hoped, just as my father once dreamed. He was in his first year of training in Shimla, braving the cold and the discipline and the distance.

Then came a complication – some paperwork, some document clearance issue – and what was supposed to be a 1-year training extended to two long years, almost overnight. We didn’t even know how he was doing.

Because this was a time before WhatsApp. Before video calls and instant pings. Before “last seen” and blue ticks could offer tiny bits of comfort.

This was the time of letters and STD booths – of red inland envelopes with shaky handwriting, of phone calls where we counted every second like coins, and still ended up saying, “Bas itna hi bol paaye.”

And then... even that went quiet.

For six whole months, we had no contact. No call. No letter. Just silence.

We didn't know if he was still in Shimla. Or already sent off to his first posting. We only found out later — he had been deployed directly to Jammu, in one of the most sensitive zones.

Imagine being a family of five, surviving on pension, caring for a sick father, and not knowing whether your eldest son — your strongest link, your farthest hope — was safe... or not.

Every knock on the door brought both hope and fear. Every postman's delay felt like cruelty. Every night, my mother sat a little longer on the balcony, looking at the sky as if trying to send him a message through the stars.

When Sixteen Had to Grow Up

As I had no option, I did what life demanded — I stepped up.

Not because I was ready. But because there was no one else to turn to.

At sixteen, the world still sees you as a child. But responsibility doesn't. It doesn't ask how old you are. It just hands you a burden and watches what you do with it.

At 16 — yes, just 16 — I had to step up. To pay for Baba's treatments. To cover my school fees. There wasn't much choice. I looked into working at McDonald's. Even thought about manning an STD booth.

Too young to carry the world... But too aware to ignore it.

One day, a friend's brother referred me to a local courier office. The pay wasn't much, but it was something. My job was simple on paper — go door to door across Pune delivering parcels ON CYCLE. But in reality, it was exhausting. I rode a borrowed cycle, battling the scorching sun, traffic, and my own fatigue.

There were days when I'd skip meals, just to save a few rupees. Days when my legs trembled from the cycling, and nights when I'd collapse into bed with sunburns and stories. But every parcel I delivered felt like a step closer to easing Baba's pain and lifting a small part of the load off Maa's shoulders.

The landline rang. My boss picked it up, looked at me, and said, "It's your sister. Line 2."

I held the receiver casually. "Hello?"

What I heard next would never leave me.

“Hemu... Baba ko cancer detect hua hai.”

My mind paused. Like someone hit the mute button on life.

“Will he be fine?” I asked, voice shaking. “Dad humko chhodke upar toh nahi chale jayenge?” Silence. Then tears on both ends.

That moment didn’t just break my heart – it broke my childhood.

What I didn’t know was that this was just 1% of the problems coming our way. Hospital bills. Financial debt. Sleepless nights. Silent prayers. Seeing a strong man, my father, turned fragile in front of my eyes.

As months went by, the medical bills piled up, and therapy costs quietly emptied whatever little we had in our bank account.

So we did what every middle-class family does in a crisis – we began selling things, one by one.

First, the land. Then, our flat. Then, Mummy’s gold.

Each thing had a story. Each sale felt like letting go of a memory.

But the one that broke us wasn’t the land or the flat. It was Baba’s scooter.

A sky-blue Bajaj Chetak. His pride. His only luxury. He cleaned it every Sunday, covered it at night like a child, and even engraved my name – *Hemant* – under the number plate. That’s how close it was to his heart.

It wasn’t just a vehicle. It was a symbol of everything we once were – stable, strong, and simple.

But one fine day, when the medicines ran out and the bills didn’t wait, we knew what had to be done.

I still remember wheeling it out of our parking. Baba didn't say a word. He just watched from the balcony, his hands trembling on the railing.



We sold it for a few thousand rupees. And in that moment, it felt like we weren't just selling a scooter — We were saying goodbye to a version of life we may never get back.

Back then, I was too young to understand how deeply a man can be attached to his belongings. Today, I often wonder how my dad must have felt... how he managed to hide his emotions and stay strong through it all.

While all of this was happening — the hospital runs, the scooter sale, the growing silence in our home — my elder brother had just joined the Indian Army.

Back then, there was no WhatsApp, no video calls, no Facebook updates to stay connected. Just telegrams, inland letters, and occasional STD booth calls where you'd talk fast because you could hear the seconds ticking like coins.

But Baba gave us one clear order:

“Don't tell him anything.”

No letters about the hospital. No calls about the financial pressure. Nothing about the fear we were living with every single day.

“He's just joined the training,” Baba had said, lying on his bed but still sounding like a soldier. “I know what that phase demands. He needs focus, not fear.”

Even while fighting his own battle, my father's instinct was to *protect*. Not himself. Not his savings. But his son's dreams.

It felt strange — hiding pain from your own brother. But looking back, I understand. That was the kind of man Baba was.

And so we obeyed.

Letters mein humne sab halka hi likha.

“All good at home,” likha tha. “Mummy ne apka favourite pohla banaya hai.”

Asliyat toh chhup gayi thi ink aur kagaz ke beech.

Jab humein khud nahi pata tha kal kya khayenge.

Na paise the, na ration. Sirf himmat thi... aur thoda sa bharosa.

Zindagi uss time itni mushkil ho gayi thi ki bhookh sabse badi feeling ban gayi thi.

Ek din main raste se jaa raha tha. Achanak dekha — sadak par ek aadha burger pada hai. Lag raha tha kisi ne thoda sa khake feka hai. Bilkul fresh tha.

Main wahin ruk gaya. Dil mein ek hi thought aaya — *kha lu kya?* Na sahi samajh aaya, na galat. Bas itni bhookh lagi thi ki laga, *ab kuch bhi chalega*.

Ghar mein uss waqt sirf ek time ka khana banta tha. Kabhi sirf nasta, kabhi sirf dinner. Aur kai din toh teeno time kuch bhi nahi hota tha.

Woh burger nahi uthaya maine... Par uss din bhookh ne andar se hila diya. Aur pata nahi kyun, lekin ghar aake khud ko kamre mein band kar liya... aur bahut zor se roya.

It was just another summer evening. Baba and Mummy had gone to the hospital to visit a relative. Both my sisters were out shopping. And I — just done with a bucket bath — was home alone, drying off in a towel.

Then came the knock.

Not on the door — but on my life.

I heard someone shouting from outside. It was our neighbor's daughter, out of breath and buzzing with excitement.

“Dada! Subhash bhaiya aagaye hai! Jaldi aao!”

I froze.

Still dripping wet, I threw on whatever I could find and ran out barefoot.

And there he was.

Subhash bhaiya. Dressed in crisp Indian Army uniform – olive green, stars gleaming, suitcase in one hand, briefcase in the other. Smiling that classic big brother smile. The one that said, *“I’m home. I made it.”*

We didn’t say anything at first. We just looked at each other – and smiled through the tears.

He walked in, freshened up like nothing had changed. But everything had.

A while later, my sisters returned. The moment they saw him, their screams filled the entire colony. Laughter. Hugs. Joy. It was the first real happiness our house had seen in years.

But the best moment was still waiting.

It was around 9 PM when Baba and Mummy walked in, tired from the hospital visit. We kept calm – asked about the relative, nodded along.

And then Baba got up to change – walking casually into the bedroom.

He didn’t know his eldest son was hiding behind the door, waiting.

As Baba pushed the door open, he saw the one person he hadn’t seen in years – in full uniform, standing tall, eyes welling up.

He stopped. I froze. And then it all burst out.

He cried. Not the quiet kind. He wept, openly, loudly – hugging him tight, kissing his cheeks again and again, as if to make up for all the years he couldn’t.

Mummy, startled by the noise, ran into the room. And the scene that unfolded next – even words would fail to describe.

All five of us, together again. Not rich, not healed, not problem-free. But whole.

For the first time in years — whole.

I was in 6th grade when our school took us on a trip to Mahabaleshwar. For a quiet, shy kid like me, it felt like stepping into a new world — cool breeze, strawberries everywhere, and strict instructions from our teachers.

“Don’t buy anything without asking us,” our class teacher had said. Her words echoed like rules carved in stone. And when you’re a scared little introvert, those rules feel ten times heavier.

While walking through the local market, I saw something that made me stop — a simple wooden walking stick, curved just right. My first thought wasn’t about myself. It was of Papa.

He had started limping a little back then, brushing it off like it was nothing. But I had noticed. And this stick... It felt like something he could use. Something I could bring back for him. A small gift. A quiet gesture of love.

But the problem was — I was scared. Scared of talking to the teacher. Scared of being scolded. Scared of speaking up at all.

My friend nudged me. “Ma’am won’t say anything. You’re buying it for your dad. Go ask.”

My heart pounded as I walked up to her. Words stuck in my throat. But somehow, I managed to mumble, “Ma’am... I saw a walking stick. Can I buy it for my Papa?”

She looked at me — not with anger or irritation, but with softness I hadn’t expected. “Oh... that’s very sweet,” she said, smiling.

And before I could even breathe a sigh of relief, she walked with me to the shop and even helped me bargain.

That stick cost just a few rupees. But what I carried back that day... was courage. The courage to speak up for love.

Chapter 2:

The Night the Silence Spoke

It was at Southern Command Army Hospital where Baba's final treatment was underway. One evening, he insisted we all go home and get some rest. "I'm feeling better," he said softly, as if not to worry us. Trusting his words, we left — unaware of what the night held.

The next morning, while trying to make his way to the restroom alone, Baba slipped and fell. The fragile bones that had already been weathered by months of cancer treatment couldn't take the impact — his left leg fractured badly.

We got the call from the emergency ward. My heart dropped. I rushed to the hospital — it was nearly an hour-long ride, but it felt like I was trapped in slow motion.

When I reached, I was directed straight to the MRI room. There, lying on a stretcher, was my father. Pale. In pain. But still refusing the scan until both his sons were by his side. He waited for us — like he always did — holding onto his strength just a little longer.

Only after seeing our faces did he agree to go ahead with the scan.

Back in the ward, the doctors told us a metal rod needed to be inserted into his leg. I stood outside as they began the procedure. And then — a cry. A scream so raw, so guttural — it pierced through the walls. It was Baba. A man already battling cancer, now forced to endure the agony of a fractured bone being fixed.

I broke down. The tears came without warning. I couldn't hold them back.

Later that evening, he called both my brother and me close to his bedside. His voice was low, trembling, but his eyes — they were full. Full of pain, exhaustion, and something else... surrender.

He turned to my elder brother and, for the first time in my life, I saw Baba cry.

"Subhash beta," he whispered, tears rolling down his cheeks,

"Ab mujhse shayad na ho paaye... meri sehne ki shakti khatam ho gayi hai. Shayad main ab give up kar doon. Tujhe apne chhote bhai ko sambhalna hoga. Maa aur behen ka bhi khayal rakhna padega. Ab tere kandhon par zimmedari hai... jab tak Hemant bada nahi ho jaata."

We all wept — my brother, me, and Baba — three grown men caught in a moment too fragile to bear.

To this day, whenever that memory surfaces, I get goosebumps. That room, that voice, those tears — they never really left me.

At that moment, everything felt like it had ended.

My childhood, my belief in permanence, my sense of safety — it all blurred.

One day, Dr. Colonel Kapoor called my dad and me in for a final check-up. After a brief silence, he looked at my father and said gently,

"Ghale sahab, ab aap ghar chale jao. Ghar pe family ke saath waqt bitaiye."

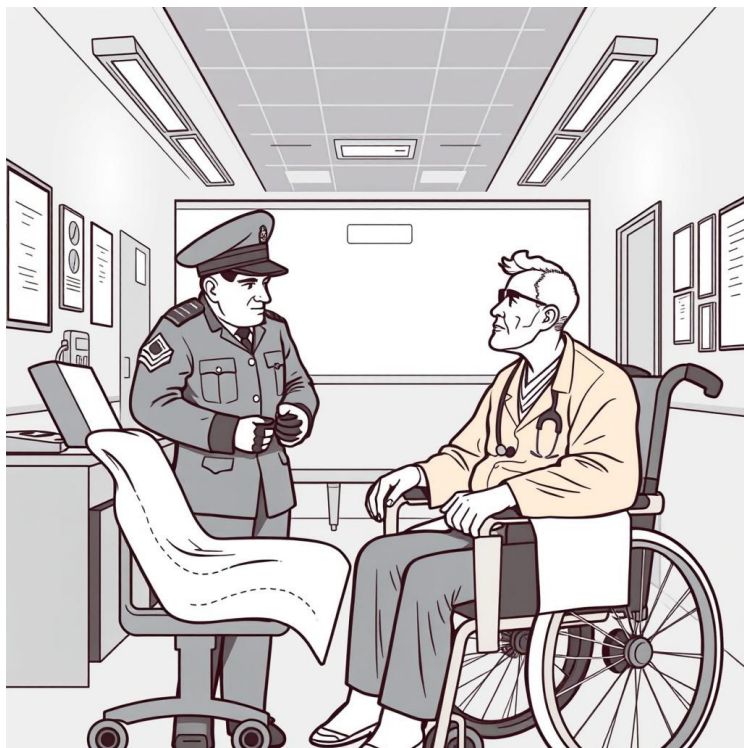
My dad understood exactly what he meant.

Yet, without breaking a sweat or showing the slightest hint of worry, he simply asked,

"Colonel sahab, khane mein kuch precautions lenne hain kya?"

Dr. Kapoor smiled softly and replied,

"Nahi, aap kha sakte ho. Bas thoda spicy se door rehna."



Sometimes, I still wonder – was the life before that day even real? Or is this struggle the real story, and the rest was just a dream I once lived?

We bought a Siemens mobile phone – back when incoming calls cost one rupee. We got it only for one reason: to stay connected

with Baba, no matter what. Every ring felt important, sacred even.

That afternoon, the phone rang. It was my sister. Her voice, as always, carried a smile, bright and unaware of the storm we were standing in. "*Kidhar hai tu?*" she asked casually, like it was any other day.

I was at the hospital, trying hard to keep myself together. My throat tightened. Before I could respond, she continued, "*Baba thik hai na? Khana khaya?*"

That was it.

I broke.

Tears welled up, but I turned my face away, hiding the crack in my voice. At that moment, Baba — lying there, weak and in pain — noticed my struggle. He gently gestured for the phone, took it from my hand, and within seconds, transformed.

He laughed. He spoke to her like everything was perfectly fine. As if he had just come back from an evening walk and was catching up on the day. No hint of pain. No sign of fear. Just love and calm and the unmatched strength of a father protecting his child's world from falling apart.

What a man he was.

That day, without saying it aloud, he taught me one of the greatest lessons of my life — not to give up until it's over. Even in pain, even in silence, even when the world feels like it's collapsing — you hold on. You stay strong for the people you love.

Dad's health was getting worse — bedsores, loss of senses, and what not.

There were days his body was present, but he wasn't really there.

While other kids my age were worrying about homework and cricket practice, I was learning the names of medicines, how to read prescriptions, and which nurse to call in an emergency.

My childhood wasn't lost.

It just took a different route.

After fighting cancer for five long years, Baba passed away!

I was sleeping beside Baba, curled up on the narrow hospital bench, listening to the slow hum of machines and the uneven rhythm of his breath. Around 4 a.m., a soft hand touched my shoulder. It was the doctor. His voice was low, careful, but the words shattered something inside me: *"Please inform your family... your father is no more."* For a moment, the world went completely still. I looked at Baba — peaceful, unmoving, almost as if he was still resting. But something in the room had changed. The weight of that silence said everything. At seventeen, I had to stand up, wipe my face, and walk down a dim hospital corridor... not as a boy, but as a son carrying the heaviest news of his life.

I was still a teenager, standing in the hospital — numb. His body had already been taken to the crematorium. My *Chacha* came to me and gently said, "Go, see your Baba one last time."

I stood there, frozen. Just a boy. Watching the man who once held my hand to school, now lying still. His voice echoed in my ears: "My son Hemant Ghale...."

That was the last time I saw him. And then, he was gone. All that remained were memories, old photographs... and a hollow silence in our home. The days after felt darker than night.

His pension stopped immediately. The transition to my mother's name took forever. And in that pause, life didn't wait. Bills didn't wait. Hunger didn't wait. So I took a job – in a factory. I became a helper. My work? Pack boxes. Seal them. Pass them on. Shift after shift. Day after day.



I was on contract – no security, no benefits. But they offered one OT (Over time) day every month – double salary if you worked both shifts.

I grabbed it every single month. From 6:30 AM to 12:30 AM. Eighteen hours. One break. Two meals. A few hundred extra rupees.

That was survival.

On my days off, I'd play cricket with local teams. Sometimes, if I performed well, they'd hand me a free cricket ball as a thank-you.

I didn't keep them. I sold them to my friends for a discount. Used the money to buy rice, dal... or some vegetables.

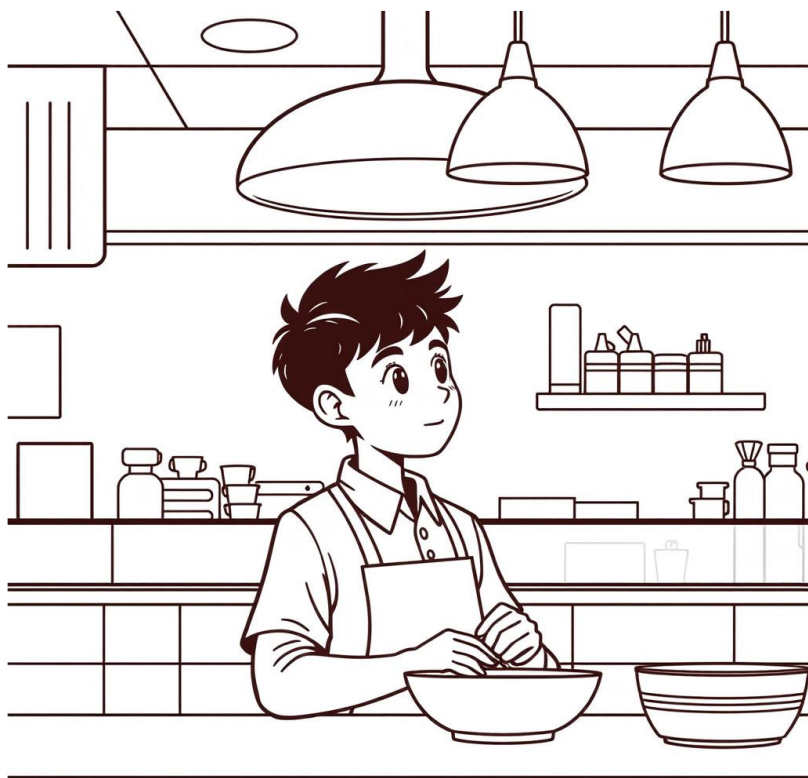
That was my hustle.

There was no mentor, no roadmap. Just the memory of Baba's words — and a quiet belief that this wasn't where my story ends.

As the contract came to an end, my supervisor — perhaps out of kindness, or maybe just to help me stay afloat — recommended me for a job in the factory canteen. The work was simple, yet completely foreign to me: washing used plates, serving breakfast and lunch, and taking tea to the purchasing department's managers. I was just eighteen. A boy still figuring out the adult world. Until then, my childhood hadn't even required me to clear my own plate after a meal — and now, here I was, scrubbing dozens. On one of my first days, unsure and overwhelmed, I was called out by one of the managers. "Idhar aa," he barked, his voice sharp. I froze. My heart raced as I walked toward him, my hands clumsy, my body tense. He pointed at the table and snapped, "Aise saaf karte ho? Dekho kitna ganda hai." I looked down. It was messy, sure — but no messier than the knot in my throat. I bent down and started cleaning it again, wiping harder, faster, hoping it would make the sting go away. Tears welled up

in my eyes, but I couldn't afford to let them fall. In that moment, I realised: dignity wasn't always in what you did — it was in how you carried yourself when no one else was watching.

My family didn't know I was working in a canteen. All they knew was that I had found some work at a factory. I never corrected them. How could I? How could I tell my mother, who still served me food with her hands, that her son was scrubbing dirty plates for strangers? How could I let my siblings know that the money I brought home smelled more like dal stains and steel trays than a paycheck?



So I kept it all in — the exhaustion, the humiliation, the ache of being spoken to like I didn't matter. But every time I handed over my wages at home, I did it with a smile, hiding the grease in my fingernails and the weight in my chest. Not because I was ashamed of the job, but because I didn't want them to carry the heaviness I was learning to lift. It wasn't bravery. It was love, in its quietest form.

Chapter 3:

“Sell That Coke, Sell Yourself”

How I cracked my first MNC interview – and what you can learn from it. Sometimes, the only thing you need to sell is your belief in yourself.

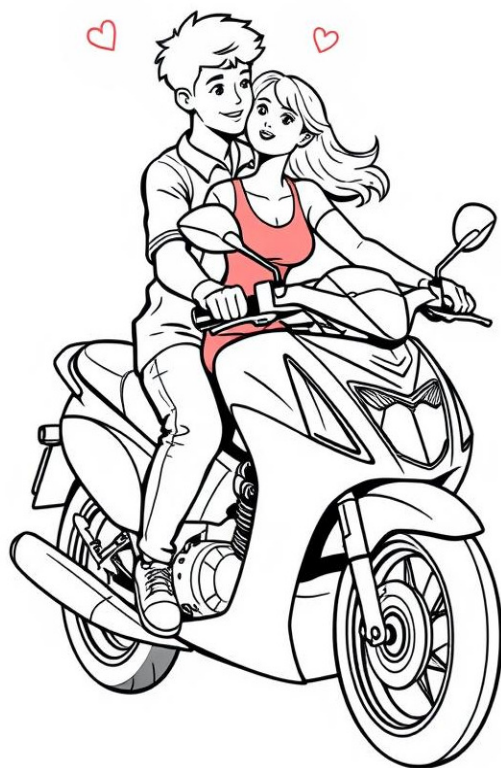
After completing my 12th, I didn't have the luxury to take a break or wait for the “perfect” opportunity.

I applied for a Customer Support (CS) role – in a completely different domain . As the industry I worked in was slowly collapsing, and I was on the edge of pursuing my graduation. There was no stability, no clear path – just a desperate need to earn and help at home.

I picked up a job as a Customer Service Executive (CSE) at a multiplex – not because I loved cinema, but because I needed something. For three years, I greeted moviegoers, handled billing, and cleaned up after the last show – quietly building discipline without even realizing it.

But I knew I needed more.

That same year, someone special walked into my life. “Nisha” was doing her BSc, full of dreams of her own, yet she made time for me – for *us*. During her breaks, she'd visit me at work, and we'd sneak out for Misal – the only thing I could afford on that salary. But those moments felt rich, full of laughter, warmth, and belief.



Nisha believed in me even when I doubted myself.

While I was busy surviving, she kept nudging me – *“Do more... you can do better... just try once.”*

And then, like a sign from the universe, I heard about an MNC BPO hiring in Pune. Night shift. Decent pay. A global brand. It sounded distant, ambitious – but something in me shifted.

I applied.

However the interview wasn't like anything I had expected.

The interviewer smiled and said: “Sell me this Coke bottle.”

I froze for a second. I wasn't from sales. I didn't have MBA lingo. But I was hungry. At that moment, I said to myself – If I don't sell this Coke, I won't get this job. If I don't sell myself today, I go home empty.

So I paused, smiled, and said:

“Sir, this Coke isn't just a drink. Right now, in your long day of interviews, it's a moment of refreshment. Ice-cold, fizzy, and familiar – just like a small break in a hard day. It's not just Coke. It's comfortable in a bottle.”

He smiled. I cracked it. I was hired.



Chapter 4:

“Welcome to the Jungle”

After I cracked the Coke bottle interview, I was in.

An MNC. Night shifts. A new life. And a training room that felt less like orientation and more like an episode of Roadies.

It was survival of the fittest – or rather, of the most fluent.

Timings: 9 PM to 6 AM (IST) Client timezone: Canada Reality: No room for mistakes.

We were told on Day 1 – “Only those who clear the training will move to the floor.” That wasn’t a suggestion. It was a warning.

We were trained on:

- US phonetics
- Time zones
- States and provinces
- Sales pitch flow
- Customer objections

And yes – that Firangi accent. I never imagined I’d be on a headset talking to strangers halfway across the world, saying things like,

“Hi, this is Jack from Global Connect, am I speaking with Mr. Daniel?”

I studied like my life depended on it – because it kind of did. Even on my weekly offs, I read the script again and again. I

became so obsessed with getting better, I forgot what weekends were.

During our training at the BPO, our trainer gave us a challenge – “Choose any product and sell it to the entire room.” A simple task on the surface, but for most of us, it felt like being thrown onto a stage with no script.

I had no fancy product ideas. No tech gadgets or travel plans to pitch. So I did what came naturally – I picked something I knew well.

Movie tickets.

But not just any tickets – I pitched the *ultimate* corporate movie package. Unlimited bulk bookings, zero blackout dates, popcorn on the house, and discounts so steep, I’m pretty sure if a cinema executive had heard me, they would’ve filed for bankruptcy that same day.

Everyone burst into laughter. The trainer stared at me, half-impressed, half-worried about the future of the cinema industry.

But here’s what happened – I had their attention. I made people listen, laugh, and imagine. I had *sold* something. And in that moment, I felt something click inside me.

Maybe, just maybe... sales was my stage.

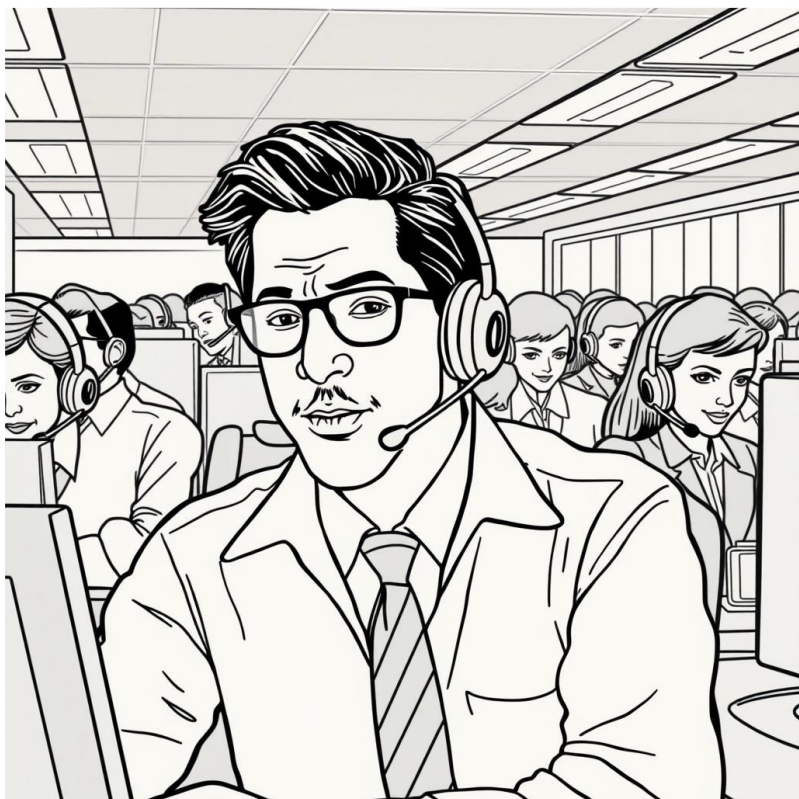
And it worked. I cleared training. I went live.

I began meeting Nisha, my partner more frequently, riding my bike through the city just to see her smile – those moments became calm in the middle of my chaotic days. She lived 30 kilometers away, but no distance felt too far. Not when someone waits for you with that kind of warmth. We always met at the

same little restaurant — Priya. In the beginning, we stuck to Misal — spicy, simple, and perfect for my starter salary. But soon, thanks to a much-celebrated pay hike, we proudly upgraded to Dosa. Big dreams, small wins... and a crispy Dosa to celebrate them — hahaha.

First Day on Sales Floor:

It felt like I had walked into a scene from *The Wolf of Wall Street*.



The energy was manic. 100 agents. 100 headsets. 100 voices — all pitching at the same time. It wasn't chaos. It was rhythm. A hustle-symphony.

That's when I met Brad. Well, not really. Brad was actually Bunty from Kothrud — just like I was "Jack from Texas."

Pseudonyms. Fake names. Real targets. We made 300 calls a day — no dialers, no filters, just numbers and nerves.

I was 20. No MBA. No sales manual. Just instincts and a survival mindset.

Brad – sorry, *Bunty* – was the first to teach me how to smile through rejection. “Client ka mood theek nahi hai? Toh hum unka mood banayenge!” he’d say with that trademark grin. And he did. Day after day. No matter how many hang-ups, abuses, or fake promises came his way.

That floor was my first real classroom. No PowerPoints. No theories. Just rejection, repetition, and resilience.

And every day I didn’t quit, I earned something no salary slip could show – guts.

I had never done sales calls before – and this was B2C, that too with Canadian customers. The challenge was brutal. My floor manager used to say, “*Aaj toh acha TNO (Talk Time, Number of calls, and Orders or Outcome) le le.*” I didn’t even know what a TNO was – but the way he said it pinched me. It felt like I had to prove something. Not to him. To myself.

So I went all in. Started giving mock pitches in front of the mirror. Practiced on the bike. In the cab. With friends. With strangers. I stopped waiting for “the right setup” or “the right people.” Whoever I met, I’d say – “*Ek kaam karo, role play karte hain. Main sales person, tum customer.*”

The height of it? One day, I handed a paper to my local *ration dukaan wala* and said, “*Bhaiya, bas iss paper mein jo likha hai, woh aap mujhe puchho. Jaise customer bolta hai.*” He stared at me, totally confused. Five minutes later, he asked, “*Sir, aap kaam kya karte ho?*”

I smiled. “*Main khud ko bechna seekh raha hoon.*”

My mother had her own version of success.

My mom used to think, “*Mera beta kisi bade office mein kaam karta hai.*” Cab picks and drops. Long ID card hanging from the neck. Talking to international clients. Decent salary at this young age. In her eyes — “*Pakka beta kuch bada kar raha hoga.*”

She’d often tell neighbours, “*Mera beta international clients ke saath kaam karta hai... pura building unki company ka hai!*” I never corrected her. Maybe because it gave her joy. Maybe because, deep down, I wanted it to be true too.

What she didn’t know was that her “international” son was sitting at a desk, grinding through 300 cold calls a day. Getting rejected in English by customers. And scolded in Hindi by the TL.

There were days when it felt like I was getting paid only to be insulted. But I held on. Somewhere in my gut, I knew — this phase wasn’t forever.

One week, I had a day off on a weekday. She was making pocha in the kitchen, humming a tune. And I just blurted, “*Maa, office chalogi?*”

She looked confused. “*Office? Main? Kyun?*”

“*Dikhana hai. Tu kehti hai na bada office hai — chal dekh le.*”

That afternoon, we both sat in an autorickshaw. She had draped her favourite blue saree. Hair tied tight, a small clutch in her hand. Eyes filled with pride... and a bit of curiosity.

We reached the building.

12 floors. Glass facade. Security at the gate. It *was* a big office. One thing she wasn’t wrong about.

She stood at the entrance, just staring for a minute. Then she said, softly, “*Accha hai. Bada hai.*”

I showed her around – the lobby, the cafeteria, the floor where I sat. She met some of my colleagues. Smiled shyly. Didn't say much. But I could see it in her eyes. Pride. Peace. As if, for the first time, she could actually picture the world I lived in.

That night, she made kheer. Without saying anything about the visit.

But later, while serving, she said, *"Jab tu bolta hai na, client se call pe tha... ab samajh aata hai."*

And that was it. No big speech. No advice.

Just her way of saying – *"I see you. And I'm proud."*

After six months of night shifts and day-sleep routines, I had finally adapted to the rhythm. The caffeine, the calls, the artificial light – it had all become part of a strange, comfortable loop.

I was earning decently. I was managing bills. And like many of us who land their first stable job, I made some rookie mistakes – Credit card. EMI on a new TV. A consumer loan for some gadgets.

Because, of course – this job would last forever... right?

It was a Wednesday. I had taken my weekly off the day before and was catching up on some much-needed sleep. The curtain was drawn, the fan was on, and I was deep in a nap when my phone buzzed.

Caller ID: Cab Mate – Ramesh I thought it was the usual "Pick-up at 4 PM?" reminder call.

Half-asleep, I picked up.

"Hey... hello?" "Hemant, are you awake?" "Yeah... what happened?" "Bad news, bhai. No cabs today. Actually... no job."

I blinked. Still lying on the mattress, staring at the ceiling.

“Kya bol raha hai tu?” “We’ve been laid off. Immediate effect. Just saw the email. The HR team's already packing things. They’re letting go of the whole shift.”

And just like that – the salary I built my life around vanished.

No notice period. No severance. Just silence. And a long list of unpaid EMIs.

One thing I slowly started to understand – and feel in my bones – was the difference between a startup layoff and an MNC layoff.

In a startup, if you get laid off, chances are... you didn’t perform. It’s personal. It’s direct. It hurts. But it makes sense. Startups don’t have the luxury to carry dead weight. You miss targets. You skip deadlines. There are no hiding places. No corner cabins or complex hierarchies to shield you. If you’re out, it’s often because you didn’t show up fully.

But in an MNC? It’s colder. Sharper. More... surgical.

You could be clocking 12-hour days. Winning awards. Ticking every box. And still – one morning, you’ll walk in with a smile, and walk out with a cardboard box.

Not because you didn’t perform. But because the business didn’t.

Maybe the global revenue didn’t meet Wall Street’s expectations. Maybe the product line in another continent shut down. Maybe some senior VP far away decided to “optimize headcount.”

And just like that – Your email stops working. Your name disappears from the directory. And you’re out – not for a mistake, but for being part of the system.

That’s the brutal difference.

In a startup, the game is personal. You win — you stay. You lose — you're told why. You learn. You evolve.

In an MNC, it's rarely personal. You win — and sometimes still lose. You never even know who made the decision. You're just a row in an Excel sheet, part of a larger strategy deck no one asked you to contribute to.

And that realization changed me.

It made me respect startups — not because they're easy. But because they're honest. You may fail, but at least you'll know why.

I sat up. Not because I was ready — but because I didn't know what else to do. For one full minute, I was blank.

This wasn't just about losing a job. It was about losing a version of myself I was finally beginning to trust.

For a good three months, I relied entirely on Nisha for my expenses. From chai to fuel, she quietly picked up the pieces I couldn't manage. Not once did she make me feel less. She just stood by me — patient, supportive, and steady.

And that's when I truly understood what people mean when they talk about *balance* in a relationship. It's not about who earns more or who sacrifices more. It's about showing up when the other can't. It's about being each other's tag team partner — not keeping score, just holding hands through the chaos.

In those moments, I stopped seeing love as a fairy tale. I saw it for what it really is — *teamwork in real life*.

Chapter 5:

“Rain, Resumes, and the Real World”

From soaked CVs to startup survival – how my first real break shaped me.

After the layoff, I was back on the streets – quite literally.

Interview after interview. CV after CV. Hope after rejection. And rain... so much rain.

This was the pre-LinkedIn era. No job alerts. No Zoom interviews. No online applications. You printed your resume, carried it in a folder, and showed up in person.

And when it rained, I didn't cover myself – I covered my resume. Because clothes would dry. But a smudged CV meant no interview.

Months passed. Savings drained. Confidence cracked. But not once did I let myself stop.

Then it happened:

A call came from a 3rd-party vendor company that worked with IT clients. Role: Junior BDE (Business Development Executive)
Location: Pune Salary: Not much. But it was a start.

This was late in the 2000s. The IT boom had just begun in India. Only a handful of people knew what a BDE even did. But those who could learn fast – could rise faster.

My Mindset:

“Stay away from office politics. Stick to your goals. Let the results do the talking.”

I was on probation for 6 months. This wasn't just about surviving. This was my chance to restart. And in a startup, you're not just observed by your manager. You're observed by the CEO.

So I did what most people didn't:

- During lunch breaks, I watched YouTube videos on tech sales.
- After office hours, I read IT blogs instead of scrolling Facebook.
- I wrote down my 5-year plan in a notebook.
- I asked dumb questions — but I asked.

Chapter 6:

The Day I Hooked a Whale

After switching to another software product company – a U.S. captive with its headquarters in Sunnyvale, California – the expectations weren't just high, they were relentless. Our sales floor wasn't a typical Indian BPO setup. This was a lean, agile team of fifty inside sales reps chasing enterprise clients across North America. My daily routine started with a 35-kilometre ride through traffic, potholes, and heat – just to reach my desk, open the dialer, and punch in call after call. Three hundred dials a day was not exceptional; it was expected.

The targets? CXOs from billion-dollar enterprises. Global heads. Decision-makers who probably ignored 90% of emails and dodged 99% of cold calls. These weren't quick wins – they were whales. And on one of those late nights, after nearly 280 dials, I was deep into my personal research sheet, hunting for accounts that hadn't been touched by others. That's when I spotted him – the Global VP of Contact Center at Citibank, New York.

I could've saved him for another day. I could've waited for a better moment. But something told me to go for it. I dialed. My hands were tired, I hadn't had dinner – it was already 12:30 AM IST – but my voice was steady. When he answered, I didn't pitch features. I didn't fumble into a script. I offered context. Value. Clarity. I made it about him, not the software.

He paused.

Then said the one thing that made everything worth it:

“Alright, let’s talk next week. I liked your persistence.”

Meeting booked.

I walked back to my desk and asked my team lead to help log the meeting in the CRM. As he filled out the lead form, he stopped mid-sentence, staring at the screen. “Wait a minute... Citibank? Global VP? How the hell did you get him?”

We both laughed. I still remember the disbelief in his voice.

Was I lucky? Maybe. Was the timing right? Probably. But that call — that win — was the result of preparation meeting persistence.

Because when most people give up after 100 dials, I made it to 300. Because I believed that sometimes, your biggest break is just one tired call away.

Chapter 7:

Back Pain, Ping Pong & a New Kind of Exit

Later, I moved into an IT services company – a growing firm with some solid clients and a driven leadership team. I joined as part of their business development function and, as always, went all in. But this phase was... different.

I had come into this role after completing my MBA – a journey that added direction to my raw sales energy. Those two years gave me more than a degree; they gave me clarity. I learned how businesses think, how numbers speak, and how people – not just products – drive everything. It wasn't a classroom filled with just assignments and deadlines. It was where my ambitions finally felt seen. Where I began refining not just my pitch, but my purpose.

And while I had grown professionally, life on the personal front was also evolving.

Nisha and I had been together for over seven years by then. We had seen each other through job switches, pay hikes, late-night chai, and long-distance struggles. Ours was a love story rooted in support and simplicity – never showy, always steady. But sometimes, two good people can start walking different paths. Not because something goes wrong... but because life gently nudges you in opposite directions.

We parted ways – not with anger, not with blame. Just a quiet understanding that we had shared a beautiful chapter, and now it was time to turn the page. Even today, I hold nothing but respect and gratitude for her presence in those formative years

of my life. She was, and always will be, a part of the foundation that shaped who I became.

Professionally, I worked in that company for six months.

And then — my back gave up before my will did.

Years of night shifts, stressful sitting hours, and riding long distances finally caught up with me. I started experiencing intense back pain. Simple tasks like sitting through meetings or long calls became uncomfortable. I wasn't able to give 100% — and for me, giving anything less felt like cheating both the company and myself.

When I told my Sales Director about my decision to step back, he genuinely asked me to reconsider.

“Take time, work from home, slow down if you must — but don't quit,” he said.

It felt good to be valued.

But I knew my body wasn't allowing me to be at my best. And so, I quit.

Now, here's the fun part — while I couldn't sit on sales calls for long hours...

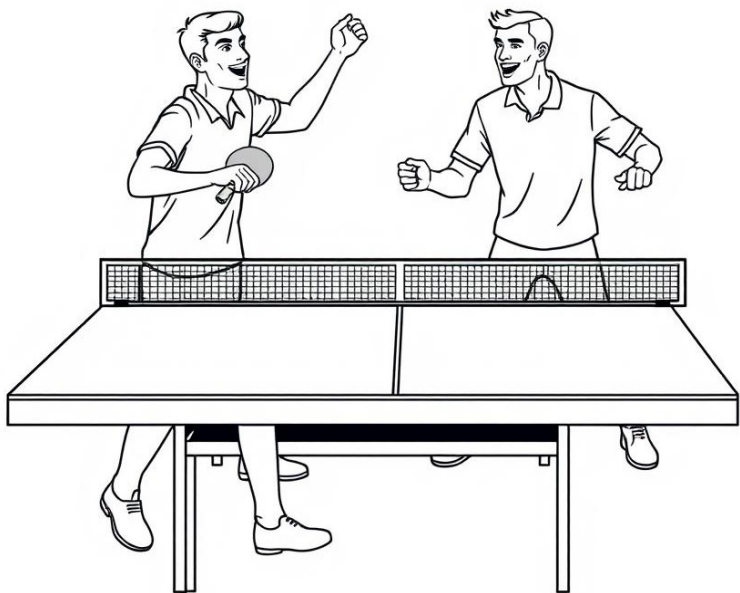
I could still play table tennis in short bursts.

And guess what? The office had a TT table in the cafeteria.

So, in those six months, I may not have closed million-dollar deals...

But I seriously improved my TT game — which, funny enough, helped me bond faster in my next company.

Sometimes, you pick up tools where you least expect them. And sometimes, those tools aren't sales scripts – they're spin shots.



Chapter 8:

From Courier Boy to Global Rooms

My next stop was with a company that had a presence in almost every part of the world. A global name. A serious player. And this time, my interview panel included a French gentleman who had been living in the U.S. for over a decade, and a sharp Canadian professional seated next to him.

Now pause for a moment. Go back in time. Picture that boy – sweating it out in a factory, packing boxes for ₹1500 a month. Or the one cycling across Pune’s narrow lanes delivering couriers – no big dreams, just big responsibilities. And now here he was, being interviewed by global leaders. If that’s not proof that everything is possible, then what is? They say luck is everything – I disagree. Luck is a myth until you earn it.

That morning, I was in the company’s waiting lounge by 8:30 AM IST – a painful time for someone used to working nights. My eyes were puffy, bloodshot – the kind of look you get after downing a bottle of whisky, except all I had consumed was sleep deprivation. My voice was husky, and my brain was still catching up to the sunlight. Honestly, I felt like a zombie in formals.

Suddenly, I heard a voice. “Hemant, please come in.” It was the HR. I straightened up, gave myself a quick pep talk, and walked toward the cabin.

In my head, I assumed I’d be meeting a typical Indian hiring manager. But the moment I opened the door, I saw two global faces staring back at me – calm, curious, and clearly experienced.

The room had an intimidating silence. Nervous? Absolutely. But confidence? Ten on ten. At least that's what I was projecting on the outside.

They began with a few general questions. I answered honestly. Then came the question that would decide everything: "Can you give us a quick pitch of your previous company and the product you sold?"

Boom. That was my moment. I had lived on that pitch for three years. Memorised it. Rewritten it. Perfected it. I knew that pitch better than I knew most people in my life. And the second I began speaking – I didn't just answer... I performed. Loud, clear, confident. I could see the surprise in their expressions. In fact, I think the HR sitting two floors above could hear me too! We all laughed. They smiled. I smiled. But inside me, a voice whispered – "You've come a long way, Hemant. And you're just getting started."

I worked there for almost a year as the only Business Development Manager handling the U.S. region in a 500-seater office. After 7 PM IST, the place would slowly go silent – no teammates, no chatter, no hustle. Just me, my targets, and the security guard outside the glass doors, nodding at me each night like a quiet ally. My boss operated from the U.S. and stayed in touch via Skype. One evening, I messaged him saying I'd be late – my car had broken down. He replied with a chuckle, "Time to get a new car, mate. More sales, more money – you see what I mean?"

I smiled at the screen but sat there quietly for a minute. His words hit something deeper. I went into a little flashback. I remembered the boy I once was – the one who had a luxurious

childhood, at least by middle-class standards. The one who used to tell his dad, “*Papa, I want a new toy... a bat... a bicycle...*” and like magic, it would be there the next day. Now, everything I wanted — from a pair of shoes to a car — had to be earned. Not wished for. Not gifted. Just earned. And that’s life. It doesn’t take away your dreams — it just asks whether you’re willing to work for them.

Eventually, I had to part ways with my international boss — not by choice, but because the company was acquired by a larger, well-known player in the market. It was one of those transitions where everything changes overnight — the name, the direction, the energy. After that, I joined another company for a short stint. It wasn’t a very long chapter in my career, but it was where I met someone who would later go on to become part of the founding team of my own startup.

But before that turning point, I worked with a company that built field service management software for HVAC clients in the U.S. and Canada. It was a night shift, yes — but not the typical one. Our wrap-up meetings began at 3 AM and ended around 11 AM. Wild, right? A shift that didn’t feel like it had a clock — just conversations, chaos, and creation. And yet, I look back at that company with deep respect. Because that’s where the entrepreneur in me was truly born.

It was a startup in every sense — small team, tighter budgets, bigger dreams. I reported directly to the CEO, an Indian-born, Wisconsin-educated founder who wasn’t even from an IT background — yet had built a SaaS product from scratch. Every conversation with him, especially post-shift, was a goldmine. We’d sit there — half tired, half inspired — and talk about

product, growth, vision, people, and mistakes. His energy was electric, his belief in the mission was contagious. He never said, “We’re a family,” but somehow, we felt like one.

The office was tiny – sometimes barely room to move – but the dreams were massive. Booze nights, pizza on the floor, spontaneous debates, shared stress, mutual wins. It wasn’t polished, but it was real. That company didn’t just teach me how to sell or build – it taught me what it *feels* like when an idea becomes bigger than just one person. And how belief, when shared by a few crazy, committed people, can start becoming something unstoppable.

Right after I left that role, another door opened – I was offered the position of Director of Sales at an IT services company. It sounded fancy, but this wasn’t a role where I could just sit in an air-conditioned cabin and scroll through YouTube videos. This was war. I was asked to build the entire sales function from scratch – data sourcing, outreach, marketing, team building – all of it. It was yet another startup, but with a completely different mindset and playbook.

Soon after joining, I flew with the CEO to Dubai for a major tech event. The catch? We didn’t have a booth. Just visitors pass. Which meant no seated presentations, no banners, no fixed corner to invite prospects to. We were foot soldiers. For four straight days, I walked around 10 kilometers a day – suit, shoes, backpack – pitching strangers, exchanging cards, and pushing conversations. By day three, my legs were swollen, and the exhaustion was real. But there was one thing louder than the pain – the responsibility I felt. My CEO had taken a leap of faith

by bringing us here. I wasn't going to let that decision go to waste.

We returned to India after six days. The leads looked promising. The energy was still high. But a few weeks later, everything changed. The company made a sudden pivot, the team I built was dissolved, and I had no choice but to walk away. Strangely, I wasn't angry. I was awakened. Because for the first time, amidst the chaos and the uncertainty, I started to feel something deeper. A voice inside said: "You've seen how it's built. You've seen how it can break. Maybe it's time to build your own."

Chapter 9:

The Birth of vConnect iDess

I always wanted to be an entrepreneur — not just a CEO of a startup, but a real entrepreneur. There's a difference. A CEO might lead a company, but an entrepreneur builds it from scratch, takes the fall, the leap, the uncertainty, and still shows up the next day.

During one of my final job interviews, I shared this vision with the CEO of the company. I still remember how he reacted — with a bit of sarcasm and a smirk, saying, “You youngsters think becoming an entrepreneur is a piece of cake.”

In my head, I quietly disagreed. Why is he demotivating me? I thought.

Only later, after I actually started this roller-coaster journey in 2019, did I realize he wasn't demotivating me — he was just brutally honest.

But truth be told, 2019 wasn't the first attempt.

In 2018, I tried. Rented a fancy co-working space. Managed to get one or two clients. Thought I had arrived. I hadn't. I failed — badly.

Fast forward to December 2019. I decided to give it another shot. But this time, with a promise to myself: I'll stick with it for at least one year — even if it's pitch dark the entire way.

Little did I know that a pandemic called COVID was about to knock on our doors just a few months later.

It was a regular sunny day. I had already quit my job, and the idea of “doing something of my own” was starting to take shape again. I picked up my phone and called an old colleague — someone who had worked with me before, someone who had always believed in my madness.

“Hello D,” I said. “Chowk mein mil, kuch important baat karni hai.”

As always, he was there before time. We parked our bike near the BRT bus stop and sat under the steel roof. The sun was harsh; the idea was still blurry. But this is how that conversation went:

Me to D: Last time try kiya tha, fail ho gaye the. Iss baar success milega kya?

D to Me: Mujhe bharosa hai. Iss baar kuch zarur karenge. Chahe pass ho ya fail, main aapke saath hoon.

Me to D: Kitne percent chance hai fail hone ke?

D to Me: Shuruaat ke 6 mahine toh shayad project na mile. Jo jayega pocket se hi jayega.

Me to D: Teri toh next year shaadi bhi hai na?

D to Me: Haan... woh dekh lenge. Mujhe pta hai ap Sales leke hi aoge

Me to D: Chal phir. Chalu karte. Iss baar company register karenge. Jo hoga dekha jayega.

Me to D (smiling): Main sales dekh lunga, tu delivery dekh lena.



And that's how vConnect iDess was born.

Not in a fancy boardroom. Not in an AC cabin. But under the steel roof of a bus stop — on a sunny day, around 12 pm. A bag full of belief. And zero guarantees.

Day 1 – At the Co-working Space

We had no office of our own. So we borrowed someone else's dreams for rent – a corner in a co-working space. The walls were white, the AC worked fine, and the coffee was unlimited. But deep down, we knew none of those things really mattered.

What mattered was what we brought with us:

- a laptop that overheated
- a notepad with scribbled goals
- a silent prayer for one paying client
- and eyes that refused to blink in the face of fear

We weren't building a company that day – we were building *resilience*.

Because Day 1 wasn't about grand openings. It was about showing up. With no money, no fame, and no promise of success.

March 2019 – The Storm Before the Storm

Months had passed. Days blurred into each other.

Sales: 0. Hopes: 100.

That's how we tracked our growth back then.

Just 3 months later we started vConnect iDess. We had just hired two more team members – fresh energy, fresh optimism. The office was still that same co-working space with flickering lights and a leaking tap near the pantry, but to us, it was a dream in motion.

One afternoon, I stepped out onto the narrow balcony. It was a small break after yet another demo that didn't convert. I leaned

on the railing, looking out across the street at a quiet residential building. Through a half-open window, I saw someone watching the news. The headline flashing in bold red:

“1-Day Janata Lockdown Announced Amid Rising COVID Concerns.”

It sounded like a precaution — nothing more. A short pause. A small break. I walked back in, smiled at the team, and casually said:

“We’ll work from home tomorrow. Just for a day.”

I didn’t know then — none of us did — that this was the last time I’d see my team together in person for nearly two years.

We packed our laptops like it was a weekend gig. No goodbyes. No plans. Just a “see you on Zoom tomorrow.”

And just like that, everything changed.

The world shut down. Streets emptied. Coffee mugs at the co-working space stayed exactly where we left them.

And us? We were a three-month-old startup — barely out of our shell, not even loud enough for the market to notice — suddenly thrown into a storm we hadn’t prepared for.

No clients. No visibility. No funding cushion.

Just three laptops, a shaky internet connection, and a whole lot of unfinished dreams.



Chapter 10:

Zoom Call, Heart Call

The world was shutting down. News channels flashed red tickers. Cases rising. Lockdowns looming. Uncertainty wasn't just outside — it was sitting silently inside our homes, too.

My small team — just the three of them — had worked with me for barely three months. But those three months felt like three years. We had bootstrapped, brainstormed, pulled all-nighters, and somehow kept the wheels turning. Now, those wheels were slowing — and so was their hope.

One afternoon, I got a message: "Hemant, can we jump on a quick Zoom call?" I already knew what they were going to ask. And I already knew what I was going to say.

On the screen, I saw three anxious faces — eyes filled with worry, voices heavy with hesitation.

One of them finally spoke,

"Hemant... COVID is spreading like wildfire. Everything looks scary — outside and inside. No company is hiring. And honestly... we're just scared. Will you be shutting vConnect down? Will we be fired?"

For a moment, I paused. Not for drama — but to absorb the weight of their fear. And then I said the only thing I truly believed:

“If I go down, I’ll go down with my people. But as long as I’m standing, you’re standing with me. vConnect is not shutting down. Not today.”

There was a long silence. Then a faint smile. Then one of them said,

“Chalo, ab kaam pe wapas chalte hai.”

And just like that — the fear didn’t vanish. But it softened. Because sometimes, a startup is not just about revenue or product — it’s about people holding each other up when the world sits down.

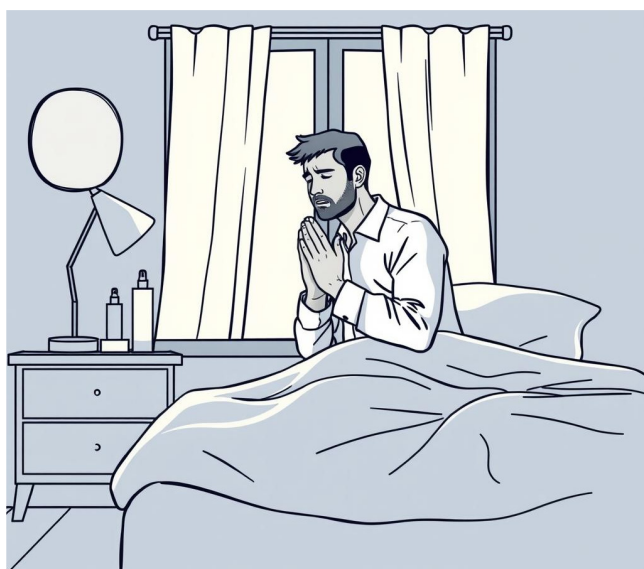
Chapter 11:

A Prayer Behind Closed Doors

I locked my room. The world outside was already noisy with doubt – I didn't need more voices in my head. I dropped to my knees.

No one saw me – Not my team, not my family. Just me... and Him.

My hands trembled as they rose toward the ceiling. My eyes brimmed with tears, not of weakness, but of weight. And then, in silence – but screaming inside – I prayed: “Lord... give me strength. The vision is blurry. Everyone is saying this isn't the time – not during a pandemic, not while bootstrapping. But You've put this fire inside me for a reason. Help me decide wisely. Help me not give up. Help me... believe.”



No lightning struck. No magical sign appeared. But something subtle shifted — inside me.

It reminded me *why* I started. It took me back to the days when Baba was struggling, and yet, we never gave up. We fought — not with certainty, but with hope. It reminded me of the people who were waiting — not for miracles, but for a leader who wouldn't quit. People who believed that *together*, we could build something... earn something... *become* something. It reminded me that if I took a U-turn now, there wouldn't be another path — just a haunting sentence that would follow me for life:

"I almost did it."

And that, I couldn't live with.

Chapter: One More Step

Time passed — not in leaps and bounds, but in tiny, exhausted footsteps.

From 3, we became 5. Then 8 During the lockdown, the world was baking banana bread and doing Instagram live workouts, I was... selling. Day in. Day out.

Not one, not five — but 15-20 calls a day. Sometimes even more.
Each one lasts 30 to 45 minutes, non-stop.

I had turned my room into a mini call center. Laptop on. Headphones ready. Voice loud and confident. And yes — *camera off most of the time!*

I still remember... There were days I had lunch while talking to clients.

One hand on the roti, the other hand on the keyboard. Chewing quietly, pressing mute whenever I took a bite. And then unmuting with a serious voice:

“So vConnect iDess has 8 members? Got it!”

Once, I bit into a papad and forgot to press mute. The client heard the loud crunch and laughed:

“That was honest! I like that!”

We both laughed – and believe it or not, He became a client. hahaha

That’s what lockdown taught me. You don’t need a fancy office or a suit and tie. You need:

- Hunger to keep going
- Discipline to show up
- And a little sense of humour to survive long days.

Chapter 12:

One More Step

The year was 2022. We took a leap of faith — and signed up for our first full office. A humble 10-seater. But to us, it felt like a mini Google.

We set up our desks, whiteboarded our goals, ordered chai in rounds, and began to hire with hope. It was messy. It was exciting. It was ours.

Then came 2023 — and we outgrew that space faster than we imagined. So we packed our dreams, our Wi-Fi router, and our endless hustle... and shifted into a bigger office.

The walls were wider now. But more than that, our mindset had expanded.

We weren't just working anymore. We were building something real.

Soon, we started attending events — First, small local meetups. Then national expos. And finally...Dubai. Our first global event.

I still remember the faces of my teammates at the airport — eyes wide, hearts full, and company t-shirts worn like superhero capes. It was our first international trip together, and the excitement was unreal.

We didn't have a flashy booth. No LED screens. No big-budget stall. Just a few posters, some printed brochures — and a whole lot of belief.

Belief in our work. Belief in our story. Belief that conviction matters more than decoration.

And it did.

People walked up. They listened. They smiled. They saw the spark — not in our stall, but in our eyes.

But wait — no great event story is complete without a few ‘Oh no!’ moments.

We’d accidentally printed “AI Lead Gen” on our event board. We meant “Automated,” but guess what? Everyone read it as Artificial Intelligence.

So for three full days, we were answering questions like:

“How does your AI scrape B2B data in real-time?” “Does it learn on its own?” “Can it predict client intent?”

And we were like:

“Uhh... yes, of course! AI can do wonders these days!” 😊

Then there was my teammate Akshay, who gave us the biggest scare at immigration. We were all lined up for security when he suddenly turned pale.

“Guys... I don’t have my passport.”

Dead silence.

We all looked at him like he just confessed a murder.

Turns out, it was in his back pocket the whole time. He just forgot he had tucked it there during the cab ride. That was the day I almost had a mini heart attack before even boarding the plane.

But somewhere in between the laughter and the late-night rehearsals, something deeper happened.

In the investor lounge, I was standing, waiting for my turn to pitch. Wearing formals, holding a deck, acting all confident. But inside, my mind slipped into a flashback – to a hospital corridor, to my father’s last breath.

I closed my eyes for a moment and thought: *“If Baba were here today... If he could see me, standing in this room, speaking to investors from across the globe... Would he be proud?”*

The answer hit me like a wave. He would be.

And at that moment, I wasn’t nervous anymore. I was rooted in something stronger than ambition – gratitude.

In five years, we had served over 300 clients. Built processes. Hired talent. Learned, unlearned, stumbled, fell, got back up.

But even when the curve looked upward, reality often bent downward.

But business is business. You’re always walking a thin line – between growth and collapse.

Slowly, things started slipping. One by one, the team members left – some for better jobs, some without saying a word. Clients began drying up. Invoices got delayed. Promises were made, but payments didn’t come.

We went from growing to surviving. From profit to break-even. From break-even to hand-to-mouth.

Each day, the vision blurred a little more. Each night, the anxiety grew heavier. And slowly, silently, my health began to crack under the pressure.

There was this one fictional story I kept close to my heart – one that strangely became more real each day:

The Desert Walker. He was a man lost in the middle of a vast, scorching desert. No food. No compass. No voice to call for help. All he had was a half-burnt map in his pocket and a whisper inside his head: "*Keep walking. Just one more step.*"

Every day, the sun burned him. Every night, the cold clawed at his skin. And yet, he walked. Because he believed: "Maybe the next step... is the one that changes everything."

That man was me.

I'd walk into the office every morning — hair combed, shirt tucked, face calm — and inside, a storm raged. Because I knew the truth: The salaries were due in 3 days. The bank account was almost empty. Three clients had gone cold. Payments worth lakhs were stuck. And my own wallet? I hadn't paid *myself* in months.

I'd ask myself quietly: *What if we don't survive this month?*

Then I'd answer myself: "*We're close. Very close. Just one more step.*"

They say entrepreneurship is about vision. I say it's about persistence.

Because building something from nothing isn't about having all the answers. It's about showing up — even when it's tough, even when it's silent, even when it's just you.

Yes, there were nights I skipped meals. Days I faked confidence. Moments I almost gave up.

But I didn't. And that made all the difference.

From a small colony in Pune to an international stage in Dubai. From board exams to boardrooms. From rejection calls to investor meetings.

We've come a long way. But this isn't the end.

Today, we're not just a service company — We're building products like Zigtex and Gyangrove, We're building stable income lines, deeper impact, and real futures.

And tomorrow? We'll go further. Because now we don't just believe in the dream — we're living it.

So if you're reading this, and you're in your own desert — Keep walking. Even when the sand burns. Even when the night is cruel. Because maybe, just maybe...The next step is the one that changes everything.

When I look back and see fresh MBA graduates or young engineers giving up too early — it hits me. Many of them carry the weight of a single belief: that a degree guarantees a skyrocketing career. And if it doesn't happen within a year or two, they feel like they're already out of the race. But let me tell you something from the other side of 15 years of relentless juggling — it's not over.

It's not over until *you* say it's over. I didn't shoot to success after my first job. Or my second. Or my third. I built my way up — through late nights, uncertain mornings, unpaid dues, and uncelebrated wins. Today, I stand as the founder of vConnect iDess. We're building our own CRM from scratch — not reselling, not white-labelling — *building*. We've acquired a school management platform and are rewriting its future too. And this is just the beginning.

The race isn't over. Your story isn't done. *You* get to decide how far you'll go.

Takeaway: If You're in the Desert...

- You're not alone.
- Every dream worth chasing will demand more from you than you think you have.
- The people who make it aren't always the smartest or the strongest — they're the ones who *keep showing up*.
- Your journey will look impossible until one day it becomes *inspiring* to someone else.

Just keep walking. One more step. One more no. One more late night. Because the oasis may be closer than you think.

Conclusion:

From Papa's Boy to the Man in the Mirror

The journey... From being a pampered kid – Baba's boy – who thought his world began and ended with his father's smile... To watch that world collapse one quiet, cruel evening.

I was barely in my teens. I didn't even know how to talk to the world, let alone survive in it without a father. No map. No mentor. Just memories. Memories of Baba's discipline, his kindness, his strength, and his belief in me.

From that moment on, every step forward was a rebellion against giving up.

I worked jobs that didn't need degrees – they just needed courage. Helper at a Factory. Canteen boy. Courier delivery. Not to hustle. To survive. To pay school fees. To eat.

Managers laughed at my cold calls. Shouted at by customers. People said I wouldn't survive in sales.

Maybe I wasn't. But I showed up the next day anyway.

And one day... I became the guy who built a sales team from scratch. From one voice, to many. From one rejection, to thousands – and eventually, to wins.

From working in a tiny room with fear in my chest, To building *vConnect iDess* – An organisation born not just from a business plan, But from pain, prayer, and purpose.

I look back now... The time isn't the same anymore. But the soul that walked through fire is still here — a little scarred, maybe, but not burnt.

I didn't have elite degrees. I didn't have inheritance. I didn't have a "Plan B."

But I had this — A fire in my belly. A refusal to settle. And a father's words echoing in my heart: "Be humble, but never stop moving forward."

This book is not a blueprint. It's not a success guide. It's a mirror.

For the ones who don't have it easy. For those who are written off before they even start. For those who carry more responsibilities than years on their resume.

To you, the reader — Gen Z, fresher, dreamer, doer:

This world will often look at your marks, your LinkedIn, your English fluency, your background. But trust me... the world is also secretly watching something else:

Your discipline. Your will. Your hunger.

The ones who *do*, not just *plan* — they make it. The ones who *start*, even when scared — they make it. The ones who *show up* again after failing — they make it.

You don't have to be perfect. You just have to be real. And relentless.

So whenever you doubt yourself, remember my story. Not to feel sorry. But to remind yourself:

If he could, maybe I can too.

Final Note:

From losing my father to becoming one. From failing sales calls to coaching others. From no identity... to building a brand.

I've been broken. But I've never finished.

So here's my closing line to you – the young Hemants, the lost dreamers, the quiet rebels reading this:

Let's do it. Even if no one believes. Even if it's hard. Even if you're scared.

Especially then – when everyone loses hope in you. Be an example of this: *"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."*

Now until we meet again – Signing off for this time.

With all my heart, Your loving, Hemant Ghale

****Some journeys begin with a goodbye.**

Others begin with a scooter, a startup, and a silent promise.******

If you've read this far, thank you – not just for reading,
but for walking a few miles with me.

This story isn't just mine.

It's for every son trying to make his father proud.

Every daughter holds a dream and a debt.

Every quiet struggle who keeps showing up.

So here's to you.

To late nights, small wins, silent prayers, and loud dreams.

And to never give up — even when the engine sputters.

Let's ride on.

~~

****Let's connect****

LinkedIn: [Linkedin](#)

Podcast: [Startup with Soul](#)

Website: www.vconnectiDess.com